



# Comox Valley Naturalists Society

May 2012

## Message from the President

In ecology nothing seems more artificial, false, and downright perverse if not muddle-headed than political boundaries. Artificial lines we draw on an administrative map bear little or no relation with the ultimate reality of biological relationships. I very much doubt that U.S. salmon know that they are different from Canadian salmon. The problem gets even worse when you begin to think that the relationship shifts across timescales, since a thousand years ago the distribution of salmon populations was not what it is today or even what it was one hundred years ago. So things look, feel and are different when we stop and contemplate that we live in a world driven by change.

Disturbance at multiple scales drives ecosystems. Ecosystems themselves do not change, they collapse and form new systems. There has never been a fixed state representative of “the balance of nature,” any more than a Garden of Eden. There has only been a multitude of creative equilibria constantly shifting at different scales and rates.

The only difference is the looming rate of change beyond nature’s ability to adapt.

The ecological history of mankind tells us that the biggest problem humans have faced is, learning to embrace the beauty of change. We fail when we try to freeze and fix our environment to suit our immediate needs. The world came from eternity and will go on its journey long after humans disappear.

Greening the world, endorsing environmental values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is really simpler than many think. It means simply understanding and accepting the core message of Charles Darwin: the world about us is individual and ever-changing. It is dancing before us in a perpetual state of flux. The survival of every species, including ours, depends on its ability to embrace and adapt to change.

As the atmospheric chemist and Nobel-prize winner, Paul Crutzen, has pointed out, some 8,000 years ago humans took control of the planet. With the advent of agriculture, humans irreversibly changed atmospheric processes and chemistry. That was the beginning of the

Anthropocene, an era that heralded human control of the planet. (And for the record, it seems women started agriculture..... seemingly Lillith, who was much more interesting than Eve.)

There are a couple of things to consider about this. First, change is unidirectional. We can never restore or turn back the state of nature to a previous state, anymore than we can reverse time, cultures and economies. Second, some argue from this that “*human activities resulted in an increasing influence on climate, environment and ecosystems, mostly – it has to be said- to their detriment.*” Since all the chips have yet to be played, it seems early write us off. Humans have an extraordinary ability to learn, to adapt, and to surprise.

As humans control the fate of the planet, our survival and that of the planet depend on our ability to change and adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions. The great instrument of change and learning is communication – and it is important to note that the transformative rate of the Information Revolution initiated in the 80’s outstrips our capacity to keep up with it.

The Information Revolution is transforming many things, not least of which, our cultural institutions and the way we make decisions. It is young, but we begin to see how this transformation meets new challenges. The Occupy Movement and its reaction to an economic system which no longer meets the needs of 99% of the world’s population, foreshadows how looming environmental problems will be addressed.

Humans will make the necessary changes, independently of traditional government structures. Government structures that do not adapt will be discarded. These structures are just convenient conventions, transient boundaries of our cultural map. As in biology, it is the real ecology that prevails.

The big change lies in the growing opportunity for individuals to take control of their fate, by entering in open and unmediated discussions. We are witnessing the birth of a bottom-up democracy. The disillusionment that young people feel at government inability to respond to climate change and economic alienation, is

*continued page*

# Comox Valley Naturalists Board of Directors

**President:** Loys Maingon [aardscanltd@gmail.com](mailto:aardscanltd@gmail.com)  
**Vice-President:** Mary Murphy [mary500@telus.net](mailto:mary500@telus.net)  
**Secretary:** Angela Dawson [angela.dawson@shaw.ca](mailto:angela.dawson@shaw.ca)  
**Bookkeeper** Al Schut [alschut@shaw.ca](mailto:alschut@shaw.ca)  
**Treasurer:** Anita Wood pending September

