

Volunteers In Parks

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Family of Great Horned Owls Photo Rick Leche



Making a difference...together

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Owls Species of Vancouver Island

By Laurie Sthamann

While most birds wait for the warmth of spring and summer to lay eggs, many owls on Vancouver Island get busy raising their brood in winter.

Twelve species of owls have been recorded on the island, but you are only likely to encounter six of those species. In order of frequency they are the great horned owl, barred owl, western screech owl, northern pygmy owl, northern saw-whet owl and barn owl. These owls begin mating in late fall or early winter, and they often mate for life. Females are larger than males but except for size it's hard to tell one from the other.

When it comes time to roost, these owls take advantage of an array of nests sitting empty. Their philosophy is why bother to build your own home when you can simply squat in one. Raven, hawk or eagle nests do just fine. A tree hollow or broken tree top will work in a pinch, too.

Females normally lay a clutch of two or three eggs. The incubation period for smaller owls is 21 days, while larger owls such as the Great Horned take up to 35 days of incubation. During this time the female rarely strays from the nest, and relies on the male to bring her food.

The little owlets begin teetering along tree branches at four to five weeks old and by six weeks they are learning to fly. Even so, they don't leave their parent for six months, at which point it's fall and almost time to start the whole process again.

You can spot an owl's presence by watching out for a few tell-tale signs. Look for gleaming white owl excrement known as whitewash, dripping like candle wax down the tree. A cacophony of songbirds' alarming cries can be indicative of a predatory owl in the vicinity. With a good eye, you may be lucky enough to catch sight of an owl perched motionless atop a hollow tree in one of the regional parks. They prefer mature second growth and old growth or mixed forest near feeding areas such as open fields and bodies of water or riparian habitat.

CRD Regional Parks interpreters put on a number of programs on owls, especially in the fall and winter. Find out about upcoming programs in the nature outings and events brochure or on the calendar of events at www.crd.bc.ca/parks.



Brian Scott

Barn Owl



Rick Leche

Barred Owl



Rick Leche

Great Horned Owl



David Mitchell

Northern Pygmy Owl



Rick Leche

Northern Saw-whet Owl



Flickr: Maggie Drain

Western Screech Owl

Who's That VIP?



Eldred Williams is a VIP Gatekeeper at Mill Hill Regional Park

By Colleen Long

A nearby neighbour of the park, Eldred Williams is one of our VIP Gatekeepers at Mill Hill Regional Park and has been volunteering with us since May 2007.

Eldred was born in Alberta, but moved to Victoria at six months of age. He graduated from Royal Oak High School and went to Vic College with hopes of pursuing a career in forestry. He worked for the Forest Service during the summer while in high school. During his first year at college, he suffered a serious head injury while cycling home from school. Due to the lengthiness of his recovery, he was unable to continue his studies, though he went on to have an interesting and varied career. Eldred retired eight years ago.

At college Eldred met his wife Winnifred. They went to the same church, but didn't really get to know each until their college days. With an interest in forestry, Eldred was required to take the mandatory science and math courses. Math was not a strength for Eldred, but it was for Winnifred, who helped him with his studies, and as the saying goes, the rest is history.

They were married after that first year of college and have been together for 52 years. They have six children - five

Mill Hill Regional Park

A little-known oasis of nature, this park exemplifies the exquisite beauty and ecological wealth of our region.

Features

- a large Gary oak stand with delicate spring wildflowers
- Douglas-fir forest and cedar wetlands bordering Millstream Creek
- summit (203m) views of Esquimalt Harbour, Victoria and surrounding hills and mountains
- park brochures and other information at CRD Regional Parks headquarters next door
- trail connecting with Thetis Lake Regional Park

Trail Rating: Moderate to Challenging

Size: 71 hectares

Location: 490 Atkins Avenue in Langford

Headquarter hours: 8:30am – 4:30pm

BC Transit #50 or #53

www.crd.bc.ca/parks/millhill

daughters and one son. Their family has grown to include eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren. All of their children live on the island and most in the Victoria area.

Eldred has always had a keen interest in the natural world. He began bird watching when he was 11 years old around his home in Royal Oak. He has always enjoyed being out in the parks, identifying the different plant and animal species. He feels Mill Hill is one of the best parks in the region for wildflowers and Witty's Lagoon for bird watching.

Eldred enjoys volunteering for CRD Regional Parks and feels that the work we do in trying to preserve and protect the natural environment is very important. He hikes in the park often and appreciates seeing it during the different seasons. He also enjoys the exercise he gets on his hikes to the summit.

It is great to have a neighbour so involved in the park. Eldred knows many of the regular hikers and enjoys doing his part to help protect and take care of this special place.

Regional Parks Staff Picks

Witty's Lagoon Regional Park



By Deb Thiessen

Many people see Witty's Lagoon Regional Park as a summer playground for all activities beach related, but it is in winter that you will find the heart and soul of this park in Metchosin.

Heading into the woods, the first thing you hear is the sound of water, the life blood of this special place. Winter rains make Bilston Creek swell. Under a bridge it races, before plunging over a 20-meter rock bluff into the lagoon. Sitting Lady Falls, a mere trickle in summer, has come into its winter glory.

Tear yourself away from the exhilaration of the falls and follow the woodland trail to the beach. Past the small orchard of apple trees lies the saltmarsh as it extends from the lagoon out to the sea. It is one of the last remaining estuaries in our region, and right now it is a winter home for hundreds of waterfowl.

It's a short jaunt past the open saltmarsh to Witty's Beach. Look out on the salty waters of Parry Bay where harbour seals pop their heads up, and flocks of sea birds swim by in their search for fishy treats. It's not difficult to imagine why this place of abundance was such an important home for the First Nations people long ago.

Witty's is indeed a feast of winter treats. Moving from freshwater to saltmarsh to sea, it opens up a world of beauty for the discerning hiker. And when snow falls, everything becomes a blanketed wonderland of delights. Lace up your boots, grab your winter woollies and your thermos, and head out to the park. You won't regret it.

Visit us on Facebook "Knack for Nature" to see more photos of Witty's Lagoon.

If you have a favorite regional park or trail, tell us about it!



Staff Profile

Kelly Maher
Regional Parks Maintenance Worker

What do you do at parks?

I am a parks maintenance worker 1 and work out of the field house at Beaver Lake. In the north service area we primarily take care of the parks on the peninsula. My work is varied and includes everything from cutting trails and windfalls to changing the garbage. If it's in the park my co-workers and I take care of it.

What is your favorite CRD park?

It would have to be East Sooke [Regional] Park. My favorite part of the park is the beach at Iron Mine Bay. I love walking to the little island when the tide is out. It's the best lunchroom in the CRD.

What is your favorite hobby?

Well, I grew up with a dad that coached baseball and two brothers that love playing different sports, so I became a sports nut from the time I was little. I love playing baseball, tennis and basketball. I also love running, although my lungs and legs don't always agree with it.

Tell us a bit about your family.

My dad was born in Manitoba and my mom was born in Campbell River. I have two brothers, three nieces and a nephew. I have a lovely wife and we are expecting our first child in March. Oh and I can't forget my two cats Loki and Quinn.

Where have you travelled or would most like to travel?

My Dad took me to various parts of England and Scotland when I was a teenager, which means I didn't fully appreciate what I was seeing at the time. I would love to visit Japan at some point. I have to see one Sumo event before I die. I'll invite my Dad with me.