

# Comox Valley Naturalists Society

November 2023 Newsletter



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## Two New Endangered Lichen Species Raise Concerns About Management of Conservation Areas

By Loys Maingon



**Fig. 1. *Euopsis granatina*.** Red-listed species new to Vancouver Island, found in Strathcona Provincial Park in 2023.

Photo: Loys Maingon

This summer, in spite of adverse conditions created by the challenges of a year of climate extremes the Strathcona Wilderness Institute was able to add to the record of new species documented in Strathcona

Provincial Park. The first, *Euopsis granatina* is a red-listed lichen species new to Vancouver Island, and the other tentatively appears to be a species new to science: “*Euopsis X*”. This seems to be a new un-described North American species in the genus *Euopsis*. This genus was first described in 1987 by the late Finnish lichenologist Aino Henssen (1925-2011).<sup>1</sup> This would be the third of the two species currently belonging to the genus.

Two years ago, I observed and reported three separate occurrences of *Euopsis pulvinata* (Figure 2) in three separate locations of the park. While infrequently found, it has no conservation status and is considered widespread. It is found on volcanic rock in open exposed higher subalpine to alpine areas. Like all the *Euopsis*, it is reddish brown and forms lecanorine (cup-like with a border) apothecia with thalline exciple (border made of the thallus). The thallus is usually no more than about 1 cm. The apothecia are about 1 mm. The thalline exciple photobiont contains the cyanobacteria *Gloeocapsa*, and, importantly, it does not contain green algae. It has a widespread geographic distribution and is found on non-calcareous rock and alpine sod as well as other lichens or mosses.



**Fig. 2. *Euopsis pulvinata*:** Infrequent species with thalline apothecia documented in Strathcona Provincial Park in 2021.

Photo: Loys Maingon

The second species that is new to Strathcona Park and to Vancouver Island is *Euopsis granatina*, which is a red-listed species (Figure 1). The thalline exciple contains both cyanobacteria (*Gloeocapsa*) and green algae (*Trebouxia*). It is found on volcanic rock in exposed (cliff) conditions. The individual thallus is about 0.5 cm. The apothecia are about 0.3 mm in diameter. The green algae give the thalline edges of the apothecia a white or cream colour that makes the thallus appear to be mottled. This species has an arctic and alpine distribution. Its known distribution appears to be from the arctic to Colorado and the Cascades to Oregon.

The third and new species (Figure 3) is temporarily named, for the purposes of this discussion, “*Euopsis X*.” It appears to have never been observed or described, and the consensus so far is that it seems to be a new species. It is found on non-calcareous rock above ~1200 metres. The thallus of this new species resembles closely the striated rows formed by some members of the genus *Pyrenopsis*, another reddish-brown species found on rock. Prior to Aino Henssen’s work *Euopsis* was lumped with *Pyrenopsis*. The distinction between the two genera comes largely from differences in their apothecia. *Euopsis* form bordered thalline apothecia, such as we see in Figure 3 and Figure 1. *Pyrenopsis* form sunken perithecia (vase-like) apothecia. In this new species, the apothecia have, as in *Euopsis pulvinata*, knobby thalline edges. The individual thalli which are only obvious because they form a 2–3 cm colony, appear to be about 0.25 cm and the apothecia are about 2 mm, visible only with high lens magnification. It looks like a fine-grained version of *Euopsis pulvinata*. Algal constituents have yet to be analysed and determined.



Fig. 3. “*Euopsis X*”, an undescribed species of *Euopsis* new to science found in Strathcona Provincial Park in 2023.

Photo: Loys Maingon

While these finds are important in themselves, they also have important implications with regards to BC Park’s attitude to the management of the park as a conservation area. At the time of writing, BC Parks is allowing four sets of fires associated with the Wolf River fire to merge with the Mount Con Reid fire and burn out of control.<sup>2</sup> BC Parks invokes a policy of letting natural fires burn in natural areas. Notwithstanding the good intentions of that policy, few scientists would consider our current fire situation to be “a natural process.” By all accounts outside of BC Parks and purveyors of conspiracy theories, these fires, as the hundreds that are burning across the province, cannot be construed to be “natural.” These fires are a product of climate change which is driven by human agency.

