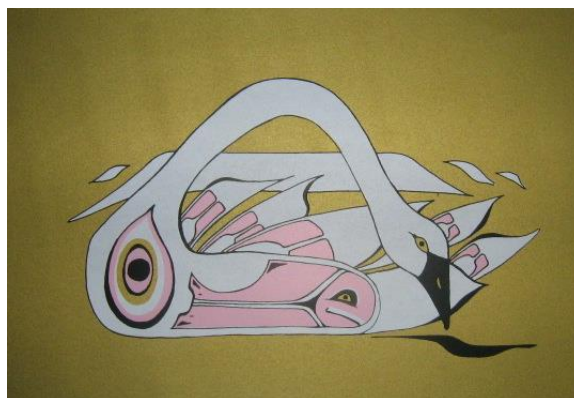


Comox Valley Naturalists Society

November 2020 Newsletter



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President's Corner

With Thanks, from Jim and Annette

By *Jim Boulter*

In this issue, our immediate past president reflects on his involvement with CVN.

In 2014, a year after moving to the Valley after retirement, I saw an ad in the paper for one of Loys's public walks in Vanier Nature Park, which features a grove of Garry Oaks. As a kid, and the youngest in my family, Mom often took me to Beacon Hill Park to play on the swings when my siblings were in school. I was fascinated with the oaks that overlooked the playground and sensed something special about them. During the course of my childhood and teens they prompted my exploration of nature, and continue to do so.

We met by the arena on Vanier Road, maybe 15 people or so, with Loys and Alison leading the walk. I enjoyed the walk, but was shocked by the condition the oaks were in; this was not Beacon Hill Park. Later we took in a general meeting, and Loys urged us to sign up, which we did. The next year rolled around and we joined the planning committee for the 2016 BC Nature Conference and AGM. This could not have been a better training ground for experiencing the logistics and planning required for a large and successful event, and preparing

for a much longer personal commitment. It was also a deep dive into the philosophy, conservation and environmental goals of BC Nature, and our own Society.

Since the spring of 2016 I have been the face of CVN, but I am just one of many who were working towards our goals. The successes we had and those to come will depend on the willingness of members to volunteer with the planning and performance of our activities, to carry on as environmental stewards, as CVN has since its beginnings in 1966.

I stepped down from the office and the Board in September this year, and it was hard to do. We have met so many wonderful, knowledgeable and friendly people through the Society that we will be forever glad that I accepted Loys' invitation 6 years ago. Annette and I have gained much personal satisfaction and have a larger skill-set from our involvement in helping to organize many successful activities. I have often said that I am a blank page when it comes to knowing anything about conservation, but Annette and I have learned a lot along the way.

All things have their season, however, and I felt that the time was right to pass the reins along to others. We have moved into the virtual world for the foreseeable future, with in-person meetings, Society-sponsored walks, day trips and conferences unlikely anytime soon, reducing the work-load of the position. The next President will be able to leisurely craft her/his own initiatives and activities without jumping directly into the fray.

Annette and I have immense gratitude to all the people who generously gave their support, ideas, encouragement and friendship to us. They are too many to name but Isabella, Sharon, Frank, Steph, Helen, Maris and Murray have to be mentioned and thanked for their constant support and guidance. And CVN's own true force of nature Loys, without whom I would have been truly lost. It was an honor to serve in this role. We give each of the 250 members a virtual hug, and thank you

for the privilege of serving such a dynamic and dedicated Society.

Here's to seeing everyone in person at the Filberg next year once we can expand our bubbles back out.



CVN Board Report

By David Innes

To say that 2020 has been an unusual year is an understatement. In addition to monthly meetings with presentations, CVN activities support several groups including Botany, Birders, Shoreline, Wetland Restoration, Weekend Walks, NatureKids and Conservation. Given the restrictions on in-person meetings, the monthly meetings shifted to webinar presentations starting in March and are continuing as webinars during fall 2020 and winter 2021. Other CVN outdoor activities including weekend walks and field trips have been put on hold. All of these activities that rely on in-person contact represent the core of CVN and present many challenges for our society to survive and grow despite the current Covid-19 restrictions. At the very least we have to maintain communication among our membership through the webinars, direct information emails to members, Facebook posts, website posts and our Newsletter. Individual CVN Groups will also have to rely on internet technology to maintain connections and communications. The consensus is that if all goes well, industrial production of the recent progress on vaccines should enable CVN to resume in-

person activities next fall (about 12 months from now). That is something to look forward to and it gives us the opportunity to plan activities and events.

In a recent survey to develop a 5-year plan, our members commented on several of the strengths that define CVN. These strengths include the breadth and diversity of the members' knowledge of the natural world, a long history of advocacy, stewardship, conservation and education, and interesting speakers and interpretive walks. There was also positive feedback for the volunteer opportunities such as assisting with habitat restoration and invasive plant removal. Even with our successes, there is always room for improvement. Only a limited number of people are willing or able to step into leadership positions. Furthermore, a major problem is attracting younger members and families, especially including young members in leadership roles. There is also a need to make connections with our local First Nations and work with them on projects. It was also viewed that CVN was often operating in a reactive rather than proactive manner with respect to environmental issues.