**BC Nature Delegate:** Sharon Niscak [springwalk2@yahoo.com](mailto:springwalk2@yahoo.com)

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Birding	Art Martell	334-2979
Botany	Karin Franzen	334-7737
Conservation	Frank Hovenden	338-9962
	Norma Morton	339-7336
Photography	Terry Thormin	
Wetland	Frank Hovenden	338-9962
Liason CVEC		
Trip list	Fran Newson	339-4001
Membership	Sue Martell	334-2979
Newsletter		
Advertising	Kathie Woodley	
Editor	Sharon Niscak	339-4606
	<a href="mailto:springwalk2@yahoo.com">Springwalk2@yahoo.com</a>	Please include in title CVNS newsletter
Speakers	Loys Maingon	331-0143
"Card Lady"	Jennifer Harrison	339-4754
Web administrator		
Website:	<a href="http://www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca">www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca</a>	

## MEMBERSHIP

**Single \$30, Family \$40 (Life \$300)**  
**Junior 12-18 \$10, Student age 18-22 \$15**

Mail cheques to Sue Martell, 251-3399 Crown Isle Drive, Courtenay, BC, V9N 9X7  
**Receipts** at meeting or send SASE

### Membership due January 1st.

If not paid by February 28th, names are struck off the CVNS and BC Nature lists. New members joining after September will have their membership extended to the following calendar year: January to December.

**Change of address, phone number or e-mail:**  
Please advise Sue Martell, 250-334-2979

## TRIP LIST

**Suggestions for trips** welcomed:  
[franew@shaw.ca](mailto:franew@shaw.ca)

## NEWSLETTER:

Deadline October newsletter: **October 1, 2012**  
Newsletters are published: February, May and October. The newsletter is e-mailed to members.

Available at monthly meetings.  
(\$5.00 per year if mailed).

Articles are welcomed: natural history, trips, unusual sightings, etc.

## MEETINGS

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

**June meeting:** potluck at member's house  
**No meeting July, August and December**

**Bird meetings** are held the first Thursday of the month 7:00 p.m. at the Filberg Soroptimist Lounge. For info: Art Martell 250-334-2979

### Botany Meetings:

Botany Meetings are scheduled on the first Monday of every month and held at a member's home, 12:30 p.m. Bring your lunch.  
For info: Jackie Gray 250-331-0313 and Karin Franzen 250-334-7737

**Comox Valley Naturalists Society, Box 3222 Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N4**

You can find us on our web site: [www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca](http://www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca)

# A Life of Luxury

by Chris Pielou

To call *algae* (singular *alga*) "seaweeds" is not only wrong, it also belittles them most unreasonably. Weeds are merely ordinary plants that annoy people, usually by growing where they aren't wanted. The marine algae are biologically distinctive living beings, and wonderfully adapted to life in the sea. They contain chlorophyll and photosynthesize their own food, but this doesn't make them "plants" any more than our (*Homo*'s) descent from reptiles makes us reptiles. In fact, they are they are the modern descendents of the original ancestors of all plants. In other respects they are entirely different. Among themselves, they are divided into three "Divisions", recognizable by their colour, as green, brown, or red algae. In the browns and the reds the colour of chlorophyll is masked by non-green pigments.

The surprising thing about them is that they grow so copiously, some to enormous sizes (bull kelp can grow as long as 35 meters) with such primitive bodies. Small, single-celled marine algae are believed to be still very similar to their ancestors, which appeared about 2 billion years ago; the first many-celled ones, big enough to be spotted by beachcombers (if there had been any) developed about 1.6 billion years ago. Why didn't they go extinct, crowded out by more highly developed organisms, millions of years ago?

The answer is that they have, and have always had, a superb environment --- they live the life of Riley (*Note: Who was/is Riley? Google is no help.*) Their habitat never suffers from drought. The water in which they live remains at a fairly even temperature, never colder than -2° C, because below that salt water freezes, and never warmer than about 20° C. These are extremes: a more normal range would be from 5° C to 15° C. This is a much narrower range than land plants in our latitude are exposed to annually.

Because of the high viscosity of water, about a thousand times as great as that of air, there is no risk of being hurt by a fall or a collision, because all movement is slow. However, large algae need to be both tough and supple, to protect themselves from being torn to pieces by waves.

