

Volunteers **In Parks**

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Happy New Year!

May the joy of the New Year bring a wealth of happiness, inspirations and quality time with those around you and in your community. We appreciate your commitment to fostering stewardship, volunteering and caring for CRD's regional parks.



Making a difference...together

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Northern Flicker: Most Common Woodpecker



I saw a Northern Flicker flying through my backyard yesterday. It had that typical undulating flight pattern of a woodpecker and I could tell it was a flicker because of its bright orange feather shafts, spotted breast and the prominent white patch at the base of its tail.

As I watched him watching me, it got me thinking—considering flickers are the most common woodpeckers in the Capital Regional District, why do we call them Northern Flickers and not Northern Woodpeckers? After spending a little time watching them though, I think I have it figured out—they're not very good peckers!

They seem to spend most of their time flicking through the dirt in my garden looking for bugs. Sometimes I see them raiding the thatcher ant hills in Francis/King Regional Park, flicking through the needles and dirt, nabbing ants. In the spring I often see them flicking the moss off the big-leaf maples in search of food. With all that flicking no wonder they're called flickers. (In all fairness, flickers do peck to excavate nest holes if the tree is rotten enough.)

Even though they don't peck for a living, Northern Flickers have all the amazing adaptations woodpeckers have. For starters, check-out that tongue! It has barbs on the end to hook dinner and when fully extended the tongue is up to two times the length of their head. Makes you wonder what they do with all that tongue when they're not using it? Rolling it up like a butterfly isn't an option. Imagine trying to close your beak over a rolled-up tongue. Stuffing it down the throat isn't going to work either. How could you breathe with your tongue down your throat?

What woodpeckers do with their tongues when they're not using them is one of the great, weird wonders of nature—it slides back behind their head, over top of their skull and ends up in their right nostril. I know it sounds too freaky to be true, but when you look at a woodpecker skull you can see the groove the tongue fits in.

You won't be able to see into the nostril of a living bird though. Like all woodpeckers, flickers look a little like my uncle Edwin when he has forgotten to use his nose-hair trimmer; a dense thatch of feathers fill their nostrils to act like a filter mask keeping out sawdust and dirt.

Flickers have typical woodpecker toes and tail, too. Like owls, woodpeckers have zygodactylus feet with two toes forward and two toes backward to give them a good grip on the tree, and their long, stiff, pointed tail feathers act as a brace they can lean against as they peck.

Whether you're a flicker or a 'pecker, you have to love an animal that is so well adapted to the lifestyle it leads. Who knows what kind of woodpecker will visit my yard next: maybe a hairy, or a downy, a sapsucker or a pileated... Time to hang up the suet!

By **Scott Mair**, Coordinator of Environmental Interpretation



Rick Leche

Wintery Wanderings

The winter rains are upon us. We want to hide inside our homes all warm and cozy. Yet there is no better time to get out in the forest and give our minds a house cleaning, and no better place than the forest.

Rich mosses carpet the woodland floor, turning rocks to lush moist miniature forests. As your eye moves through this exquisitely lovely micro-habitat, you may come across a small spider or beetle, making its way through the dense cover of the moss.

Up above you, tree branches are draped with pale green 'fur', while strewn below on the forest floor are fleshy scraps looking like discarded flakes of paint. Lichens are two plants in one—a fungus and an algae that are living together and likin' it. They serve an important function in the forest, obtaining nutrients such as nitrogen from the air, and passing these nutrients on to plant and animal life around them.

Soon, a small but vocal winter wren appears, scolding you from the underbrush. Listen more closely. The rasping kip-kip is accompanied by the faint sound of small wings fluttering. Careful observation reveals a darting, mouse-like movement through the bushes, and patience will reward you with a look at this visually inconspicuous bird. Round, plump and dark-brown, its stubby tail sticks up at right angles to the rest of its body. It may bob its head once or twice before hopping to another perch. And if you make a small pssing sound, it may be curious enough to investigate you!

Keep walking. There is more to see and hear. Mushrooms appear as if from nowhere, on logs, on stumps, in the soil around the trees. A bell-like tsss-tsss overhead says there are kinglets feeding on insects; where there are kinglets, there are sure to be chestnut-backed chickadees feeding as well. Hear that rustling in the brush? It becomes the sound of hoof and cracking twigs. You see the flash of white and black tail - a retreating black-tailed deer, startled from its winter browsing.

Once you take the time to open your senses to the forest's wintery gifts, you may find it hard to leave. Winter is not what it seemed to be before you left the house. It holds the promise of future forest wanderings. Spring is a distant dream. In the meantime, there's much to be said for winter.