The issue with these fires is that while the public may assume that we know what is burning, just as we assume that we know what we are losing in a clearcut—that is not the case. We have at best only a cursory sense of the species we are incinerating. As I have argued elsewhere: we do not conduct biological surveys to determine what species are present, unless they have a commercial value. To put things politely: we manage without data, we fly blind, we don’t know what we are doing.

Although SWI has only been able to carry out shoestring surveys over the last two years, the Wolf River drainage has thus far proven to be a gold mine of rare species. Cursory surveys done on a shoestring have documented important populations of endangered species “old-growth specklebelly” (*Pseudocyphellaria rainierensis*) and “Wahlenberg’s goblin lights” (*Catolechia wahlenbergii*). There have also been reports of relict fish populations in streams and lakes above waterfalls.

The discovery of previously unrecorded species, and species previously undescribed in science, does not only tell us about rare species that may be unique to Strathcona Park or Vancouver Island. These discoveries are a reminder of how little we know, even as governments profess to be protecting our ecosystems’ hydrological processes and managing our conservation areas wisely for the benefit of future generations. Surveys done in the alpine ecosystems of the park that turn up previously undescribed species new to science bear witness to the presence of endemics. These are species that were isolated by the retreat of the last Ice Age, or that survived the Ice Age in refugia, and have now evolved to be unique to this place. While these endemics are less easily observable than the popular “Vancouver Island marmot” (*Marmota vancouverensis*), they are equally of note, because their presence reminds us of the complex evolution of the unique ecosystems we

depend on for everything from the water we drink to the homes we live in. Biodiversity is not ornamental—it is the nuts, bolts and rivets that make an ecosystem function and make it unique.

Over the past five years the research work of the Strathcona Wilderness Institute, which continues to be unsupported, if not obstructed, by BC Parks, has been able to greatly increase the number of species documented in Strathcona Provincial Park. This summer, important work on endangered American Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) was scuttled by BC Parks, seemingly, if inadvertently, to protect the interests of the private resort on Moat Lake. Research students were prevented from staying overnight near the lake to record nesting habitat, as per the Bird Studies protocol which requires that three sets of observations be made a half hour before dawn and half an hour after dusk, and therefore requires that in remote locations observers be on site overnight.

This survey work is important, not just to help entities such as Birds Canada protect endangered species such as American Black Swifts. SWI's work provides an account of the biodiversity of the park and its distribution for future management planning as well as a record of climate change and its impacts. With the exceptions of the blight of the mine and the damming of Upper Campbell and Buttle Lakes, most of the park's terrestrial and aquatic systems have been minimally disturbed since the last Ice Age. It is a living lab of old-growth and relict species, its biodiversity and processes untouched by industry. It also provides an insight into the number of species per square kilometre that would have been expected in pre-contact environments in coastal British Columbia, and therefore of the number of species that are permanently unaccounted for and have been lost to the destructive practices of the Ministry of Forests across the entire province.

The facilitation of the same destruction that brought Larkin to declare that “the park is a mess,” now returns and finds new life in new avatars of commercialization and bureaucratic respectability. We vaguely catalogue important species with “Key Biodiversity Areas” that will remain remote entities managed in a far corner of a government office and whose fate will still be subject to ministerial fiat, notwithstanding glossy mesmerizing publicity that gives the illusion of conservation, while we will promote commercial interests, be they those of settlers or First Nations. We set up a “Strathcona Park Advisory Committee, chaired by a retired mine employee favourable to the mine's interests. We promote “inclusivity” by setting up a reservation system

that, as research shows, excludes a significant segment of the public. We exclude research that may not conform or subscribe to the objectives of the government of the day.