Further, a marine alga cannot starve as long as it gets dissolved carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the water. It must have light too, of course, so its habitat is automatically restricted to the uppermost, sunlit zone of the ocean, above about 200 metres.

In this luxurious habitat, algae can do without most of the special protective body parts that land life (plant and animal) depends on. Algae don't need a tough epidermis; they don't need any stiffening, such as wood or a bony skeleton. They don't need spines (as in

cactus) to defend themselves, nor teeth and claws, for self-defense or food-hunting. They don't need roots to absorb nutrients. They don't need elaborate digestive or circulatory systems. They simply loll in supportive, nourishing water. Lacking brains, they (presumably) don't even get bored.

The only body-parts they have are a *holdfast*, a *stipe*, and a *blade*. That's all it takes to live the life of Riley.

**Chris's New Book: *The World of Northern Evergreens*, Second Edition by E. C. Pielou.**



**Fucus and a variety of seaweeds Point Holmes.**

## Volunteers For Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre

Do you love nature, and beautiful mountain scenery? Do you also enjoy helping people and visitors to our Valley? You might like to volunteer a day or two this summer, to help staff the Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre up at Paradise Meadows, operated by the non-profit Strathcona Wilderness Institute. Visitors from Vancouver Island, across Canada & around the world come to Strathcona Provincial Park every summer.

From June to October, the Wilderness Centre provides education & information to visitors, on everything from the plants, to the birds, to the trails of Paradise Meadows. Volunteer orientation is provided, and gas costs up the mountain are reimbursed.

FMI please contact Krista Kaptein, Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre Summer Coordinator.

Phone: 250-650-4304;

Email: [coordinator@strathconapark.org](mailto:coordinator@strathconapark.org)

Web: [www.strathconapark.org](http://www.strathconapark.org)

Blog: <http://strathconapark.blogspot.com/>

Twitter: @strathconawild

# Little River Greenspaces

*By Helen Robinson with photos by Robbie Robinson*

We who live in Comox Valley are very fortunate to have several parks within a few minutes of home.

## **KIN BEACH PROVINCIAL PARK** on Astra Road



is a Class "C" Park, managed by a local community board, and has an on-location caretaker. The land, 6 hectares (14.8 acres) was donated by the owner to the Kinsmen Club in the 1940's. The

Kinsmen managed the park until the mid 1960's when it was turned over to the Provincial Government for \$1.00. When the Kinsmen ran the park it was a very active social centre with a tennis court, night-lit roller skating platform, beach change houses, playground, picnic site and campground. The numerous concrete X structures out in the ocean off the beach were put there to protect the shallow "pool" at the time.

There is a midden, running from the picnic area to the covered picnic shelter, evidence of First Nations presence in the past. The park has three ecological zones: the driftwood belt, the moss-covered meadow, and the forest (where the campground is located); each area home to distinct plants. The cobblestone beach supports many species of sea life, including starfish, clams, crabs, oysters and sand dollars. Bird watching is a favorite pastime in the area.

## **FODEN PARK**, administered by the Comox Valley



Regional District, is located at the end of Foden Road (approximately 1 km. north on Little River Road from the main entrance to CFB Comox). It is a mix of open

meadow; second growth forest with red cedar, grand fir, salal and salmonberry in the dryer area; and Sitka spruce and skunk cabbage in the wetter areas, with a swampy wetland where one can find Pacific crabapple, willows and cattails. It is a very productive wildlife habitat.

In 1966, the land, approximately 12 acres, was given by Murray and Helen Foden, to the Little River Improvement District for location of a water well site. The property was turned over to the Regional District in 1982 when the Little River water system was joined with the regional water system. Brooke Croucher, whose property was accessed on Don Road, and lay

adjacent to Foden Park, approached the Regional District in the 1990's, asking if they would like to purchase an additional 7 acres to add to the park. Her land would not have been allowed to be sub-divided, except for the fact that it was going to be parkland. Title to the property was finalized early in 1995, resulting in the total size of Foden Park being 7.54 hectares (18.62 acres).

