

Volunteers in Parks

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The Mill Hill Tremendous Trio

By Colleen Long

If you have been to Mill Hill Regional Park recently, you may have noticed a pleasant surprise. It is especially noticeable at this time of year, now that our wonderful wildflower season has begun. Over time you may have noticed that the Scotch broom and other invasive plant species have been removed from the sides of the Auburn Trail and summit at Mill Hill. This has really opened things up and allowed all of the native plants and wildflowers to flourish that have been choked out by the Scotch broom and other invasive plant species. It has also opened up some lovely views. This is due to the efforts of a small troop of incredibly dedicated Restoration Volunteers, Margaret How, Simon Bluck and James Chapman.

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Margaret (left), James (centre), and Simon (right) at Mill Hill Regional Park

The Mill Hill Regional Park Restoration Project has been ongoing since 2002 and the goal of the project is to help protect and restore the endangered Garry oak ecosystems found in the park. The 71 hectare park contains 20 hectares of Garry oak ecosystem and represents one of the highest concentrations of plants at risk in British Columbia.

Garry oak ecosystems are primarily restricted to the southeastern Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands and a few spot occurrences in the Fraser Valley. These ecosystems are home to more than 100 rare or endangered plant and animal species. Garry oak ecosystem have declined dramatically since European settlement and less than 5% of their historic range remains in a near natural state.

Past inventories that have been conducted on Mill Hill have discovered 18 rare and endangered plant and animal species including 13 plant, two butterflies, two bird and one snake species. More inventories are scheduled this year to see how things are progressing. Besides loss of habitat due to development, one of the main threats to the Garry oak ecosystems is invasive plant species such a Scotch broom, daphne or spurge laurel.

The focus of the Mill Hill Restoration Project has been to remove the invasive plant species from the areas with the highest concentration of rare plant species to give them a better chance of surviving.



Calypso orchid



Shooting star, Photo credit: Gordon Tolman

Many of these species tend to be in areas far off the main trails in the park, and though we have been working away at the project for 20 years now and removed more than 68 tonnes of invasive species, you have probably noticed that there is still a fair bit of broom in the park.

Over the years, this fact has not gone unnoticed by a number of our Restoration Volunteers and though they understood the strategy of focusing our efforts on the areas of the highest concentration of rare plant species in the park, it caused them pain to see the broom on the sides of the trail every time they made their way up the hill to get to the restoration sites.

They wanted to be able to show visitors how beautiful these Garry oak ecosystems are once the broom and other invasive plants had been removed. So one of our volunteers, Marg How, asked if she and another very dedicated volunteer, Simon Bluck, could work on taking out the broom and other invasive species in the parking lot of the park. As they were very experienced Restoration Volunteers and understood the importance of good removal techniques to minimize soil disturbance and damage to surrounding areas, they were given the go ahead to begin working on their own in August 2020.

Since that time their efforts have expanded from the parking lot of Mill Hill, up both sides of the Auburn trail to the summit and they are now working on the area surrounding the summit. The results of their work has been noticed and commented on by numerous park visitors.

Since January of this year, one of our other very committed Restoration Volunteers, James Chapman, joined their crew. This incredible three-some do their weekly sessions on Mill Hill on Mondays from around 9am-noon.

If you haven't seen them working in the park, you may have seen the results of their work in the cleared areas on the sides of the trail and summit, or the bundles of broom that are results of their long hours of work. Staff assist with bringing these bundles of broom down the hill for disposal.

Like all of the areas that we work in on the hill, these newly cleared areas will be swept each year before new areas are tackled. Having the broom cleared from these areas will allow the wildflowers and other native plant species, that may have been dormant, an opportunity to grow and expand.



Camas, Photo credit: Bev Hall



White-fawn lily

Now that the Scotch broom and other invasive plants have been cleared from these open areas, it can be tempting to want to walk into them, but it is incredibly important to enjoy the views from the sides of the trails and not venture off trail. Having people and their pets off trail in the park contributes to the trampling, soil compaction and generally degradation of these areas. Once a new trail is created, others tends to follow and soon an area covered in moss and wildflowers is reduced to barren open rock.

People and their pets staying on designated trails in the parks is one of the greatest ways that visitors can help with the protection of regional parks and other vital park green spaces in the region. By staying on the official trails, we can all enjoy these wonderful, natural areas and also give nature the opportunity to thrive.

Though you aren't able to access all of the areas of the park where many of the rare plants are located and hundreds of volunteers have dedicated thousands of hours of time to help restore, thanks to the efforts of Marg, Simon and James, you can have a glimpse into what these meadows look like once the invasive plant species have been removed.

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Before



After



Thanks to the efforts of all of our dedicated Restoration Volunteers to help restore the endangered Garry oak ecosystems in the park that make it possible for all of the residents of the region to enjoy.

Together we are protecting these vitally important ecosystems that may play a critical role in British Columbia's adjustment to climate change as our climate becomes warmer and drier.

