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Endangered Western Painted Turtle. Photo Deb Thiessen.



Making a difference...together

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Turf for Turtles

Turtle Nesting Habitat Enhancement in Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park

By Christian Engelstoft and Kristiina Ovaska

Multi-use areas southwest of Beaver Lake contain important nesting habitat for the endangered Pacific Coast population of the Western Painted Turtle.

On June 2, 2011, staff and volunteers from CRD Regional Parks, Elk-Beaver Lake Equestrian Society (EBES), Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), along with volunteers from Starbucks, engaged in nesting habitat enhancement at two sites.

One enhancement site was within the EBES riding ring area, where turtles have been nesting on paths and other unsafe areas. This site next to a horse exercise ring was selected because of known previous use by turtles.

First, the ground was cleared of weeds, and piles of sand and soil were brought in, courtesy of CRD Regional Parks. EBES donated a pile of sand already present at the site. The substrate was deposited along two east-west oriented rows, gently sloping to the south to provide warm nesting sites for turtles.

Two types of substrates were used to examine preferences by turtles: sand and a mixture of 60% sand/40% soil. The two substrates were deposited along the ridges within alternating 1x1 m grids. Many wheelbarrow loads of sand and soil were moved to provide sufficient depth (20 cm or more) to the nesting areas.

The other nesting habitat enhancement site was by a small pond in an area co-managed by CRD Regional Parks and Vancouver Island Retriever Club, who originally dug the pond about 30 years ago. Turtles come here from the lake and communally nest within a small area next to the pond. The site is getting overgrown with grass and weeds.

In 2010, we experimentally weeded and turned over four 1 m² plots within this area, and turtles preferentially nested in these bare patches. This year, with help from hard-working volunteers, we similarly weeded and turned over four additional plots that had served as control plots last year but were not used by nesting turtles.

A big "thank you" to all volunteers who came out to help!

Biologists Christian Engelstoft and Kristiina Ovaska are with Habitat Acquisition Trust.



Volunteers prepared the sites

Photos Kristiina Ovaska



Volunteers weeded and turned over plots



Volunteers at a well-deserved lunch

Who's That **VIP?**



VIP Warden Kaye Leicester

By Colleen Long

When Sooke Potholes was established as a Regional Park in 2005, Kaye Leicester came on as a Volunteer Warden. Kaye had run into one of our Volunteer Wardens on the Galloping Goose Regional Trail, David Leigh, who told Kaye about the Volunteer Warden Program, so Kaye applied with us up hoping to get a placement at Sooke Potholes.

Kaye has been a warden since the park was established, so she has an affinity for the park and looks forward to her weekly visits with her dog Smidge (schnauzer). The thing that Kaye enjoys most about Sooke Potholes is that the park is so changeable. The river and surrounding vegetation change throughout the year and there is always something new and interesting to explore.

Though Kaye loves being in the park at all times of the year, the spring season is the one she enjoys most. She loves seeing all of the new growth, activity and greenness that the spring brings before the dry summer season. Though the park is mainly deserted in the winter, which to Kaye is somewhat of a shame, she also secretly likes having it to herself.

Kaye gets enjoyment volunteering for Regional Parks. She appreciates the Warden role and being out in the park. She values being part of an organization that she believes in and

values the work that we do in trying to protect and manage these incredibly important natural areas. Kaye is thankful for all of the parks and green spaces that can be found in the Capital Region and this was one of the reasons why she moved to Victoria, and more specifically Sooke, in 1999.

Previous to living in Sooke, Kaye lived in Golden, BC where she worked as an elementary school teacher. Almost all of her teaching career took place in Golden where she taught Kindergarten-Grade 1 students from 1969-1999.

Originally from Leominster, England, Kaye immigrated to Canada in 1969 with her former husband. Kaye admitted that it was quite a culture shock when they first arrived in Golden, but that they settled in nicely there.

Kaye moved to Sooke to be closer to her younger sister. She finds the size and temperate climate very similar to what she experienced growing up in England; she is used to living in smaller, rural communities.

Since retiring Kaye finds that she is busier than ever. Besides volunteering with us, she also volunteers with Wild Arc in Metchosin. She is a member of the Sooke Striders hiking group, plays tennis, belongs to several book clubs, and is learning to kayak. Fitting in daily walks with her dog and getting all of her other chores done doesn't leave her with much idle time.

Kaye told me that when she retired she felt a strong need to give something back to her community. At Regional Parks we are very thankful that volunteering at Sooke Potholes is part of Kaye's contribution to her community.

New Volunteers Welcomed

With the busy summer season upon us we have recruited several Volunteer Naturalists to help with weekday shifts at the nature centres. Helping us out at Beaver Lake are Marlie van Roy and Alex Cowan; Kathryn Kelly-Freiberg is at Witty's Lagoon. Molly Neil has joined our ranks as a year round Naturalist at Beaver Lake nature centre, filling the vacancy left by Shannon West who recently resigned as she is expecting her second child in September.

Next Continuing Education Session

Our next Continuing Education Session will be an Astronomy Session at the University of Victoria on August 31 from 8-9:30pm. An invite to the session will be sent out the first week of August with further details. The session is being offered by Robb Russell, Senior Lab Instructor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Rob will cater his talk according to sky visibility that evening, but we will get a chance to see the telescope and have a look through it.

Annual Volunteer Recognition Event

Be sure to mark your calendars for the Annual Volunteer Recognition event being held on Saturday, September 17 from 11am-2pm at Mill Hill Regional Park. Lunch and refreshments will be served. We're excited to have guest speaker Richard Hebda, Curator of Botany and Earth History at the Royal BC Museum. Expect your personal invitation by the first week in August.

Staff Profile



What do you do at Regional Parks?

I have been with Regional Parks since 1987 when I joined the organization as its first park planner. I now manage the Planning, Resource Management and Development service area.

What is your work background?

I graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor degree and from the University of Victoria with a Master of Arts degree in geography. I have worked as a regional planner with the Regional District of East Kootenay in Cranbrook, BC and a park planner with Parks Canada in Winnipeg.

What is your favorite Regional Park and why?

My wife, Kathleen, and I love Mt Work. We hike to the summit many times a year from both sides. The views and feeling of being out in wilderness only 30 minutes from our home makes this such a special place.

Where were you born and where have you lived?

I grew up in Thunder Bay, ON. Here I spent many hours outdoors with my family, cousins and friends and this had a great influence on my love of nature. I have also been fortunate to have shared many outdoor experiences with my family, cousins and friends throughout Canada and the US. Kathleen and I also lived in the East Kootenay for seven years. Hiking, climbing and ski touring kept us busy all year. We really miss the Kootenay's and we still get together with our friends from the area to enjoy the mountains.

Tell us a bit about your family.

Kath and I have been married for 31 years and have two children; Hillary 24 and Cameron 22. I think our love for nature has definitely rubbed off on the kids. Hillary spends most of her spring, summer and fall studying rainbow trout and Cameron spends as much time as possible chasing the big surf waves on the BC Coast. Both are studying in the field of environmental and sustainable management.