## **LITTLE RIVER NATURE PARK** on Wilkinson Road, near the Little River ferry terminal, is our newest Regional District park, and was created as a result of a historic density bonus sub-division provision. A statutory right-of-way over the Harwood Estates paved road provides for public pedestrian access from the park to the foreshore. Watch for signs.

The park consists of two man-made ponds and the associated wetland habitat which provides important rearing, feeding and nesting opportunities for a variety of fish and wildlife. The Little River Enhancement Society monitors the presence of sea-run cutthroat trout in the ponds and the connecting outlet to the Little River. Other wildlife, including birds, beaver, deer and dragonflies love the area. The park also includes a large gravelly meadow which is being re-vegetated with native plants. All of this area was a gravel extraction pit when the runways at CFB Comox were being constructed. This part of the park consists of 4.2 hectares and is now fenced along Wilkinson Road. There is a designated parking area and signage with a map at the entrance. A trail runs along the ponds, and the site has pedestrian access along the Harwood Estates property and across the bridge over the Little River. Both sides of the river are included in the park, adding another 2.2 hectares of beach meadow and the riparian habitat. Although most of the beach plain was lost due to the sub-division's waterfront lots, there are still some seacoast plants on the east side of the Little River. (Indian consumption plant, Menzies' larkspur, Hooker's onion, elegant rein orchid, blue-eyed Mary, and clustered broomrape) Eradication of broom will continue to be a regular project.

## **THE KING COHO GREENWAY** is a pedestrian trail access from the north end of Capelin Place, through the strata development and along the Little River to the Straits of Georgia. The trail can also be accessed from the intersection of Florence and Wally Roads and follows the Little River to the beach. The Regional District has excellent signs in place.

In addition, there are approximately 12 public beach accesses in the Little River area, from the foot of Kilmorley Road to the Little River Nature Park; and the Regional District is in the process of having signs installed in the coming year. Location of these access points can be found on the Regional District's website.

## Dragonflies of the Comox Valley: A Must-See Opportunity



### Terry Thormin Photographing Long-tailed Ducks

Terry Thormin has kindly volunteered to present a one hour slide-illustrated lecture at the Filberg Centre, at the monthly meeting as part of CVNS educational program. His presentation will be of interest to all age groups who are interested in the diversity of the Comox Valley environment.

Photographer and naturalist extraordinaire, Terry Thormin recently retired to the Comox Valley after 23 years at the Royal Alberta Museum where he curated the entomology collection. Terry has been a naturalist all his life and first became interested in insects in his early teens. Anyone interested in an illustrated insight into the world of Terry should visit <http://www.pbase.com/terrythormin>.

Of the 41 species of dragonflies that can be found on Vancouver Island, 38 occur within the Comox Valley. This is an impressive diversity of dragonflies for such a small area, and the reason for this is the great diversity of dragonfly habitats. From high altitude meadows dotted with lakes and streams to sea level ponds, marshes and bogs, from forested lakes to fast flowing rivers and quieter streams, they all occur in the valley and support a diversity of dragonflies. Terry, through the use of his photographs, will take you on a journey to these habitats and show you what species can be found in each habitat. As well you will learn about their life histories and find out how to identify the various species.

This lecture promises to provide the public with a rare insight into the biological wealth at our doorstep.

For more information on CVNS events and presentations please visit the website at [www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca](http://www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca).



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*President column Continued from page 1*

making traditional government structures irrelevant to a growing number of young people.

The Information Revolution poses a serious challenge for traditional government structures and the paradigms they represent. In a world in which individuals can directly and freely inform and express themselves, a top-down structure in which a select number of representatives limit expression and make decisions independent of voters, however well-intentioned, is no longer the real expression of the community. This is the new shared reality of a generation that has grown up in two decades of digital information. This separates them from their analog predecessors.

