

Volunteers in Parks

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Volunteer Awards

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Justin George

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Volunteer & Park Updates



1. Award winners: Chrys Tei Argast (5th) Roxana Argast (25th),
Kaye Leicester (15th)
2. 5th year award winner - Valerie Hawkins

3. 5th year award winner - John Potter
4. 10th year award winner - Erie Pentland
5. 1st year award winner - Bridget Senyk

2020 Volunteer Awards

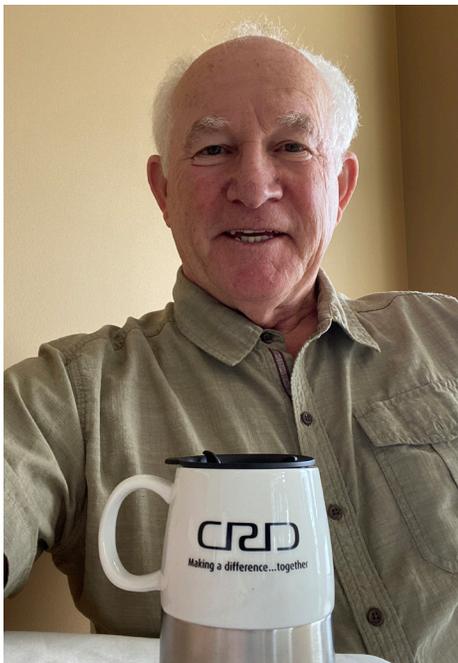
By Colleen Long

Due to COVID-19 we weren't able to host our annual Volunteer Recognition Event, which is unfortunate, as we really enjoy the opportunity of being able to connect with so many of you at the event. Hopefully we can gather again soon. Though we weren't able to host our event, we still went ahead with getting awards out to our award winners. There were 22 volunteers recognized for their years of service ranging from 1 – 30 years.



1st year award winners - Shannon Flaherty, Sharon Zwart-van Tilburg and Silke Sommerfeld

Nine volunteers were recognized for completing their 1st year of volunteering, four volunteers received 5th year awards and four volunteers received 10th year awards.



15th year award winner - David Gellately

Two volunteers received awards for 15 years of volunteer service. David Gellately, an avid cyclist, is a Park Steward along a section of the Galloping Goose and all of the Lochside Regional Trail. He lives in town, so his patrols consist of a ride from the Johnston Street Bridge to the ferry terminal and back, a distance of approximately 68km per round trip! Kaye Leicester, Park Steward at Sooke Potholes Regional Park, loves the opportunity to visit the potholes at all times of the year.

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2020 Recipients

1st Year Award Recipients

- » Amber Brown – Park Steward Ek/Beaver Lake
- » John Campbell – Park Steward Galloping Goose
- » Shannon Flaherty – Naturalist Witty's Lagoon
- » Barry Hull - Park Steward East Sooke
- » Bridget Senyk – Park Steward Sooke Hills Wilderness
- » Silke Sommerfeld- Long-term Restoration Volunteer
- » Janey Turner - Park Steward Elk/Beaver Lake
- » Marj Vachell – Devonian Restoration Volunteer
- » Sharon Zwart –van Tilburg – Naturalist Witty's Lagoon

5th Year Award Recipients

- » Chrys Tei Argast – Park Steward Galloping Goose
- » Valerie Hawkins– Naturalist Francis/King
- » Andy MacKinnon – Naturalist Witty's Lagoon
- » John Potter – Long-term Restoration Volunteer

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2020 Recipients

10th Year Award Recipients

- » Erie Pentland - Naturalist Francis/King
- » Hans Roemer – Long-term Restoration Volunteer
- » Fred Burgess – Naturalist Witty’s Lagoon
- » Paula Johanson – Naturalist Elk/Beaver Lake

15th Year Award Recipients

- » David Gellately - Park Steward Lochside
- » Kaye Leicester – Park Steward Sooke Potholes

20th Year Award Recipient

- » Randy Cunningham – Naturalist Francis/King

25th Year Award Winner

- » Roxana Argast – Park Steward Galloping Goose

30th Year Award Winner

- » Ray Creasser – Park Steward Galloping Goose

In her reports, she often comments on things she has observed in the park, the water level of the river, the return of the salmon, the changing fall colours and the diversity of mushrooms in the fall that magically appear. Secretly, we think she enjoys her patrols most in the fall and winter months when the park is a little quieter.

Randy Cunningham received his 20th year award. Randy first began with us as a Volunteer Naturalist at the Nature Centre at Francis/King Regional Park in 2000. He took quite an interest in the observation beehive at Francis/King and began taking some beekeeping courses in 2003 and then apprenticed under our Volunteer Beekeeper, Bill Spriggs. For years Randy and Bill maintained the beehive at Francis/King for thousands of visitors, especially children, to enjoy. Bill was the lead beekeeper and Randy was his assistant. During this time Randy volunteered as both a Volunteer Naturalist and Volunteer Beekeeper at the Nature Centre. As time went by, Randy began assuming more of a lead role with the bees due to Bill’s declining health. Unfortunately, Bill passed away in July 2019, a sad day for us all. This past year, Randy decided to scale back his volunteering to the Volunteer Naturalist role, but he is still an advisor on the bees to the current beekeepers.

Roxana Argast, our 25th year award winner, is a Park Steward along the Galloping Goose Regional Trail near the Sooke Basin on km 37-39. Roxana, came to volunteering with us through her children. *continued on page 4*



15th year award winner - Kaye Leicester



20th year award winner - Randy Cunningham



25th year award winner - Roxana Argast

Her daughter, Amanda, who was 14 years old at the time, wanted to volunteer as a Park Steward on the Galloping Goose, as they lived nearby and hiked that section of the trail frequently. As she was under 19 years of age, she needed to be accompanied by an adult.