The current management policies appear to inadvertently protect commercial interests and neglect conservation and biodiversity priorities to which Canada is a signatory and to which British Columbia pays lip service. This simply perpetuates the same calamitous mindset that led to the condemnation of BC Parks by Peter Larkin in 1989. We pretend to “reconcile” industry and conservation, as though oil and water can co-exist outside of an Exxon slick. Commerce has no place in parks and conservation areas which generations have fought for, for the public good. A mine in the centre of BC's oldest provincial park had no place in 1988, and it has even less now as we enter a new age of biodiversity crisis. Fire policies that treat the unprecedented fires we now face as “natural” are as out-of-step with the realities of today. Three decades of government policies aiming to perpetuate the “business-as-usual” of the 1960s, without really facing and confronting a climate crisis we were well aware of, has now brought us to the brink. That has equally no place in today's reality. That this mindset should continue to guide conservation policy is no longer acceptable nor tenable.

It is time for the winds of change to return like fresh air. Strathcona Provincial Park is not just home to a generic forest miraculously set aside from BC Forests' “scientific management” by chainsaw and skidder. It is one of BC's last great arks of biodiversity that can still yield up, with minimal effort, new species, unrecorded by science. Their presence is a measure of the government-sanctioned destructivity that takes place daily in this province. To know these species and appreciate their value anchors us into the life of this place. That is “reconciliation,” because there is no reconciliation where we do not reconcile with the land.



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These rare species are a measure of the uniqueness and fragility of these ecosystems that are taken for granted and abused in the name of “recreation,” which is often plain destruction where there is no respect for place. Strathcona Park is our Amazon in our back yard, if it is not mined, logged or incinerated in the name of government or industry management, or tourism, or death in government care. It is time to look back to 1988 and stand up for Strathcona Provincial Park, once again.

1. Henssen A, B. Budel and A. Titze (1987) *Euopsis* and *Harpidium* genera of Lichinaceae (Lichenes) with rostrate asci. *Botanica Acta* 101: 49-55.

2. <https://www.vicnews.com/local-news/mount-con-reid-fire-grows-to-1577-hectares-in-strathcona-provincial-park-2335412>



## Become a Butterflyway Ranger

Make a Difference in Your Neighbourhood

By Angela Dawson

In 2017 a German study found that 76% of flying insects have disappeared in the last 27 years and that 40% of insect species are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss, pesticides and climate change. As 80% of Canadians live in urbanized areas, urban gardens are crucial for conserving bees and butterflies.

The Butterflyway Project, a David Suzuki Foundation initiative, is a volunteer-led movement that brings nature to gardens across Canada, one butterfly-friendly planting at a time. It has been running since 2017 and has already recruited more than 2000 volunteer rangers. Two neighbours and I in the Puntledge area got together last year to apply, and we were approved to be Butterflyway Rangers. The goal was to have a minimum of 12 pollinator-friendly gardens in the neighbourhood, thus creating “Pollinator Pathways”.



Members of Puntledge Pollinators Butterflyway group.

Our aims were:

- To provide educational opportunities and increase awareness of the importance of pollinators in our local environment.
- To bring neighbours together again after a long period of isolation and stress, fostering community and deepening our connection to nature.
- To share knowledge, the joy and wonder of simple things in nature while having fun!
- To create action items: Converting lawns, growing native, reducing pesticide use, countering negative views, and becoming an educated advocate.

The David Suzuki Foundation provided webinars, inspiration and resources, as well as garden signs “Pollinator Friendly Garden” and T-shirts! In early March the webinars started. They were Canada-wide reaching the 323 new Rangers for 2022. We found them excellent, informative, interesting and indeed inspirational.

We applied for and received a grant from the Neighbourhood Small Grants Comox Valley which enabled us to purchase educational resources and discounted soil from Thrifty’s which we gave to interested neighbours. We had plants to share from our own gardens.

We decided to start our local “Puntledge Pollinators Butterflyway” with a “blitz” on the May long weekend. We delivered invitations to all our neighbours as well as inviting friends to the event.