Suggestions for the future included increased sharing of the leadership responsibilities. There were several recommendations for protection of natural areas from increased development in the Comox Valley. For example, interacting with Municipalities/planning departments on issues of habitat loss, need for green spaces and awareness of climate change issues. Broad threats to nature generally include: continued development that seriously damages natural areas and disrupts natural processes, continued large-scale logging and human activity in our watershed, overharvesting of marine fish and marine pollution, climate change and the lack of connectivity to and understanding of nature, natural processes and the importance of ecosystem balance as a critical factor in human health. All of which require increased education of the public. It was noted that current CVN members have a vast store of knowledge about the natural environment and the Comox Valley itself that needs to be passed on to the younger generations. Therefore, if we don't engage with the younger generations, CVN will fail to have a future and runs the risk of stagnation.

Future opportunities include working with municipalities on park planning and natural spaces that could extend CVN's impact and influence. Other areas of influence include Kus Kus Sum support (habitat restoration), promoting awareness of Mack Laing, the Trust Agreement, and lending support for meeting the Conditions of the Trust - to MLHS and the Town of

Comox. CVN volunteers could help enhance the valley's natural spaces by working with local high school nature clubs as a source of volunteers. CVN could also be part of the Official Community Plan process for Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland, and also provide a review of the Regional Growth Strategy. All of these opportunities for comments and consultations related to the future impacts of development on natural areas should include younger member volunteers.

The response of CVN to the Covid-19 situation, preventing in-person meetings and activities, requires continued regular correspondence with members that includes the monthly webinar presentations and direct emails. Communication could also be enhanced with a summary of the monthly board meetings and perhaps a general webinar to bring members together to discuss important issues. CVN Groups should be encouraged and supported to also initiate online meetings among group members to maintain regular communication. CVN board members have discussed setting up training sessions for use of internet video communication platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger and Google Meet. Members could also suggest and participate in remote learning opportunities that may be available as courses or webinars. Perhaps members could give short informal presentations to generate discussion on particular topics. This could involve members within each CVN group or interested people among the general membership. For example, someone might be interested in showing some images (scenery, plants, animals) from a walk on the beach or in the forest. Or perhaps a member has learned to identify local mosses, plants, marine life or seabirds and can pass on the knowledge. Several members are contributing species observations to iNaturalist as a record that includes georeferenced images. Members are encouraged to participate in iNaturalist and other online databases referencing the flora and fauna of BC (ebird, eflora etc.). Randal has been a major contributor to iNaturalist for the Shoreline Group (see: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/comox-valley-shoreline-life>). Another possibility is to share an interesting article (webpage, video or podcast) on various topics (general nature, species diversity, habitat diversity, conservation, book reviews, nature news etc.) then set up an internet video discussion. Keep it informal with a brief introduction devoting most of the time for discussion with the emphasis on participation through questions and comments. Members could also volunteer to give brief slide shows of nature trips to interesting places locally or other parts of the world.

Innisfree Farm & Botanic Garden

Saturday Cafe & Market (summer)

Nature Retreats

Herbal Medicine Classes and

Lectures



3636 Trent Road www.innisfreefarm.ca 250-336-8767

There were some suggestions for finding ways to resurrect group outings with increased focus on smaller groups (birds, shoreline etc.), recognizing that working in smaller groups might be the norm for a while. However, given the current critical situation, even small groups of people socially distanced outdoors are being discouraged. Currently, the CVN insurance does not cover any Covid-19 related liabilities. Thus, we will be relying on the various forms of electronic communication outlined above for the near future. However, individuals are encouraged to spend time outdoors in nature alone or with a few people considered to be in the same "bubble". These excursions can be used to report on nature observations to other CVN members using the methods outlined above.

BC Nature affiliation has been acknowledged as a larger voice representing us and Nature to the public and the government. BCN has been viewed as a much needed, necessary force for the environment by providing valuable input to all levels of government on legislation. It could be very damaging if individual clubs began pulling out from their affiliation with BCN. It is the collective voice for naturalists and sometimes government does listen. Affiliation with BC Nature is important, even if just for the liability insurance. However, the value of the affiliation with CVN has been questioned since a large fraction of our dues goes to BCN. Pender Island Naturalists have recently withdrawn from BCN. CVN should set up a discussion of the advantages of affiliation with BCN given the recent resignation of John Neville, the dedicated Vancouver Island BCN representative and former president. It may be time to set up "Vancouver Island Nature" as a separate federation giving voice to the interests of naturalists on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Thanks to all members who participated in the survey and to past president Jim Boulter who organized the survey and provided the summary of responses that were

used to prepare this summary. The CVN Board is also interested in any other comments and suggestions for addressing some of the issue outlined in this summary. The Board plans to meet in person (when safe to do so) to consider what actions should be pursued in light of the survey results. Thanks to all members for their continuing support.



Is Climate Change Affecting the Timing of Bird Migration in Comox Valley?

By Art Martell

There are many reports of a variety of species of birds showing earlier migration arrival dates in response to climate change but few studies with long-term data sets and few studies in western North America. A century ago recording bird phenology, such as first arrival dates of migrant birds, was popular with many birders. Theed Pearse, a local amateur ornithologist, kept careful records of bird phenology in the Comox Valley from 1920 through 1958. This documentation allowed comparison with first arrival dates today.

I compared the first arrival dates for 37 species with sufficient records from 1920–1958 with those from current eBird records from 2011–2020 (see table). The median first arrival date was advanced in 2011–2020 compared to 1920–1958 in 31 of the 37 species examined, 22 of which were significant. No species showed a significantly delayed first arrival date. The advance in first arrival date was a median of 7.5 days for all species and 12.2 days for species with a significant advance. There was no significant difference in median first arrival date related to migration distance. A recent international study with continuous observation coverage throughout the entire season over multiple years reported an average advancement of one week over 57 years

(1959–2015) for 195 species across continents. The advance in first arrival dates observed in the Comox Valley (a median of 7.5 days for all species) is consistent with that study.