By **Deb Thiessen**, *Regional Parks Interpreter*



Bradley Esau



Deb Thiessen

Protecting Our Only Native **Turtle Species**

Turtles first arose approximately 210 million years ago, during the latter part of the Triassic Period, the same period during which dinosaurs first arose, and about 208 million years before humans came into the picture. Since then, turtles have thrived on the earth, enduring numerous challenging times, including the well-known event, about 65 million years ago, when 50–80% of the planet’s plant and animal species went extinct, including dinosaurs.



Western Painted Turtle

Jeff Brown

If you see a turtle in one of our parks...

1. Do not disturb the turtle; take photos and take note of its location.
2. Confirm whether it is a Western Painted Turtle or a Red-eared Slider. (Note: an excellent identification sheet is available online at: <http://www.hat.bc.ca/attachments/Turtle-IDGuide-May2008.pdf>).
3. Email your photos and other sighting information to Marilyn Fuchs, our Environmental Conservation Specialist, at mfuchs@crd.bc.ca.

Nowadays, humans have created a new set of challenges for turtles, including habitat loss, road mortality, collection for food and for pets, and much more. Today, nearly 50% of the earth's 270 turtle species are at risk of extinction, including the Pacific Coast population of the Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta belii*), which in 2006, was listed as endangered for reasons of wetland habitat loss, a rapidly increasing human population and associated development pressure, and recent evidence of turtle population declines within the region.

Surprisingly enough, another turtle, the Red-eared Slider may also pose a threat to this species. Sliders are the most common turtle in the local pet trade; when people grow tired of having them as pets—which they inevitably do because the turtles grow to 30 cm (1 foot) in length, are difficult to care for, and can live for 50-75 years—they release them into local water bodies, where they may compete with the native turtles for resources, or expose them to disease, parasites or infection.

There have been remarkably few surveys/studies of turtles on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands in recent years, so very little is known about the abundance and distribution of both Western Painted Turtles and Red-eared Sliders in the Capital Regional District. For this reason, in 2008 CRD Regional Parks hired Christian Englestoft of Alula Biological

Consulting to conduct turtle surveys at a number of lakes and ponds in the regional parks system; these surveys were conducted as part of a larger study covering the southern half of Vancouver Island as well as some of the Gulf Islands.

The goal of the study was to determine:

1. where the painted turtles exist;
2. where they co-exist with sliders, creating a potential conflict; and
3. what factors might pose a threat to the native painted turtles where they exist.

Western Painted Turtles were identified at Elk/Beaver Lake and Matheson Lake Regional Parks; Red-eared Sliders were confirmed to be present in both parks as well. Although historical painted turtle occurrences have been documented at Thetis Lake and Mount Work regional parks, only non-native turtles were identified in these parks in 2008. The most likely threats to Western Painted Turtles in the regional parks system include: disturbance by park visitors and their pets; road mortality; and exotic species, including Red-eared Sliders, as well as Bullfrogs, which are known to occasionally eat hatchling turtles.

The study provided valuable information on the status of turtle populations within the regional parks system, as well as insight on the conservation measures required to ensure the persistence of the Capital Region's only native turtle species.

By **Pamela Wesley**, M.Sc., former Environmental Conservation Specialist with CRD Regional Parks

Nowadays, humans have created a new set of challenges for turtles, including habitat loss, road mortality, collection for food and for pets, and much more.

Red-eared Slider





Picture It

We would love to use your photos of CRD regional parks in our publications and on the website. We are currently seeking digital photos for the upcoming Spring Nature Program brochure, which covers April, May and June 2009.

Here are examples of shots we're looking for:

- Features of Sooke Potholes, Witty's Lagoon, Mount Work, East Sooke, Francis/King, Matheson Lake, Coles Bay, Elk/Beaver Lake, and Gonzales regional parks in spring
- Wildflowers and other blooms
- Returning birds
- Intertidal creatures
- Canoeing
- Flora and fauna in general
- Any other photos you think our parks visitors would appreciate

All photo submissions will be added to our image bank and you will be given photo credit if we publish it. Ideally the digital photos should be taken at the highest resolution setting on your camera. Parameters are:

- 1200 x1800 pixels @ 180 dpi
- The file should be saved as a jpeg format

Email your submissions to parksvolunteer@crd.bc.ca. For more information contact our Communications Coordinator, Laurie Sthamann, at 250.478.3344 or at the email address shown above.

Mill Hill Regional Park Restoration Project

With funding support from the Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, the CRD's award winning Mill Hill Restoration Project, now in its seventh year, held a successful volunteer event and completed intensive restoration work on Mill Hill Regional Park's Garry Oak ecosystems. The project helps protect and restore one of the remaining Garry Oak meadow ecosystems on the south island.