The invitations were titled: “Create a Pollinator Patch in Five Easy Steps”:

- **Serve an all-season buffet:** Choose a combo of flowers that bloom in the spring, summer and fall.
- **Plant native wildflowers:** Plants and shrubs adapted to your climate feed local critters and are easier to grow.
- **Keep it natural:** Avoid pesticides. Mulch less. Mow less.
- **Bunch plantings:** Create floral bull's eyes - plant a few of each species together.
- **Be a good host:** Find out what plants caterpillars eat, like nettles, willows pearly everlasting, fennel and oceanspray.

***Gardening with Native Plants*** was an excellent resource that we were able to provide to our neighbours. We had purchased copies from “HAT” Habitat Acquisition Trust (<https://www.hat.bc.ca>). This compact guide is filled with excellent information including a Plant Table listing the native plants, their characteristics, descriptions, preferred site, bloom time and numerous other useful tips for your Naturescape. Highly recommended!

***Grow Me Instead*** is another great resource that we handed out - an excellent brochure put out by the Invasive Species Council of BC (<https://bcinvasives.ca/Plantwise>).

We all gained valuable knowledge and understanding, and we all learned lots and had fun working together and liaising with neighbours on this project. Our gardens and others in the neighbourhood are now more Pollinator Friendly habitats. Our project was a success. We would encourage others to explore becoming a Butterflyway Ranger through the David Suzuki Foundation. Recruiting happens in January and February for that year. Find out how to apply at <https://david Suzuki.org/take-action/act-locally/butterflyway/national/> and make a difference in your community.

### New Membership Secretary

CVN's Membership Secretary is a key volunteer position that helps keep our organization running smoothly. Recently, Dianna Colnett passed the baton of this position, after more than four years of stellar service, to Aileen Williams. Thank you, Aileen, for stepping up!

## Salt Marsh Dodder

A friendly arm-choke does not really hurt  
By *Véronique McIntyre*

The birding group went to Deep Bay in August under Kelly Kline's leadership and some birders found me. I am the salt marsh dodder, (*Cuscuta pacifica*, a member of the Convolvulaceae, like bindweeds), and you see me here with one of my favorite friends, the American glasswort (her real name is *Sarcocornia pacifica*, but it's too complicated for me. She belongs to the family Amaranthaceae with orache and lamb's quarter).



Fig. 1a. Salt marsh dodder entangled with American glasswort.

Photo: V. McIntyre



Fig. 1b. American glasswort free of salt marsh dodder.

Photo: V. McIntyre

I am all the beautiful golden threads and the cute little white flowers. In fact, that's all I am—a stem. No cumbersome roots for me, thank you very much. I grew from a seed, but my seed died very soon after I formed, and I was left to my own devices. Luckily our seeds don't travel far, and there is usually a plant nearby we

can hang around with. That way we don't trail on the ground. And it's less lonely.



**Fig. 2.** Salt marsh dodder's golden stem and white flowers.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

If you look closely, you can see that I love my friend and give her tight, very tight, hugs, always anticlockwise.



**Fig. 3.** Salt marsh dodder twirling anticlockwise around an American glasswort branch.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

And when I arrive at the top of one of her branches, I simply swing like Tarzan until I find another branch to hug.



**Fig. 4a.** Thread of salt marsh dodder that goes from the top of a branch on the right to another branch on the left.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*



**Fig. 4b.** I produce flowers on those dangling threads; why waste such a golden opportunity to increase the number of seeds I produce.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

I don't want the wind to tear us apart, so from time to time I loop back on myself, forming a neat little knot.



**Fig. 5.** Knot of salt marsh dodder stem around an American glasswort branch.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

To tell you the truth I overdo it a little bit. I want to be one with her, I love her so much. So, I grow a few little suckers and we can exchange juices that way.