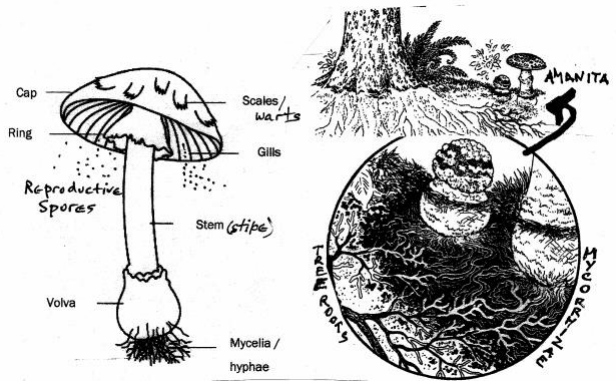
The only local, long-term weather records are from Comox Airport which began observing spring records in 1945. Spring (March–May) mean daily temperatures (mean, mean max, mean min) were 8.2, 12.8, and 3.6 °C (respectively) in 1945–1958 and 9.7, 13.6, and 5.8 °C (respectively) in 2011–2020. There was no significant difference in mean daily or mean daily maximum temperatures but mean daily minimum temperature was significantly warmer in 2011–2020. This is consistent with other observations in coastal southwestern British Columbia.

First arrival dates may be biased but are often all that are available. As well, eBird data have several challenges including species bias, variation in effort, and variation in observer skill. Therefore, the results should be used cautiously. The advance in first arrival dates observed in the Comox Valley may be in response to the increase in spring temperatures related to climate change but certainty would require continuous observation throughout the migration period over multiple years.

The table below lists the median first arrival dates of migratory birds in the Comox Valley in 1920–1958 and 2011–2020 (number of records in parentheses), the difference in arrival dates between the two periods (in days), and the significance (*) of those differences.

Species	1920–1958	2011–2020	Days
Band-tailed Pigeon	10 Apr (31)	21 Mar (8)	-19.5*
Common Nighthawk	6 Jun (26)	7 Jun (9)	1.0
Black Swift	27 May (23)	19 May (9)	-8.0*
Vaux's Swift	13 May (21)	29 Apr (8)	-14.0*
Rufous Hummingbird	10 Apr (32)	17 Mar (9)	-24.5*
Whimbrel	2 May (19)	1 May (8)	-1.0
Least Sandpiper	27 Apr (19)	23 Apr (10)	-4.0*
Western Sandpiper	27 Apr (13)	22 Apr (8)	-4.5*
Dowitcher sp.	2 May (16)	1 May (10)	-0.5
Greater Yellowlegs	10 Apr (26)	23 Mar (10)	-18.0*
Turkey Vulture	25 Mar (6)	3 Mar (8)	-23.0*
Osprey	22 Apr (21)	1 May (7)	9.0
American Kestrel	10 Apr (26)	13 Apr (10)	-3.0
Olive-sided Flycatcher	22 May (8)	6 May (10)	-15.5*
Western Wood-Pewee	21 May (10)	20 May (8)	-1.0

Species	1920–1958	2011–2020	Days
Willow Flycatcher	20 May (6)	20 May (6)	0.5
Pacific Slope Flycatcher	27 Apr (25)	24 Apr (9)	-3.0
Cassin's Vireo	11 Apr (24)	19 Apr (9)	8.0
Warbling Vireo	14 May (27)	1 May (10)	-13.0*
Tree Swallow	3 Apr (27)	27 Mar (8)	-7.5
Violet-green Swallow	21 Mar (33)	13 Mar (10)	-7.5*
N. Rough-winged Swallow	22 Apr (22)	6 Apr (8)	-15.0*
Purple Martin	23 Apr (8)	13 Apr (7)	-10.0*
Barn Swallow	2 May (31)	20 Apr (10)	-11.5*
House Wren	24 Apr (24)	27 Apr (8)	3.0
Swainson's Thrush	16 May (31)	11 May (10)	-5.0*
Cedar Waxwing	26 May (12)	15 May (10)	-11.0*
Chipping Sparrow	20 Apr (33)	16 Apr (10)	-4.0
Orange-crowned Warbler	10 Apr (32)	31 Mar (9)	-10.0*
MacGillivray's Warbler	5 May (17)	4 May (10)	-0.5
Common Yellowthroat	28 Apr (16)	10 Apr (9)	-17.5*
Yellow Warbler	8 May (25)	27 Apr (9)	-11.0*
Yellow-rumped Warbler	17 Mar (34)	14 Mar (9)	-3.0
Townsend's Warbler	26 Apr (16)	15 Apr (7)	-11.5*
Wilson's Warbler	30 Apr (16)	2 May (10)	1.5
Western Tanager	14 May (28)	1 May (9)	-13.0*
Black-headed Grosbeak	31 May (10)	6 May (10)	-25.0*



(1) *Amanita* morphology.

First, the most commonly observed *Amanita muscaria* (fly agaric, photo 2) with its bright red cap and white warts. There is not total agreement on the varieties we have in the Pacific Northwest including *A. muscaria* var. *flavivolvatus* and *A. muscaria* var. *alba* (see MatchMaker for details).



(2) *Amanita muscaria*.

Photo: Alison Maingon

Amanitas

Amongst the most stunning, but toxic fungi

By Alison Maingon

You can see the photos that are referenced here but do not appear here, and view all the photos at a larger size, on the CVN website at <https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/amanitas-alisons-fungi-notes-part-2/>.