Garry Oak ecosystems contain the highest terrestrial plant diversity in coastal BC, including a high concentration of rare and endangered species. Only five percent of the CRD's original Garry Oak ecosystems remain in the region. Invasive plants such as Scotch Broom and Daphne can out compete and exclude native plants; removing invasives is a critical step in ecosystem restoration.

In October-November 2008 the Mill Hill Restoration Project hired an 11-person crew for two and a half weeks of intensive work. In addition, volunteers from across the region joined in the annual Mill Hill Broom Sweep, including members of the UVic Environmental Law Club, Canada World Youth, Cordova Bay 55+ Association and the Friends of Ecological Reserves. Other participants included high school students from Belmont Secondary and youth from the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Society. In total, more than 100 volunteers took part.

The work of staff and volunteers resulted in the removal of over three metric tonnes of invasive shrubs from the park's meadows. To date, about 45 tonnes have been removed from approximately 16 hectares of the park. In addition to invasive species removal, project activities include improving and realigning trails and scientific monitoring of rare plants and other vegetation. Trail improvements help park visitors stay on designated trails and avoid trampling rare plants and other sensitive vegetation. By documenting ecosystem responses to invasive species management, the restoration team can ensure that activities stay focused and effective.

Courtesy of Chair's Update, Capital Regional District Winter 2008, Vol. 3, Issue 4

Mill Hill volunteers



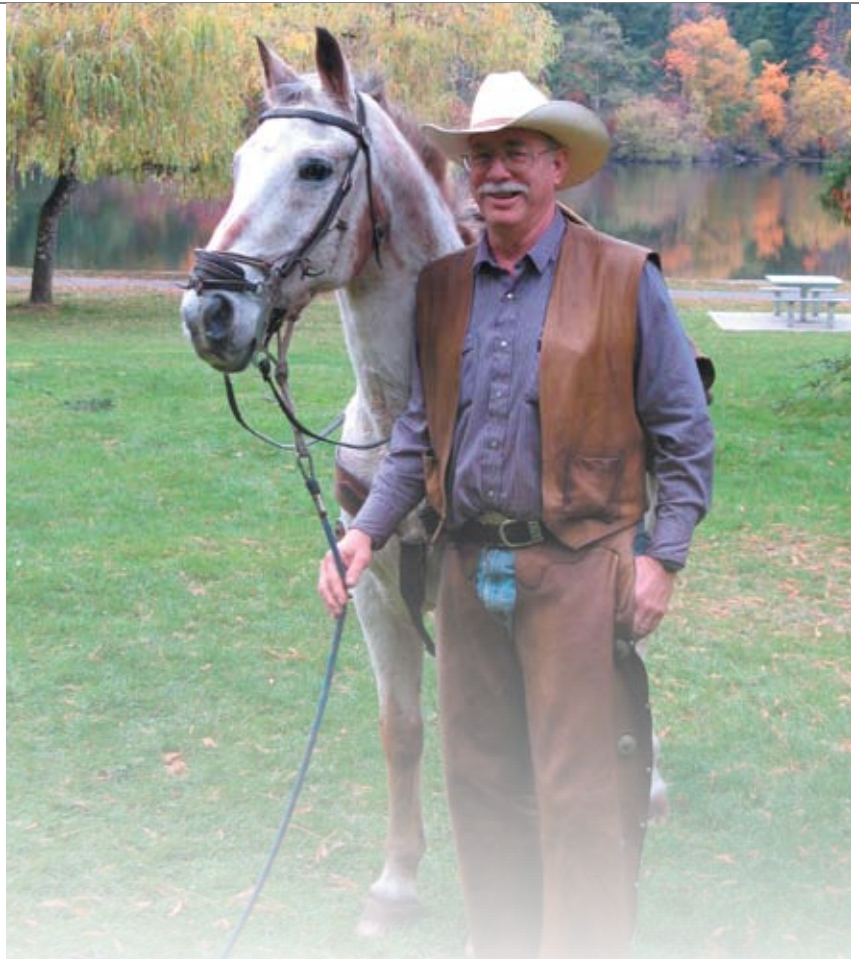
Who's that **VIP?**

In a world of change and advancing technology, how many teenagers can say that one of their hobbies and passion is the same as their grandfather's or better yet, of their great grandfather's? The Townsends happen to be able to say that this is true! The connection that these men share is in taking adventure-filled rides through the world of literature. Opportunities for Mystery rides with Ellery Queen, western adventures with Louie Lamour, through to the Smiling Pool and the Old Briar Patch with Mother Westwind books or learning about the amazing inventions of Tom Swift. All of which line the bookshelves in the Townsend home.