**Fig. 6.** Marks of dodder suckers on a branch of American glasswort (the 2 yellow dots). The bumps on the dodder stem mark where the suckers were attached.  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

“Exchange“ might be a little bit of a misnomer. I tend to monopolize our relationship and I end up sucking up the juices my friend produces for me. Well, maybe not for me, but they end up inside me anyway. And boy, are they salty! Even though my friend stores the extra salt from the sea in vacuoles at the top of her segments, which is what allows her to use saltwater when it is quite dry in the summer here, and even though she drops off those segments when they are full of brine (and quite red), there is still quite a bit of salt left in her circulating liquids.

People who have nothing better to do with their time than to badmouth others call me a parasite. Well, I would like to see them survive without roots! And did you notice I don’t sport any green? Meaning I am completely devoid of chlorophyll and can’t photosynthesize. Where am I supposed to get the sugars I need to live from? Same as you—from another plant!

My white flowers have 5 fused sepals, 5 petals fused into a little bell, and 5 golden stamens.



**Fig. 7a.** Salt marsh dodder flower (top), spent flower (middle) and fruit forming (bottom). *Photo: V. McIntyre*



**Fig. 7b.** Close-up of a flower. *Photo: V. McIntyre*



**Fig. 7c.** Flowers in profile. *Photo: V. McIntyre*

Sometimes the parts of my friend I latched onto die on me. Not because of me, I am not a killer. Maybe she does not like me anymore and instead of just unfriending me she lets herself go?



**Fig. 8.** Dead dodder on a dead branch of American glasswort. Only the dodder-infected part of the glasswort is dead. The glasswort continues its growth. *Photo: V. McIntyre*

In fact, she is simply too impatient; once my flowers have turned into golden fruits, each containing 2 to 4 seeds with just enough reserves to form a tiny golden stem, I die anyway. See, I am an annual plant, while she is a perennial, which means she can live for many years.



**Fig. 9a.** Dying dodder. The golden hue of the stem turned brown. *Photo: V. McIntyre*



Fig. 9b. Dodder fruit.

Photo: V. McIntyre



Sea lion and gulls feeding on salmon.

Photo: V. McIntyre

And even if my descendants reinfest her year after year since our seeds don't travel far, she'll be fine. A friendly arm-choke does not really hurt.

Reference:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuscuta\\_pacifica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuscuta_pacifica)

### New Website Feature: Spherical Panoramas

The centrepiece of CVN's website, the online Nature Viewing Guide, is now even better. Thanks to the leadership and hard work of our Photography Group leader, Bruce Moffat, each viewing site in the Guide now has a spherical (360°) panoramic photo. These amazing photos give you an interactive bird's-eye view of the site.

Bruce enlisted the enthusiastic participation of the Drone Group of the Comox Valley Photographic Society, and the results are spectacular. Huge thanks are due to Bruce and all the photographers for producing these images. Be sure to check them out, starting from the earlier announcement on our website:

<https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/spherical-panoramas-announced/>.

## Airpark Restoration Report

Fall 2023

By Frank Hovenden

We have been busy planting native shrubs and bulbs recently. With climate change it has been difficult to find the ideal time for planting the various types of flora that we use in our restoration efforts at the Courtenay River Airpark. I like the fall for establishing shrubs, as root growth can get a head start if there is moisture in the soil. With the dry weather this means one has to resort to watering the newly planted shrubs. Fortunately, this autumn has not been as dry as last year when the rains didn't arrive until November. This year we have planted areas recently cleared of Himalayan blackberry on the east side of the Lagoon. A couple of new shrubs we have planted for the first time this year include evergreen huckleberry and beaked hazelnut.



Kathie Woodley and Yvette Crane planting shrubs.

Photo: Frank Hovenden

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The second phase of our fall planting is for our meadow bulbs—camas (common and great), wild onions (Hooker's and nodding) and harvest brodiaea. These are planted in fenced plots that have been weeded by covering them with black plastic for an entire growing



season. This basically cooks the soil, destroying weeds and their seeds.



