

volunteers in parks



This Season in Parks

Side by Side: A Lesson in Cooperation

WINTER 2008

Volunteers In Parks is a quarterly newsletter produced by Capital Regional District Parks



Capital Regional District
PARKS

490 Atkins Avenue
Victoria, BC V9B 2Z8
tel (250) 478-3344
fax (250) 478-5416

e: CRDPARKS@crd.bc.ca
www.crd.bc.ca/parks

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Who's That VIP?

Even though the days are shorter and the temperatures cooler, there is still much to see during your winter wanderings. With careful observation you may also learn a few things from some of our fine-feathered friends.

In the forests now, I regularly hear the nasal *chick-a-dee-dee* of our Chestnut-backed Chickadee, playing counterpoint to the bell-like tinkling sounds of Golden-crowned kinglets. These tiny, plump birds flit about, chattering amongst themselves, and bringing warmth and cheer to the cold day.

What's really neat about these little tweeters is that even though they belong to different species, they hang out together in flocks, foraging for the same kind of food. These birds are in the same "feeding guild"—that is, they are not of the same species but forage for



Chestnut-backed Chickadee (Photo: Tom Ediger)

similar foods. In my yard, the luncheon menu appears to be insect grubs under bark, served on Douglas-fir trees.

Mixed species flocking like this is not

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Golden-crowned Kinglet (Photo: Rick Leche)

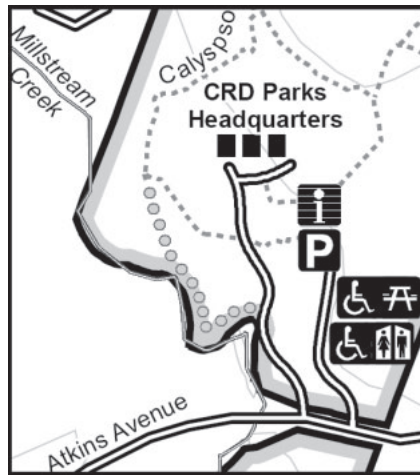
Footprints in Floodplains

How lovely the little river is, with its dark changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank, and listen to its low, placid voice...

– George Eliot

I can certainly identify with these words. For six years, I spent my summers walking up and down meandering cobble-bottomed rivers, studying an endangered turtle species in northern Ontario. Today, there are few places where I feel as at ease as on the shores of a stream. However, while streams are appreciated by many, like me, their neighbours, the floodplains are often forgotten.

Floodplains are the interface between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems; when healthy, these areas can support an incredible array of plants and animals, both aquatic and terrestrial in nature. However floodplain ecosystems are also very complex and fragile; impacts to a stream and to its surrounding habitat (e.g. through water flow management, removal of vegetation, soil compaction or erosion, etc.) can dramatically alter plant and animal composition in the floodplain. Likewise, impacts on a



Map of the riparian trail segment that CRD Regional Parks has closed for restoration (large dots), along Millstream Creek in Mill Hill Regional Park.

floodplain can have important implications for its associated stream.

A perfect example of the sensitivity of floodplains, and of the problems associated with human activity in these areas, is the case of the 200m trail segment along Millstream Creek in Mill Hill Regional Park (Figure 1). Every summer, park visitors and their pets hike this trail, resulting in compaction



This section of the trail, which runs immediately adjacent to Millstream Creek (bottom right), has become severely eroded as a result of trail use followed by winter flooding.

and disturbance of soil on the trail's surface, and vegetation loss along the trail corridor.

Come the rainy season, the creek rises and the trail is inundated with flowing water, which carries with it any loose soil from the trail's surface (Figure 2), as well as any garbage or pet poop, which unfortunately was left along the trail. Downstream, the soil particles in the water get clogged in the gills of fish and other aquatic organisms, making it difficult for them to breathe, and garbage and pet poop contribute to the pollution of the stream and the ocean or lake(s) to which the stream flows.

Meanwhile, back at the trail, compacted soils have lost their ability to absorb or retain water, and have become inhospitable to floodplain species, which characteristically are well adapted to wet soils. Trees present along the sides of the trail, many of them centuries old, are no longer well anchored, because of soil erosion around their roots (Figure 2); these trees are now susceptible to windthrow.

These are just some of the reasons why CRD Regional Parks has recently decided to close this 200m trail segment along the floodplain of Millstream Creek. Over time, we hope that native vegetation will re-colonize the trail, improving the stability of its soils, and restoring the natural ability of those soils to retain water.

Nowadays, when I find myself approaching a stream, I take a moment to consider how my presence would impact that sensitive and dynamic ecosystem, and I ask myself whether I should really be there.

Pam Wesley, Environmental Conservation Specialist

Our Shared Natural Wealth

Each year a number of projects, aimed at identifying locations of rare and endangered species, take place within CRD Parks. This year, inventories for rare plants, sharp-tailed snake, amphibians, and blue-grey taildropper (a slug!) were conducted. These projects act towards fulfilling the primary mandate of CRD Parks, protection of the natural environment, by identifying risks to those populations and making recommendations for management.

A number of rare plants were identified; most notably, the only locations known in Canada of the endangered Prairie Lupine were documented on just a few mountain tops in the Sooke Hills! Several rare plant species were also documented at Island View Beach Regional Park. These data are being used to contribute to a conservation strategy for the Cordova Shore, which is a joint project among CRD Parks, Central Saanich, the Tsawout First Nation and the Provincial and Federal governments.