In general, most species in the *Amanita* genus are easily recognizable through the following features (see illustration 1): a cap with “warts” which are the remnants of the universal veil that encased the embryonic fruiting body; at the base a distinct volva out of which the fruiting body grew, a ring around the upper part of the stem/stipe, again part of the universal veil; and white spores.

Common to our area is also a brown species with white warts, *Amanita pantherina* (photo 3), as well as two with yellow caps and white warts – *Amanita aprica* and *Amanita gemmata* (photo 4). The former tends to appear in the spring, the latter in the fall. There is a broad colour range from bright to dull, apricot shades to pale lemon (photos 5 & 6). To add to the confusion, very young *A. muscaria* can be quite yellow in appearance.

Two white amanitas in our area are:

- *Amanita silvicola* (photo 7), which has a short stubby stipe emerging from a round volva and is covered with lots of cottony tissue;

- *Amanita smithiana*, which by contrast has a long stipe, emerging from a bulbous base that tapers towards the “root” end (photos 8 & 9). Hence the latter might be mistaken for *Tricholoma magnivelare* (pine mushroom, photo 10) which of course has no warts, and is recognizable by its sweet cinnamon smell. As always, PICKER BEWARE.

(8) *Amanita smithiana*.

Photo: Alison Maingon

(10) *Tricholoma magnivelare*.

Photo: Alison Maingon

This September, Kate and Gary found an early stage *Amanita pachycolea* (western grisette) on a path in their woods (photo 11). We located a mature example on the trail to McKenzie Lake in the Park. The cap is striate, often without warts, and the stipe is quite slender, emerging from a volva that is constricted half way up (photos 12 & 13).

A final word on the two most prominent **amanitas with lethal amatoxins** (the photos here are scanned from N.

Siegel and C. Schwarz, *Mushrooms of the Redwood Coast*, 2016, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley):

- *Amanita ocreata* (western destroying angel), spring fruiting, with hardwoods (including various oak species) in California; not to my knowledge this far north (photo 14).
- *Amanita phalloides* (death cap), fruiting possible year round, with hardwoods (photo 15). It was introduced from Europe on the roots of the cork oak, and has become naturalized in California. It has spread north mostly through the movement of nursery ornamentals, and has reached Victoria and south Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island (?), but has not been observed in the Comox Valley.

(14) *Amanita ocreata*.

Photo: Siegel & Schwarz

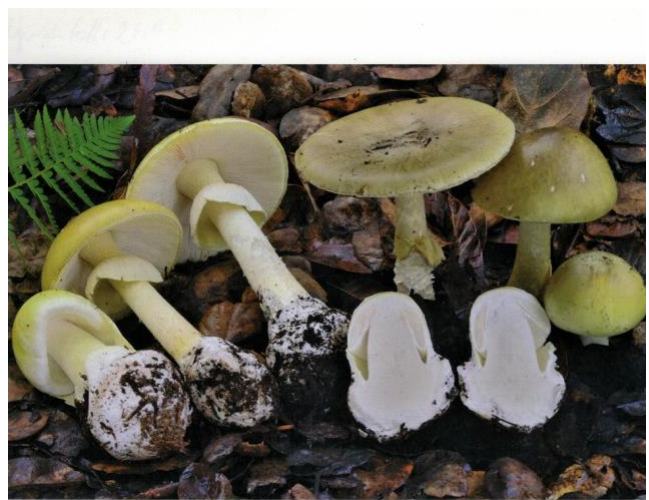
(15) *Amanita phalloides*.

Photo: Siegel & Schwarz

Courtenay River Airpark Report, Fall 2020

By Frank Hovenden

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic we are headed for our best year ever in terms of volunteer hours spent working in the Airpark. I had hoped to see more field work done by the City of Courtenay this year. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the City did very little hiring of seasonal personnel for their Parks department. Into this void stepped two “alpha” volunteers, in the persons of Karen Cummins and Jack Bindernagel. A huge debt of gratitude is owed to both of them. Much of our work this year was removing Himalayan blackberry by the roots. This is tough manual shovel work and these two heroes persevered so that our control areas have never looked better.



Jack B. showing the massive root on a Himalayan blackberry.
Photo: Frank Hovenden

Removing invasive plants is only one step in the restoration process. We are continuing to introduce native plants. This fall we are concentrating on the bulbs such as camas, wild onions and harvest brodiaea. The planting sites were prepared by being solarized during the hot summer months. Black plastic poly was laid over

the site to kill the existing sod which can out-compete our native forbs. Our new plots are extensions from last year’s plots. It is our plan to keep extending the existing plots each year.

We have locally sourced our common camas from a remnant of one of the original prairies in the Comox Valley. The owners of the property care for the camas by not plowing the land and limiting the grazing done on the field. We dug up 150 common camas bulbs in late July and planted them in the Airpark in late September. In addition we received 100 great camas bulbs from plant rescuer Louise Goulet of Victoria.



Murray Little and Karen Cummins planting camas bulbs.
Photo: Frank Hovenden

In the spring report I touched on our introduced rabbit problem. The rabbits are still in the Airpark, but they seem to be less problematic during the summer months. I suspect it is because of the larger food source available to them. This results in them not targeting our plantings to the same degree as in the winter months. We have deliberately left some of our planting plots unprotected by fencing to act as control plots to compare with our fenced plots.

The CVN sign at the first viewing stand in the Airpark is being replaced. It has lasted seven years and is showing its age. Lisa Zervakis who is a designer and who works for the City of Courtenay is helping out with this. It should be finished in the next month.

Purple Loosestrife and Others...