**Karen Cummins and Véronique McIntyre planting native bulbs.**  
*Photo: Frank Hovenden*

The last phase will be direct sowing of seed on open ground. The thatch is first removed by raking. We tried this last year with some success, so we will repeat it later this fall with a mixture of meadow plants and grasses. The mixture includes seablush, spring gold, red maids and yellow rattle.

Lastly, I have started to prepare my annual report which I hope to have ready by year end. It will be posted on the CVN website with a limited number of hard copies available to club members.

As we approach the year's end, I want to thank all the volunteers who have come out to our work parties. I get lots of feedback on how good the Airpark is looking and it is all because of you.

A special thank you to CVN members Bob Hauser and Royann Petrell for growing and donating native plants for our project, and to Kathie Woodley for doing the rabbit count.

### Learn About Bats

BC Nature has organized a series of presentations by BC Community Bat Programs on bats in BC. The first webinar, "An Introduction to Bats" was held on October 23. You can view this episode on BC Nature's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E5WSMUSEDE>, and find out more about BC Community Bat Programs at <https://bcbats.ca/>.

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## Wetlands Group at Little River Nature Park

Fall 2023 Update

*By Karen Cummins*

For many of us involved in stewardship activities, the fall season marks the transition between the active work in the field and the start of report writing. This year's report on CVN's work at the Little River Nature Park to the CVRD Parks Dept. will note 166 volunteer hours. This time is spent learning more about the native plant ecosystems at this park and removing the invasive plants that attempt to make inroads. Every year has been a new experience in some aspect and this year the numbers in the report help to tell the story.



**Little River beach plain worksite.** *Photo: Karen Cummins*

This season we spent 1/3 the hours of previous seasons removing all the purple deadnettle and curly dock found, due to fewer, smaller, and less dense patches of both species. Was the change in population due to different environmental factors or is it the result of years of focused work on these target invasive species? Whatever the cause, it was extremely satisfying to see vast areas of beach or estuarine plain ecosystems that were clear of

these plants at an earlier point in the season than ever before. This allowed us to focus more time on other species such as Dalmation toadflax.



**Kathie and David on our last pass for curled dock.**  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*



**Kathie with Dalmation toadflax rhizome.**  
*Photo: V. McIntyre*

It was a regular 3 to 8 CVN members who showed up every Wednesday at Little River Nature Park from mid-April to early August: Kathie W., Murray L., Angela D., Barbara N., David O., Jim B., and Véronique M. Special thanks to Véronique for many photos, for assuming the group leader role in July and for being the lone scout for errant toadflax removal in August and October.

Interested in joining us in the spring? Please do. Much laughter and cookies are guaranteed. Contact Karen at [karen.cummins@shaw.ca](mailto:karen.cummins@shaw.ca).




**Getting down to earth with toadflax removal.**  
*Photo: Karen Cummins*

In previous years we have primarily slowed the spread of this plant by removing flowers. We also removed lone plants and experimented with removing outliers of established patches to slowly reduce the patch size and to gauge the issues and success rate of removing the deep tap roots and long-reaching rhizomes (underground stems) of this plant. This season we took advantage of our new-found time and removed all the toadflax. Stay tuned for the continuing toadflax saga.

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## CVN Education and Outreach in 2023

By Karen Cummins

From March to September, our Education and Outreach booth represented CVN in seven community events across the Comox Valley. We offer event attendees information on all the CVN activities open to members and our work in the valley to “know nature and keep it worth knowing”.

The outside of our tent always features native plants on one side and invasive plants of concern on the other. Both elicit conversation and questions from both newcomers and long-time residents of the valley. Inside are the hand-outs and presentation boards with more information as well as games we have created for all ages to play. In the photo, Véronique M., helps a family play the Salmon game she visualized from the salmon life cycle and which Jennifer H. beautifully captured in canvas and paint. Véronique has also created three different bird card games from her bird photos.



CVN at Fanny Bay Market Day. Photo: Karen Cummins

Our thanks to CVN members who helped carry our message at the events: Jan S., Suzanne G., Joy D., Véronique, Jim B., Kathryn H., David I., Kathie W., Kathryn L., Karin F., and Shirley C. We all benefit from meeting the public personally and sharing our knowledge and passion for nature.