The endangered sharp-tailed snake continues to give researchers the wobble. This snake spends much of its time under leaves, wood, or in burrows, which makes it hard to find. With the use of "artificial cover objects", for example pieces of asphalt shingle, biologists can attract snakes to a specific location and detect their presence. Snakes have been seen at Lone Tree Hill, Mill Hill and Mt Work Regional Parks.

CRD Parks provide habitat to so many rare and endangered species and we continue to learn as much as we can to protect them. Our shared wealth of biological diversity is most definitely something to be treasured by all park visitors.

Jennifer Psyllakis, Environmental Conservation Specialist

Going, Going, Gone...

Sometimes it is good to get rid of things. 6.28 tonnes of broom and 0.2 tonnes of daphne were lifted by helicopter off Mill Hill this month! Pulling up that many plants was no small feat! It was accomplished by the dedication of Regional Parks staff and community members that included residents from Mill Hill and surrounding communities, ESL students from King George International College and UVic, KPMG employees and a group of Beavers. Over three hundred volunteer hours were dedicated to the project this year; that's 3 times the amount of volunteer hour contribution from 2006!

A project that began in 2001, Mill Hill Restoration involves three components: first, staff tackle new areas and remove large broom and daphne for the first time; then, individuals who are giving back to their community, volunteer in areas to remove re-growth of areas previously worked on by staff; and finally, research and monitoring takes place to assess the results of all this effort.

The monitoring work resulted in one more rare plant species being added to the known species on Mill Hill and 23 new locations of rare plants being identified. Other research that investigates the impacts of grazing from high concentrations of black-tailed deer and populations of introduced eastern cottontail rabbit suggest at least one

endangered plant, the very bright and showy deltoid balsamroot, is benefiting from fencing erected to protect them.

The negative impact of invasive species is the second most serious threat to Garry Oak ecosystems, only after habitat loss. That is why control of invasive species is such a high priority,



A photo of the team on the first afternoon!

especially in protected areas. The restoration project on Mill Hill is so important because of the number of rare plants and animals in the park and is recognized through continued funding support from the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program. Thank you to all the volunteers that gave back to that effort!

*Jennifer Psyllakis, Environmental Conservation Specialist and
Karen Preston, Coordinator of Volunteers*



Broom removed for 2007!

Who's That VIP?

Imagine yourself in your backyard and seeing a recruitment notice for volunteers, what would you do? For Ian Gesman, VIP Gatekeeper, the answer was clear: join the team! For the past six years, Ian has been volunteering in his back yard, on the Galloping Goose Regional Trail.

Ian is an individual that loves to see the fruits of his labour, whether he is working on a hobby such as creating a bonsai, planting a tree in his garden,



Ian Gesman, VIP Gatekeeper

or painting houses as part of his own business. Taking great care in his work, both as a neighbour and as a contractor, is very important to Ian, and this has created a domino effect for his company, as happy customers have brought more business to him through word of mouth.

After our recent conversation, I can honestly say that Ian's life reflects his values. He lives his life with a keen awareness of his footprint on the Earth; he is an avid recycler, and he always

drives an economical, previously used car. When discouraged by urban growth and increased consumerism, he heads out his back door and gives back by spending time on the Galloping Goose. There, he can be found collecting garbage along the way because his philosophy is that, "we have to take care of this planet." He believes that "fresh air and nature help you leave all your troubles behind and get you in touch with nature."

"Preserving land" is what comes to Ian's mind when you ask him what Regional Parks means to him and why he volunteers with us. He is "pleased with the great [land] acquisitions that Regional Parks has made to date." Having lived here for the past 30 years, Ian is concerned that with the increase of development, there is nowhere for wildlife to go. For years, he has observed the salmon spawning, and he has witnessed, first hand, how quickly their habitat has disappeared. As a volunteer with regional parks, Ian feels part of a team of like minded individuals who are making a difference. By working together and by acquiring more land, there is still a chance for the region's wildlife.

The other side to being part of a team is taking part in the celebration of people's accomplishments. In April, we celebrated 25 Years of Volunteers in Parks and during that celebration; we honored Brian Peddlesden for being our first volunteer and our first recipient of 25th year milestone award as a volunteer. Ian explained that he felt part of our community that day and that he "truly enjoyed seeing someone who has been volunteering from the beginning, and being able to celebrate his commitment." This feeling of being part of a community is one of the many rewards that follow when one dedicates their time and energy to something they believe in; and in Ian's case, he gets to do it in his backyard.

Karen Preston
Coordinator of Volunteers

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uncommon. In North America it occurs mostly in the non-breeding season. But why flock with other species, when you can flock with your own kind? As it turns out, associating with birds of different species lessens competition for food. If you watch the chickadees and kinglets, they are not fighting it out for the biggest and juiciest insect larvae. Instead they seem to be getting along quite fine. The reason for this becomes apparent if you look at their beaks. The kinglets have finer bills than the chickadees and are looking for morsels of a different size. Thus they can hang out together without undue competition for food when resources are limited.

Several species flocking together like this also increases the number of eyes and ears able to detect predators. In fact, the Downy woodpecker is known to use mixed species flocks of chickadees and kinglets as sentinels. This allows the woodpecker to devote its time to the business of foraging for food, while relying on the smaller birds' alarm calls to warn them of any danger.

When you head out on the park trails this winter, keep a look out for mixed species flocking. There is some pretty cool behaviour going on out there. And in the course of your wanderings, you may just learn a little something from this inter-species cooperation.

Deb Thiessen
Park Interpreter