Loose in our estuary

By Karen Cummins

Jocie Brooks posted some lovely photos this summer of beautiful native plants like Henderson's checkermallow (*Sidalcea hendersonii*) found in wetlands like our estuary. I hiked the estuary in July with Brian H. and Jason G. from Sellentin's Habitat Restoration (SHR), on the lookout for purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudocorus*), plants that shouldn't be there. Both of these plants make themselves right at home in moist habitats such as ditches, ponds and shorelines with such speed and ease that they can easily displace the beautiful and ecologically functional plants like Henderson's checkermallow as well as cattails, sedges and rushes used for food, shelter and nesting material by local wildlife. Both plants can make such dense mats that water movement can be changed and open water eliminated.

Hiking across the estuary sounds easy but involves navigating many deep, slippery channels hidden by vegetation while packing removal tools and heavy sacks of purple loosestrife and yellow flag iris remains. This is after the effort of removing the roots. Thank you Brian and Jason for continuing to monitor and remove these invaders as part of CVN's Wetland group contract with the CVRD!



Brian (left) and Jason digging out purple loosestrife (purple flower near bag) with reed canary grass in the background.

Photo: Karen Cummins

SHR has been working with our group on removing invasive plants from wetland areas since 2001. In a 2003 report on the work in the estuary, Ernie Sellentin raised the issue of another invader, reed canary grass (*Phalaris*

arundinacea). This grass has gone from being non-existent in the eastern half of the estuary in 1974 to being a dominant grass there. On the western side of the estuary where the RCG established prior to 1974 it has formed a huge clonal swath where nothing else grows. While there has been a lot of attention paid over the years in many jurisdictions to the showy and toxic invaders such as yellow flag iris and purple loosestrife, the green and leafy RCG, that is still touted in some areas as excellent for forage and erosion control, has slid quietly under the radar and begun taking over wetland areas from ditches to estuaries.

In late October, I was happy to participate in two mornings out with other Project Watershed volunteers to first cut willows and then to plant them in Mallard Creek just across the dyke road from the estuary. This project was initiated to restore open water and flow to just one area of the creek where there is neither open water nor water flow due to RCG. Last year huge mats of RCG were removed from the creek, and willows planted on the new "shore" to create shade for both the creek and to shade out remaining RCG over time. It is a very worthwhile project that should give us more information about how to restore other areas invaded by RCG. However, the take home message may be that we ignore this "elephant in the room" at the peril of so many species who would like to call these natural areas home.

I was reminded of the importance of this as my fellow steward, Barbara N. and I worked recently at Little River Nature Park, first cutting and marking new clumps of RCG and then walking the park to monitor for the appearance of any new thugs. Vigilance and early response to eradicate those that would take over is paid for many times over.

More information on RCG below at:

https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/wetland_2003-opt.pdf

<https://projectwatershed.ca/2020/04/30/project-watershed-continues-restoration-work-along-mallard-creek/>

<https://projectwatershed.ca/2019/07/19/project-watershed-is-battling-reed-canary-grass/>

CVN Presentations in 2020

By David Innes

Comox Valley Nature presentations for 2020 were successful as in past years despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic that continues to prevent in-person meetings.

We started our January meeting at the Filberg Centre with a presentation by **Dorrie Woodward** and **Barbara**

Mills from the Association for Denman Island Marine Stewards (ADIMS). In their presentation, “**Advocating for the Baynes Sound marine ecosystem one step at a time**”, they outlined the efforts of ADIMS to advocate for, and protect the vital marine ecosystem surrounding Denman Island. Baynes Sound has a very productive marine ecosystem with the annual spring herring spawn as one major component. However, many years of a very intensive aquaculture industry focused primarily on oyster cultivation continues to have a negative impact with much netting and plastic debris washing onto the shores and the sensitive intertidal areas. Every year ADIMS organizes a beach cleanup to sort and recycle the many tons of plastics. More information and videos are available at <https://adims.ca/>.

The February meeting, also at the Filberg Centre, was the Annual General Meeting with **presentations by CVN Groups**. The Shoreline Group led by paleobotanist Randal Mindell, have monthly field trips to explore the intertidal zone during the day as well as at night. The field trips highlight the geology, seaweeds, invertebrates and the occasional intertidal fish found in the local area. The presentation summarized the observations from some of these field trips during 2019 with observation data uploaded to iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/comox-valley-shoreline-life>).

The Birders Group have a monthly meeting as well as informal outings for CVN members. This is a great way to learn bird identification, meet people, and explore new locales within the Comox Valley. There are three Bird Counts conducted by CVN: annual Spring count, annual Christmas count, and weekly Trumpeter Swan counts in winter. Kelly Kline (Birders Group leader) presented a summary of the 2019 Christmas bird count.

The third presentation at the AGM was by former CVN Secretary Gabriel Bau Baiges (Professional Engineer with the CVRD) who presented an update of the Comox Strathcona Waste Management Service Capital projects including a new compost facility and improvements to the condition of our landfills. The overview included projects on protecting our environment through the management of our garbage, the closure of landfills and opening of new recycling programs.

In March, the Covid-19 pandemic prevented our normal monthly meeting. We therefore began to organize presentations as webinars for live online viewing with the ability for viewers to ask questions following the presentation. We owe much thanks to Loys Maingon who was able to organize webinars using the GoToMeeting platform supported by the Canadian

Society of Environmental Biologists (CSEB). These webinars are also recorded and can be viewed at: <https://cseb-scbe.org/resources/cseb-webinar-archives/>.