When interviewing Wayne Townsend, VIP Warden for Elk/Beaver Lake, he shared with me just how that passion developed. "Dad read to me until I got big enough to read myself" and that "I've always been a book worm." Wayne was inspired by and proud of his dad who, having only a Grade 10 education had an astounding vocabulary. He read and absorbed. Wayne inherited about 27 boxes of his dad's books and has read most of them, some two and three times each. Wayne continued the tradition of reading to his son and then his grandsons. Not surprisingly, this passion for reading continues with one of his grandsons, who always has a book at hand.

As I write, I am wondering how to describe who Wayne is and through my research I realized that he is much like the character Ned Newton from the Tom Swift's novels—Tom's friend and sidekick. He is described as humorous, dependable and absolutely loyal. This definitely describes Wayne, who was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and moved to Edmonton when he was 19. A country boy at heart, Wayne grew up in the city but spent fantastic summers on a ranch/farm, milking cows, slopping the pigs and of course, riding.

He married Linda, his best friend, in 1965 and they still enjoy their life together, traveling, square dancing and spending time with their children and grandchildren. A grin breaks out on Wayne's



face when I query him on what he does at home. With a chuckle he says, "whatever is on the Honey Do List" explaining that Linda is a list maker; she keeps track of life's tasks. They enjoy each other's company and have fun together, which is what it is all about for Wayne. "Life is too short to get tense!"

For Wayne, volunteering is about "helping people and enjoying the reaction of the little kids" with Taurus, his Arab/Appaloosa bred sidekick. Taurus is Wayne's wonderful companion when he is in the park or just having fun bush riding in Metchosin—one that provides a friendly challenge of energy with attitude. As Wayne describes, "he needs to be first."

As someone who participates with the community in different ways over the years, volunteering fills Wayne with pride. "Nice to keep the park cleaned up," Wayne says with a smile on his face. He's pleased to celebrate his fifth year of volunteering as a horse warden with Taurus this year! Wayne has also volunteered as a therapeutic rider helper—"it was fun with the kids." Perhaps the legacy that Wayne continues from his father is in sharing time, passion and himself with the kids to teach and foster family ties, enjoyment and community involvement.

By **Karen Preston**, Coordinator of Volunteers

A country boy at heart, Wayne grew up in the city but spent fantastic summers on a ranch/farm, milking cows, slopping the pigs and of course, riding.



Recruiting Naturalists

Do you have a friend who wants to Get Out & Give Back? We are recruiting for Volunteer Naturalists! They can become part of the volunteer team at Beaver Lake, Witty's Lagoon or Francis King Nature Centre. Extend an invitation to them to share their passion for nature. For more information contact 250.478.3344, email: parksvolunteer@crd.bc.ca or visit www.crd.bc.ca/parks/volunteer.

Sign Program

Regional Parks is embarking on a comprehensive program to standardize all parks and trails signage. It will provide clear, consistent and accepted standards for design, production, installation and maintenance of all our regulatory, directional and informational signs. We are also exploring opportunities to enhance the visitor experience to our parks. Our goal is to have a strategy in place by spring 2009. We will keep you posted as things progress.

Moss Exploration

Our Continuing Education Sessions invites volunteers to spend some time with Kem Luther, VIP Naturalist to learn more about mosses. Enjoy a presentation and a walk of exploration. Please RSVP to Jeanette Mollin at 250.478.3344 to add your name to the list.

Saturday, January 31, 2009, 1:30—3:30pm

Meet at the Francis/King Regional Park Foresters Cabin.

New Volunteers Welcomed in 2008

Naturalists:
Bobby & Mischa Arbes
Shawna Liddicoat
Linda Pickett
Ashley Rabey
Lisa Maria Schlosser
Michelle Trommelen
Emma Weigham

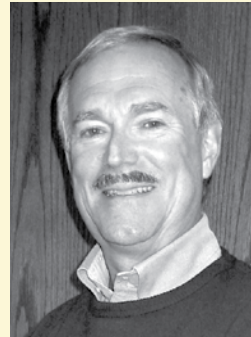
Summer Naturalists:
Julia Daly
Coral Forbes
Janet McDougal
Haley & Janine Roy
Tamara Thorton
Giselle Wikelund

Wardens:
Irma Berlin
Jesse Brunet
Dillon Carfoot
Edmund Choy
Laurie Fairweather
Tim, Cecelia & Wu Kelly
Diane Knight
Bob Smith
Larry Strutynski
Gord Tolman
Rachel Young

Thank you for sharing your passion and time with Regional Parks.

Regional Parks Updates

We welcomed four new staff to our fold. If you come across them in passing, please introduce yourself—they'd be pleased to meet you!



Jim Barlow
Manager of Parks
Operations Services



Sean Brock
Park Attendant



Sarah Forbes
GIS Technologist



Brian Slater
Information Technician