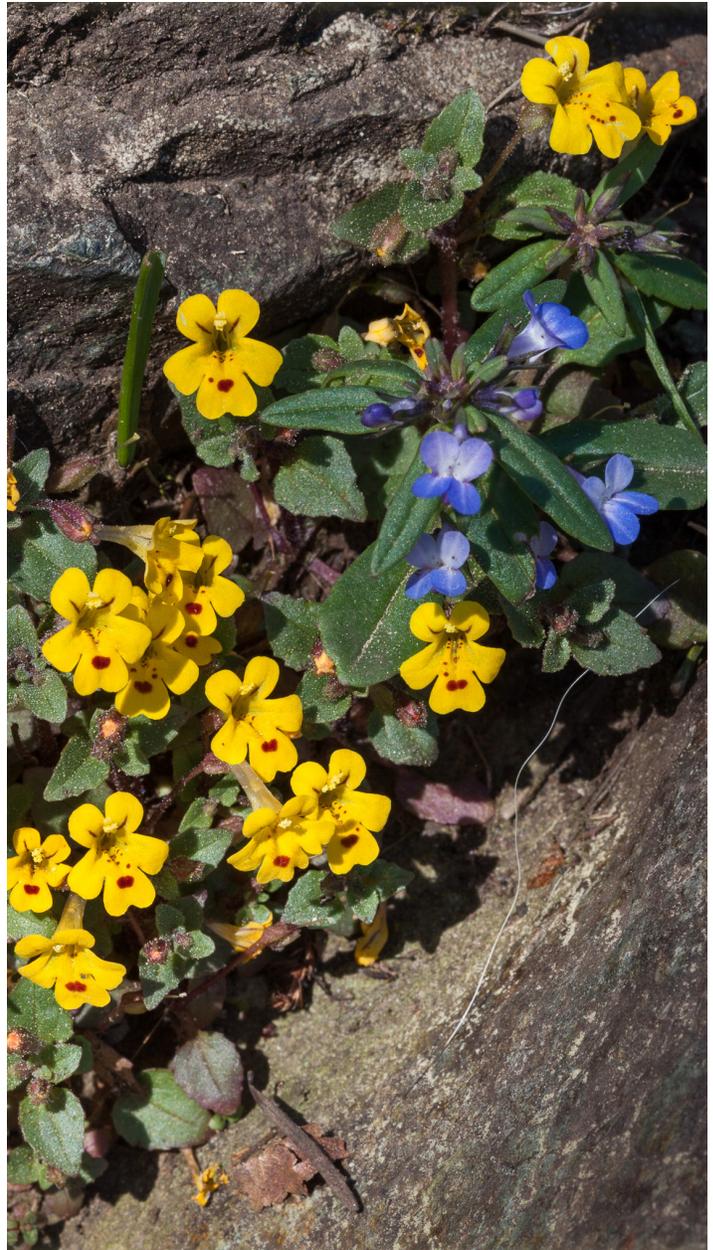
Garry oak are adapted to these conditions and may help to fill the void created by our declining evergreen forests that are more dependent on a cooler, wetter climate.

So if you haven't been to Mill Hill for a while, now is the perfect time to head up the hill to see the wildflower show that has begun and will continue on now until the end of summer, with a different array of wildflowers throughout the season.

Some of the wildflowers to be seen at this time of year include the white-fawn lilies, spring gold, shooting stars, western trillium, blue-eyed Mary, yellow monkey flower, calypso orchids and camas to name a few. I guarantee, you won't be disappointed.



Spring gold, Photo credit: Gordon Tolman



Monkeyflowers and blue-eyed Mary, Photo credit: Mary Sanseverino



Western trillium

Volunteer Profile - Andrew Malczyk

Andrew has been a Volunteer Naturalist at Francis/King Regional Park since December 2009.

What do you most enjoy about volunteering with Regional Parks?

What I most enjoy most about volunteering at Francis/King are the lone walks through the Heritage Grove after a shift. After more than a decade of volunteering here I am still awestruck by the trees' majesty and presence every time I see them.

What is your favourite volunteer memory or experience?

My favorite memory is any epic Newton vs. Darwin wrestling match! Those two Rough-skinned newts are entertaining to watch.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I was born and raised on Vancouver Island, currently live in Sooke and work in Victoria as a paramedic. I have a degree in geography and environmental science and have always had a keen interest in nature conservation and stewardship.

I have always volunteered in some capacity since high school, so once I moved back to the island after university, volunteering here was a perfect match!

I am hard of hearing so a beautiful place like this free of background noise allows me to hear all the sounds of nature. If I'm not working or volunteering, you can probably find me in my backyard hanging out with my 4 Muscovy ducks!



Newton and Darwin at the Francis/King Regional Park Nature Centre

Staff Profile - Emma Taylor

Emma has been a Regional Parks Planner since January 2022.