Our first webinar was by **Aaron Purdy** from the Ocean Wise Research Institute (<https://research.ocean.org/>) entitled “**The Whales in Our Waters: Conservation Through Citizen Science**”. Aaron discussed BC's common cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises), the threats they face, and how Ocean Wise helps to mitigate these threats through research and conservation efforts. He also described how you can become a citizen scientist by acting as an observer for the BC Cetacean Sightings Network while out on your next coastal adventure.

In May, CVN hosted a webinar “**Discovery with Citizen Science – the BC Parks iNaturalist Project**” by **Dr. John Reynolds** from Simon Fraser University who is also the Chair of COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). Citizen science projects are changing the way we document biodiversity, leading to discoveries that can have direct implications for how we protect and enhance wild nature. Dr. Reynolds outlined how the BC Parks iNaturalist project provides an example of harnessing the enthusiasm of volunteers to photograph plants and animals through the global iNaturalist platform. CVN is exploring the ways that CVN members can contribute to iNaturalist projects. For example, as mentioned earlier, Randal Mindell has made extensive use of iNaturalist to document the field observations of the Shoreline Group field trips. In addition to his interest in marine plants and animals, Randal has also made contributions based on his observations of fungi, mosses and lichens in the Comox Valley. Thus, iNaturalist offers CVN members an organized database for viewing and contributing to a better understanding of the diversity and distribution of many different species in the Comox Valley.

After the summer break, September saw the resumption of CVN meetings with presentations. Given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the requirements by BC Health to limit in-person contact, CVN has continued with webinar presentations. We are fortunate to be able to line up a series of webinar presenters for 2020 – 2021.

Dan Strickland gave the September webinar entitled “**2020 Update on Paradise Meadows Canada Jay Research**”. Dan was the Chief Park Naturalist of Algonquin Provincial Park. As a side project he has carried out a behavioural study of colour-banded Canada Jays, now in its 58th year and one of the longest-running studies of its kind in the world. Now, in retirement, he

has expanded the scope of his Canada jay studies to include research into the race found in the coastal mountains of BC and the northwestern U.S. The Canada Jay has three recognizable races that all meet in British Columbia. The one in the mountains of Vancouver Island and the mainland coast is the most distinct, and for 60 years was even considered to be a distinct species called the Oregon Jay. Dan began a study of a population of these jays at Paradise Meadows in 2016 and in the last four years has learned that they are even more distinct than was realized, not only in appearance but also in their social organization and nesting. He is always interested in sightings of the individual birds with unique colour-coded leg bands. See <https://strathconapark.org/programs/> for more information.

Jackie Hildering, who is the Communications Director for the Marine Education & Research Society - MERS (<https://mersociety.org/>), gave the October presentation, “**The Return of Giants!**” about the local humpback whale populations and the dangers facing the whales. Jackie and MERS are focused on educating the boating public to avoid collisions with whales and entanglement with ropes that can be fatal. Jackie is also a renowned wildlife photographer and it is worth checking out her webpage (<https://themarinedetective.com/>) for images, videos and other information on coastal BC marine wildlife.

The final presentation for 2020 was by **Natalie Mahara** entitled “**Establishing a baseline of microplastics in marine food webs: a case study in Baynes Sound, B.C.**”. Thus, Natalie’s presentation provides a connection with the January presentation showing the large amount of plastic debris from industrial aquaculture activities that impacts the sensitive Baynes Sound ecosystem. Plastic debris can break down into microplastics that can then enter marine food webs. The impact of microplastics on marine food webs is unknown, showing that studies such as Natalie’s are particularly important.

In summary, the 2020 CVN presentation series was able to successfully make the transition to webinars. However, we do miss the meetings at the Filberg Centre with the opportunity for meeting and chatting as a group. Hopefully, we can return soon!

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Birders Group Activities

By Kelly Kline

Weekly Bird Walks

Since March, the COVID-19 protocol has prevented us from having weekly bird walks. However, individual birders are still going out and sharing sightings on social media. I have brokered an exchange of email addresses for those who wish to connect to other birders.

Evening Meetings

Risks of COVID-19 have precluded any in-person meetings since March. We will very likely start Zoom meetings in the near future. The Board has identified CVN members who will help us get started with this.

Sale of Bird Books

The Birders Group received a gift of about 190 bird books from the estate of Thomas Crawford, an avid birder in the Comox area. A two-day book sale was held in September, widely advertised online. This was followed more recently by direct sales to members of the group. Many beautiful books were purchased at very low prices. Eight books were donated to MARS and the remaining 26 books were donated to North Island Wildlife Recovery Association. Money raised from the sale totals \$278, which will be used to fund room rentals for Birders Group meetings when these resume.

eDNA Sampling

Six members of the Birders Group are doing eDNA sampling to assist Bettina Thalinger, PhD Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Biodiversity Genomics, University of Guelph. eDNA is DNA that has fallen off the source animal and is floating freely in the environment.

Weekly sampling is being done at the Courtenay Airpark Lagoon from August to the end of November. Using

sterile handling techniques, a two-litre water sample from the lagoon is forced through a special filter. DNA is retained by the filter, and these samples will be sent to Dr. Thalinger for analysis.

The bird species detected in the sample will be compared to the eBird reports for the Airpark to see if the sampling method is a reliable substitute for visual identification. If it is, then this sampling method could be used in remote areas not often visited by birders.

Partnership with MARS

A partnership with the Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society (MARS) was begun last year. MARS directors requested that the Birders Group provide enhancements to the bird displays in the visitor center.

The first project was a presentation last Fall by Art Martell about Trumpeter Swans and the swan count being done in the Comox Valley.