So, Roxana and her daughter came on with us as one of our first volunteer families. Eventually all three of her children helped out in the role, Amanda, Peter and Tim. One by one the children headed off to university and other pursuits, but Roxana chose to continue on in her role and 25 years later, she is still sending in reports on her section of the trail. Her partner, Chrys, came on with us five years ago and now the two of them do the patrols along the trail. An entire family of Regional Parks Volunteers!



30th year award winner - Ray Creasser

Our final award recipient, at an incredible 30 years of volunteer service, is Ray Creasser. Ray is a Park Steward along the Galloping Goose Regional Trail in Metchosis. Shortly after coming on with us in 1990, Ray expanded his duties to include Witty's Lagoon Regional Park. He did patrols on both the Galloping Goose and at Witty's Lagoon until 2016, when he decided that he wanted to step back to just doing patrols along Galloping Goose. Ray lives very close to km 25 along the trail. Over the years, he has done patrols heading either way from km 25, back to km 23 or up to km 27. The last several years Ray's patrols have mainly been along km 25-26 on the trail.

Ray was born and raised in Metchosis on Rocky Point Road. His house, where he and his wife Elinor have lived for over 60 years and raised their three children, is just off Rocky Point Road. When I dropped off Ray's award, he let me know that he was resigning from his role as he felt he wasn't able to keep up with the commitment. He turned 88 in October of this year and felt it was time to give somebody else the opportunity to keep watch over this section of trail. Volunteering in his community has always been important to Ray,

so volunteering for regional parks in Metchosis was a good fit for him. Ray does other volunteering in the community, so we are fortunate that he continued volunteering with us for so long.

Congratulations to all of our award winners! Thanks also to all of you for all that you do on our behalf to help us in our efforts to protect and restore the region's biodiversity and provide residents of the region with safe and enjoyable experiences in our regional parks.

THANK YOU!

Volunteer Profile

Karen and James Benson are Park Stewards at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park. James came on with us in June 2014 and Karen in October 2016.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

We arrived in Victoria in 1986 from Winnipeg. We came out for our honeymoon in May of 1985 and could not believe the lush west coast so we decided to make the move. James was offered a position as a Recreation Therapist and we literally packed everything up in two weeks. We both love camping, hiking, canoeing and nature. We bought our first house beside Mill Hill Regional Park two years later because we loved hiking to the hill top. The views from the top of Mill Hill are spectacular. We would hike the trails daily with our dog and then with our two sons. Mill Hill was their playground. The diverse topography from the salmon stream to the 360 panoramic views of the capital region is breathtaking. The fauna is diverse as is the flora. Our son started volunteering while he was at UVic and then moved away. He encouraged us to volunteer at Mill Hill. We started at Mill Hill and then moved to Witty's Lagoon. We have loved every minute of being on the trails and sharing information with others.

What is your favourite volunteer memory or experience?

There are so many great experiences that we have had while volunteering. A great benefit is the wonderful education opportunities provided to volunteers. We gained so much knowledge and appreciation for the cultural and natural history.

We have seen so much wildlife in the Regional Parks from orcas, seals, bears and a multitude of birds. One summer evening just around sunset at Witty's Lagoon we were coming by Sitting Lady Falls and we could hear the call of an owl and then a baby owl. It turned out to be three baby owlets sitting on a branch just over Bilston Creek. The owlets were watching us as much as we were watching them. One even flew closer to us as we stood quietly enjoying the experience.

What do you most enjoy about volunteering with Regional Parks?

No matter what the weather we love getting out to Witty's Lagoon. There is always something new to see and enjoy. There is so much natural and cultural diversity with the ocean meeting the forest and Bilston Creek supplying the fresh water for all the flora and fauna. We have brought our grandchildren to the Regional Parks to share our deep love of our parks. It is so heart-warming to see so many people getting out in nature especially since COVID-19. Nature is healing. It clears your head and fills your soul.



Staff Profile

Justin George, Mechanic since August 2020



What do you enjoy about working at Regional Parks?

I enjoy being able to keep the vehicles and equipment used by the parks team in good working order. This helps them to keep our parks and facilities in awesome condition for everyone to use. I also enjoy that I am able to get out into the outdoors for onsite repairs when the occasions arise.

Tell us a bit about yourself

I grew up on the Saanich Peninsula and have been using all of our local parks and beaches since I was old enough to get outside. I enjoy mountain biking, hiking and anything that gets me out in the woods. I completed an apprenticeship as a commercial transport mechanic and have a red seal for the trade. I now have a family and enjoy taking the kids out to explore the awesome surroundings that make up the island we call home. I look forward to continuing to explore the parks and trails across the island and see where they take me.

Volunteer & Park Updates



This winter has brought blustering winds and snow to Regional Parks. Because of the severe winds, there are many fallen trees and debris in parks and on trails. CRD staff are working on getting to all of these areas but in some remote areas it may take longer.

The south section of Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park is officially open. If you climb to the top of Mount Braden or scramble up Sugarloaf, you will see green hills stretching in every direction. The same park connectivity that benefits far-roaming wildlife allows hikers, cyclists and equestrians the opportunity to access other protected areas from the south section.



Photo Credit: Christian J. Stewart

All photos in this newsletter are supplied from the CRD Image Bank unless otherwise noted.