What is your position and when did you start working at Regional Parks?

Before starting as a full time Planner at Regional Parks, I worked as a Planner at the CRD Juan de Fuca Electoral Area office and have had various temporary assignments at Regional Parks over the years.

My big project this spring is to lead the Regional Parks Strategic Plan update. I am also working on pursuing partnerships and grant funding for widening and lighting the urban section of the Galloping Goose Regional Trail.

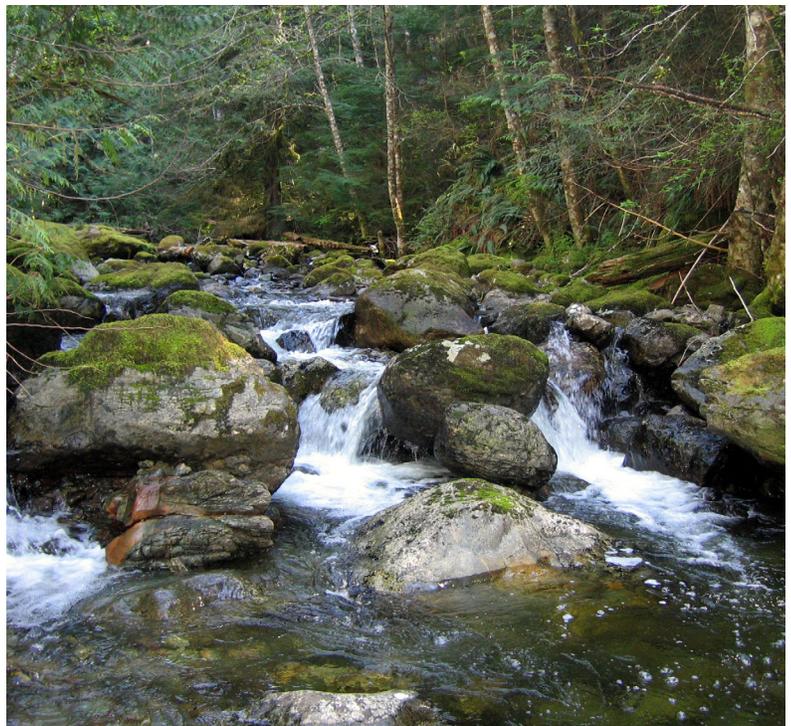
I look forward to being involved with the many exciting projects that the Planning & Development team has on the go including park management plans and the land acquisition strategy.

What do you most enjoy about working at Regional Parks?

This is such an exciting time to join Regional Parks with several new staff positions, a new division structure, and a new Strategic Plan! I am grateful to be part of this team of staff that have the dedication and expertise to get ahead of the many issues and challenges facing our parks and trails system.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am a Registered Professional Planner with a background in geography, resource management, outdoor recreation and land use planning. I love riding bikes and spending time outside with my husband, two 'tween' sons and dog. We live in Sooke and have a big garden with chickens and DeMamiel Creek in the backyard. Life is good!



Creek in Sea to Sea Regional Park, Photo credit: Gord Tolman

Volunteer & Park Updates



Hamsterly Beach nature playground, Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park

Nature Playground

The playground at Hamsterly Beach in Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park was recently replaced with a new nature playground. The playground was built using the existing landscape, local timbers and green infrastructure, providing a sustainable connection to the lake ecosystem. Work is also being done to improve water quality and reduce frequency of blue-green algae, improve fish habitat and manage growth of Eurasian milfoil, through the development of a watershed management plan, and an in-lake remediation plan.

More information on the Elk/Beaver Lake Initiative is available here: <https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/elk-beaver-lake-initiative>



Mount Work Regional Park

Mount Work Regional Park

The Capital Regional District is developing a management plan to guide management, use and development at Mount Work over the next 15 years. A second round of engagement is underway. Input from this second round of engagement will influence how the plan is finalized before it goes to the CRD Board for approval.

For more information, to complete the survey, and for details on the open house visit: <https://getinvolved.crd.bc.ca/mount-work>

Tick season is well underway!

In BC, two species of western black-legged ticks cause Lyme disease. It is caused by a bacteria that is carried by the ticks and transferred to humans when they bite you. Thankfully, less than 1 percent of ticks tested carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease and it seems that the infected tick must feed on its host for at least 24 hours before the bacteria can be transmitted.

Ticks live in tall grasses and wooded areas and latch on to unexpected host as they pass by, so after an outing in the parks be sure to check your entire body, including your scalp. To protect yourself from ticks, walk on cleared trails, wear light coloured clothing, tuck your top into your pants and tuck your pants into your boots or socks. You may also try using an insect repellent that contains 20-30 percent DEET.

For more information about ticks, what to do if you find a tick on yourself and how to remove it, check out the HealthLink BC Files on [Ticks Bites and Disease](#) and the BC Centre for Disease Control for information on [Lyme Disease](#).