In 1966, when The Comox-Strathcona Naturalists Society was formed, the digital revolution was still 20 years away. Communication was still a relatively leisurely affair. Even with a much more efficient postal service, a local letter took at least 12-24 hrs. – from the time it got to the post-office. An international e-mail now takes 2 seconds.

The magnitude of environmental challenges before us has only grown. An analog system of governance is no longer up to the needs of the society. So the central question Comox Valley Naturalists Society must now ask itself, is how to change the governing structure and the society's internal culture, and respond to the pressing realities of a new generation? My belief is that the answer lies in making governance even more open, flexible and participatory than ever. The executive must be transformed into a facilitative body responding to directions from the membership.

Direction must not come from me – it must come from you. In the digital age - the executive needs to be the membership, as the government must be the 99%. This president is really just a facilitator, not even an executive director, and the directors are communications advisors. The executive is you.

CVNS is embarking on an adventure in adaptation so that we continue to meet the needs of the Comox Valley environmental community, as per the original

mandate of the society. To meet our new challenges, your responses and your input are the key that will shape the environment we hand to coming generations. This is an essential part of the new strategic plan being prepared. Your responses to the Survey Questionnaire are an important part of your contribution – please take the time to answer.

*Loys Maingon*

Bill McGuire (2012) Waking the Giant: How a changing climate triggers earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes. Oxford UP p.65.

## Botany Group Visits Streamside Native Plants

Five members of the botany group went to Streamside Native Plants Nursery in Deep Bay on April 16<sup>th</sup> (after our last meeting) to look at the production and growing of Native Plants. Richard, the owner, has a sophisticated operation including a large greenhouse and very organized growing beds. He has native plants for wetlands, shade and sunny locations with most of the varieties we would see locally and from the southern Island.

His plant lists and prices are online at [streamsidenativeplants.com](http://streamsidenativeplants.com). Our club purchases plants from him when we are replanting areas. One interesting fact was the length of time that it takes for many plants to grow from seed - for example Camus can take up to seven years to bloom. This is a good reason to purchase fully grown plants. Richard purchases seed and plants from an ethical source - not taken from the wild. We were impressed with this nursery and recommend it for anyone wanting to do native plant gardening.

*By Karin Franzen*



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# The Comox Valley Nature Garry Oak Project

Ever since I first came to the Comox Valley in the fall of 1970 the status Garry Oaks have been an environmental concern. This concern flared up as an issue when I returned in 1999, when the Vanier Oaks were the object of developmental concerns. That is when I met George Sirk who did a terrific job of advocating for the preservation of the Oaks.

At the time, we were fortunate that a group of progressive-minded biologists formed the Garry Oak Recover Team out of Victoria and began advocating for Garry Oak Ecosystems. We all owe a tremendous debt to Marilyn Fuchs who carried out the first comprehensive review of the system, its ecological and cultural origins and its current status.

As elsewhere in the lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, in the Comox Valley Garry Oak ecosystems are now reduced to about 5 per cent of the range they covered around 1850. Two eminent botanists, Adolf Ceska and Michael Meagher both pointed out the both the uniqueness of the Oak groves of the Comox Valley. In the first genetic study Ritland and Meagher identified 42 distinct genetic populations, of which approximately 18 per cent are in the Comox Valley alone.

In 1860 much of the area that extends north of the Tsolum River, known to settlers as “The Plain,” was a huge camas and Garry Oak savannah. I am told that as recently as 30 years ago camas beds were still visible between Carwithen Road and the fields around Tsolum School. The ecosystem has changed because of the suppression of fire ecology, development and agricultural practices.

Both Victoria and Nanaimo regions have taken many pro-active steps to restore and protect Garry Oak ecosystems. In the Comox Valley, we have just come out of yet another round of debates over the potential development of Vanier Oaks and hopefully, Comox Valley Land Trust is negotiating a settlement.

However, the conservation problem for Comox Valley Garry Oaks is not limited to the simple protection of 1 existing grove. Many of the trees around Mission Hill and Vanier are elderly and not in good physical shape. Some of these older trees are showing signs of basal rot. While large magnificent Garry Oaks are still visible on some of the farms, there has been little or no effort to grow young trees to replace these veterans when they disappear. There is little local continuity.