The second project was to be a photo essay by Bruce Moffat on the raising of a baby Common Loon by its parents from egg hatch to fledge. This was scheduled for April 2020 but has been postponed until the COVID-19 conditions are favorable.

The third project is to assist with selection and location of bird-friendly plantings for the wetland being built at the MARS property. The plant expertise is being provided by Royann Petrel. To provide a baseline for gauging the success of this project, Linda Graf and Gordon Stewart are doing weekly bird counts at the MARS property. These will be compared with future bird counts to evaluate the effectiveness of the plantings.

Christmas Bird Counts

Due to COVID-19, the counts this year cannot be sanctioned by CVN as our liability insurance does not protect against this risk. Volunteers will be participating as individuals. The current plans are as follows:

- Comox CBC: Dec. 20, Krista Kaptein organizing. There will be no post-count potluck.
- Deep Bay CBC: Dec 14, Kelly Kline organizing.
- Campbell River CBC: Dec. 27 with Jan. 3 as bad-weather alternative, Kimberley Prystupa organizing and looking for participants from Comox Valley (liliansparrow@gmail.com).
- Little River Ferry CBC: No information yet.

Charles Brandt

We were saddened to learn of the death of Father Charles Brandt in October at the age of 97. A hermit-

priest, he made significant contributions to the conservation of nature in the Comox Valley. Read more about his life here:

<https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/valley-environmentalist-and-catholic-priest-hermit-father-charles-brandt-passes-away/>.

Charles was a long-time member and friend of Comox Valley Nature, frequently contributing his photographs to this newsletter. To honour his memory, we include two of his photos here.



Swainson's Thrush on elderberry.

Photo: Charles Brandt



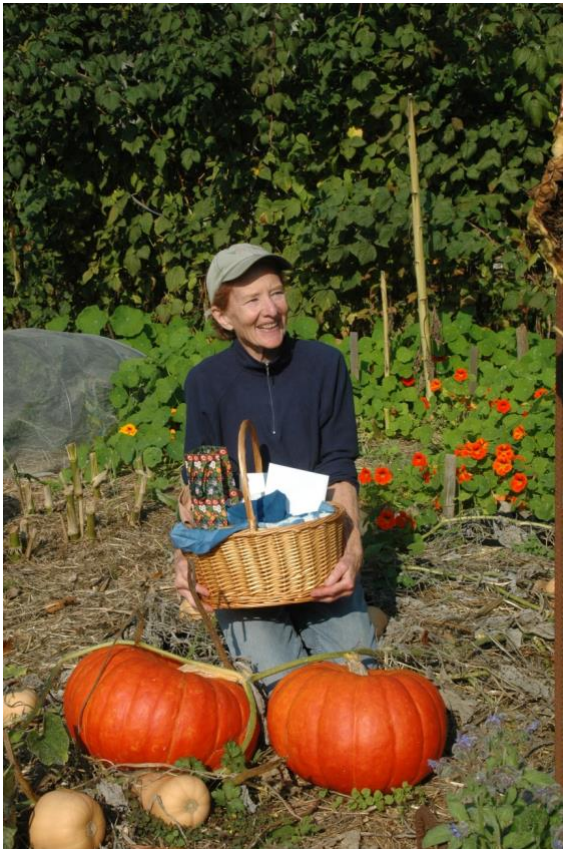
Varied Thrush.

Photo: Charles Brandt

Tree of the Year

2020 Winner

In September, the TOTY Committee announced that the winning tree this year is **a yellow cedar in Royston** nominated by Judy Walker. See the announcement at <https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/2020-cvn-tree-of-the-year-winner-announced>.



Judy with her TOTY prize basket in her garden.

Photo: Karen Cummins

Here is Judy's response to this win:

Thank you so much for the opportunity to nominate a special tree, and then to have it win for 2020! The award brings attention to trees that many people might pass by every day, but not really think about its life and the stories it knows. It is so valuable to offer these insights, and I am a firm believer that knowledge and awareness are key to the protection of our tree citizens.

The addition of the tour information for all the nominated trees is a wonderful way to encourage all of us to explore our surroundings.

And thank you for the very thoughtful gift basket- totally unexpected but quite a treat... the Alter Eco burnt caramel chocolate did not last the day!

All the best for future Tree of the Year Awards.

Sincerely,

Judy Walker

2021 Contest

By Karen Cummins

The Tree of the Year Committee is currently gearing up for 2021 nominations that will begin January 15 and close April 1. We will be opening up the nominations to all residents of the Comox Valley for any native or non-native tree of merit within the Comox Valley. Get thinking about and looking for worthy trees and their stories!

Time to Renew

By Dianna Colnett

It's now time to renew your CVN membership for 2021. Our annual (January to December) membership fee is only \$30 per household, which includes up to two adults and all children under 19 years of age. Your CVN membership includes membership in BC Nature, a subscription to the quarterly BC Nature magazine, CVN Newsletter, and liability insurance coverage when participating in Society activities.

To renew, please complete a membership form, sign the waiver, and pay the fee. Be sure to indicate on the membership form that you give permission to receive CVN communications by email (we need this each year).

A PDF version of the membership form, including waiver, can be downloaded from our website at <https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/membership-or-donation/>.

Here are the options for how to submit your forms and pay:

- Mail your completed forms with a cheque to Comox Valley Nature, P.O. Box 3222, Courtenay, BC, V9N 5N4
- Email your scanned PDF forms to cvnmembership@gmail.com and pay online using PayPal or an e-transfer to treasurercvns@gmail.com.
- Mail your completed form and pay online.

Comox Valley Nature also welcomes your donation to the annual bursary for a graduating high school student or to the CVN interest group of your choice.