The first part of CVNS’ initiative is to plant new young trees to provide continuity in their native agricultural setting. Young Garry Oaks readily grow along fence line, away from agricultural disturbance to

their root systems. To maintain genetic diversity, we are planting stock that comes from parent trees of the same locality.

The general plan is to plant 1000 trees in the Courtenay region alone, as well 500 in the Royston area, and 750 in the Comox area, by 2020. The project has an experimental component which requires monitoring the growth rate and vigor of the trees for at least the next 25 years.

The project was launched 2 weeks ago, on Earth Day, I am pleased report that, response has been enthusiastic. To date I have planted 22 trees, with a further potential commitment, to date for about 120 trees – having visited only about 1/3 of respondents. Several landowners are planning to set aside acreage to plant Garry Oak groves of between 10 and 24 trees, and have indicated a strong interest in planting camas as ground cover.

To assist all interested parties CVNS is teaming up with Comox Valley Conservation Strategy to hold a Garry Oak gardening and restoration workshop on July 16, 2012.

Always remember what Tommy Douglas used to say: *“Courage my friends, it’s not too late to create a better world.”*

*Loys Maingon*



## **Camassia lechtlinii**

Camas grew throughout the Garry Oak Meadows and were an important food source for the Indigenous people, especially the Coast Salish in BC and neighbouring States. The camas fields were extensively managed and cultivated. At once time the fields around Point Holmes and the airstrip were blue with camas in the spring.

*Photo Sharon Niscak*

# CVNS Nature Walks & Activities May and June 2012

Car pool at the Old Church Theatre 755 Harmston Avenue in Courtenay. Arrive at the parking area on Harmston Avenue to car pool 30 minutes prior to the start of the walk. Meet guides at trail heads.

**Note:** Additional summer walks will be announced shortly.

**May 22, Tuesday, Comox Lake Bluffs Ecological Reserve.** Meet 9:00 a.m. Harmston. Bring a lunch and wear good walking shoes. Leader: Helen Robinson 250 339-2608

**May 26, Saturday, \* Seal Bay Park.** Meet 9:30 a.m. Harmston – 10:00 a.m. Seal Bay Bates Road entrance  
Leader Frank Hovenden 250 338-9962

**June 2, Saturday, Point Holmes Beach Walk.** Meet 9:30 a.m. at Harmston or 10:00 a.m. at Point Holmes boat ramp.  
Wear boots because of slippery rocks. Leader: Robin Harrison 250 339-4754

**June 17 Sunday Annual CVNS potluck—place TBA**

**\*Denotes walk is available to the public**

**Please note: Guides:** All non-member field trip participants need to sign a waiver recognizing that there are risks inherent to all outdoor activities. On all field trips wear suitable clothing and footwear, and bring water & a snack. **No dogs please.** Share travelling expenses when car-pooling.

Remember car pooling at Old Church Theatre, 755 Harmston Avenue in Courtenay, 30 minutes prior to the start of our walks. Meet guides at trail heads. Check foot-wear and note no dogs, please.

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## “Sights and Sounds of Lazo Marsh”

Thank you to Bernice Muir and founding member Bill Halliday from The Friends of Comox-Lazo Forest Reserve Society for the presentation “Sights and Sounds of Lazo Marsh” at our recent monthly meeting.

Take time for a walk through the Forest Reserve and Lazo Marsh is a year round pleasure.

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## Help Needed

### CVNS Brochure manager

Tasks: (ongoing, as needed - requires either colour home printer or trips to photocopy centre)

- Update CVNS brochure (currently a Word document) as required e.g. minor changes to Contact Person, etc.
- Print colour copies of CVNS brochure & membership form insert (costs are reimbursed by CVNS)

• Distribute and/or deliver as required, for general meetings, display events, Filberg Seniors Lounge, & other locations