We need to receive your form, waiver, and payment before March 31, 2021 at the latest if you want to remain a member.

If you have any questions about your membership, or will not be renewing, please send an email to cvnsmembership@gmail.com.

Upcoming CVNS Activities

General Instructions for Field Trips

- All field trips are club events and reserved for members only, unless otherwise stated. Typically, one walk each month is open to the public.
- Meet either at the carpooling location or the trailhead 10 minutes before the specified time, unless otherwise announced. Carpooling locations are usually the former Thrifty's location in downtown Courtenay or the Courtenay Country Market on Highway 19A north of the city.
- Participants are responsible for their own safety.
- Walks typically take at least 2 hours.
- Wear clothing and footwear suitable for the conditions.
- Bring water and a snack (or lunch for longer trips).
- No dogs please.

Schedule

This information reflects planning as of our publishing date and is subject to change. For general club activities, watch for the latest information and additional details in the President's weekly announcements and on the website.

To be notified of the activities of a special interest group, contact the Group Leader and ask to be added to the group's contact list.

Following public health guidelines, all CVN in-person group activities have been cancelled until further notice.

Reminder for Field Trip Leaders

All field trip participants who are not CVNS members must sign our Informed Consent and Assumption of Risk Agreement before participating.

About the Society

Website

<http://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca>

General Email Address

coordinator@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca

Mailing Address

Comox Valley Naturalists Society
Box 3222
Courtenay BC, V9N 5N4

Board of Directors

President: [vacant]

(coordinator@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca)

Vice-President: David Innes

Secretary: Linda Graf (cvnsecretary@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Isabella Erni (TreasurerCVNS@gmail.com)

BC Nature Director: Sharon Niscak

Project Director: Loys Maingon

Wetlands Restoration Director: Karen Cummins

Group Leaders and Other Volunteers

Membership Secretary: Dianna Colnett

(cvnsmembership@gmail.com)

Birding: Kelly Kline (cvnbirds@gmail.com)

Botany: Jocie Brooks (cvnbotany@gmail.com)

Shoreline: Randal Mindell (cvnsshoreline@gmail.com)

Photography: Bryan Walwork

Weekend Walks: Loys Maingon

Conservation: Loys Maingon

Garry Oak Restoration: Loys Maingon

Airpark Restoration: Frank Hovenden

Environmental Heritage and Culture: Gordon Olsen

(coordinator@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca)

Swan Count: Ernie Stefanik, Krista Kaptein

(ernie.stefanik@gmail.com)

Comox Valley Conservation Partners liaison: Kate Panayotof

Speakers Planning: David Innes

Bursary Committee: Kathleen Wilkinson

(cvnbursary@gmail.com)

Tree of the Year Committee: Fred Newhouse

Education and Outreach Committee: Lyndsay Fraser (chair), Jodi MacLean (secretary)

Coffee Committee: Judy Chrysler, Kelly Kline

Website: David Orford (Advisor: Isabella Erni)

(site_info@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca)

Facebook: Jillian Jones (cvnnaturefacebook@gmail.com)

Newsletter Advertising: Kathie Woodley

Newsletter Editor: David Orford (Advisor: Sharon

Niscak) (newsletter@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca)

Constitution and Bylaws

Available in PDF form on this web page:

<http://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/about-us/>

Membership

Includes membership in BC Nature.

Membership form (including the Informed Consent and Assumption of Risk Agreement) is available at meetings and on the website.

Fee: \$30 per year per adult or family (2 adults plus children 16 and under)

Pay at general meetings, on the website using PayPal, or mail a cheque payable to Comox Valley Nature to:
CVNS Membership Secretary

Box 3222

Courtenay BC, V9N 5N4

Membership runs for the calendar year and is considered lapsed 90 days after year end. Lapsed members are removed from the CVNS and BC Nature membership lists.

Change of address, phone number or email: Please advise the Membership Secretary.

Meetings

When in-person meetings resume, they will follow the schedules described here.

Monthly general meetings are held on the 3rd Sunday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in the Florence Filberg Centre, 411 Anderton Avenue, Courtenay.

June meeting: Potluck at a member's house.

No general meeting in July, August, or December.

Bird meetings: First Thursday of the month, 7:00 p.m. at the Filberg Centre Soroptimist Lounge, Courtenay. For information or to be included on the birding group list, send email to cvnbirds@gmail.com. Birding walks are held weekly, most on Thursday mornings, and once per month on a Sunday.

Botany meetings: Second Monday of the month at a member's home, 12:00 p.m. An email is sent prior to the meeting to confirm location and topic.

Botany walks (weather permitting) precede or follow the meeting and are also scheduled at other times. To be included on the botany group list, send email to cvnbotany@gmail.com.

Newsletter

The newsletter is published 3 times per year (March, June, and November). The full-colour version is emailed in PDF form to all members on the email list, and a few printed copies (black and white) are available at general

meetings and in the CVNS outbox in the Evergreen Lounge at the Florence Filberg Centre.

The newsletter depends on your contributions. Please consider contributing an **article** or **note** on any topic of general interest to other members such as natural history, conservation activities, trips, unusual sightings, or a book review. **Photos** are also appreciated, either with a story or stand-alone. You can send your contribution by email to newsletter@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca.

We would appreciate receiving articles by the first day of the publication month. All articles are subject to editing.

NatureKids

CVNS has a cooperative relationship with NatureKids Comox Valley, a separate nature club for children which is part of the NatureKids BC organization. For more information, see <http://www.naturekidsbc.ca/>.