Please let us know if you would like to join us at any event. No previous experience necessary!

## Vanier Garry Oaks Project Delegation to the City of Courtenay

By Jim Boulter

A group from Comox Valley Nature’s Vanier Garry oaks team appeared as a delegation to the Mayor and Council of the City of Courtenay on October 11. Karen C. And Eloise H. presented an eight-minute slide talk, after which they responded to questions from members of the council.

This was our second appearance before the City Council. The initial one in 2021 served to provide formal notice of our proposal to the City, while this one was to provide an update of the work we have done since then and to formally present to the City our request for shared cost on the work proposed. We hope to get an answer to our proposal before the end of the year so that we may plan invasive control procedures starting this winter, and the subordination of the first conifers to release a portion of the oak grove to the sun in the fall of 2024.

We were well received by the council, as they all seemed to pay attention to our speakers and slides, and three of the counsellors had questions for us at the end. Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services was present for another reason, but showed her support both by speaking of her engagements with our team and leaving the council chamber briefly to congratulate us on our presentation. Mayor Bob also congratulated us for staying within the 10-minute schedule. In addition to Karen and Eloise we had four other members of the team present (Frank H., Ian H. Annette B., and Jim B.).

Council meetings are videotaped, and our presentation is available at the link below. We were item number 4.2, and selecting us will call up our presentation. The small window can be expanded to full screen for easier viewing. This box also contains shortcuts to our speaking notes for the presentation (2), a draft version of our brochure (3) and copies of the letters of support we received from CVN members, other Garry oak groups and experts we had visit the site (7). We would like to thank all the people who took time to write the letters of support.

<https://pub-courtenay.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=9b3db42a-583e-4fc5-96b2-6ef0284eb753&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English>

In brief, our proposal is to provide greater amounts of sunshine to the Garry oaks, which occupy slightly less than a hectare of the park. We must reduce the height of a number of conifers which are over-topping the oaks to

the south and southwest, blocking the sun to the oaks. Garry oaks cannot thrive nor propagate without an adequate amount of sunlight. Measurements of the living oaks present in the grove indicate that some may be over 200 years old, but none will live much longer as the shade encroaches on their sunlight.

We also need to remove the invasive plants as they limit the ability of oak seedlings to grow. Garry oaks are present in the Comox Valley because of their active cultivation by indigenous peoples for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and they will continue to require human intervention to have a future, which is why a stewardship group will need to be created.

Our most recent reports include the “Tree Risk Assessment” by Verna Mumby, and the “Hazard Tree Abatement” estimate from Grow Tree Care. The estimate for hazard tree abatement is \$5,760 of which the City would have to pay 100%. For safety reasons, we will not be able to do any work, including invasive removal, in the park until the hazard trees are removed. The estimate for the canopy reduction work as proposed by the team is \$7,420, split 50/50 between the City of Courtenay and the CVN team. The team will raise our share of the cost through grants and donations.

The order of tasks for the first year’s work is this:

1. The City of Courtenay approves our proposal by the end of 2023, and budgets funds for the first year’s work in 2024.
2. The City proceeds with hazard tree abatement to secure safe access in the park in the first part of 2024. The Garry oak team and the City proceed with public outreach, events and information brochures seeking public support for a local stewardship group.
3. The Garry oak team organizes volunteer invasive plant removals once it is safe to do so. Access to the waste storage area near the school district fence, and the area around the oaks to be released in 2024 will be our prime focus. A temporary footbridge across the trench will be set up to do this work. Holly and small cherry trees will be removed until the bird nesting season starts in April or May. All invasive plant material will be removed from the storage area by the City. Branches and trunk pieces from native trees will be left in place with the branches chipped to reduce fuel load.
4. Spring and summer work would include baseline measurements of the oaks to be released and ivy and daphne removal would continue. The team will also seek funding via grants for our share of the conifer reduction work. We would also work with the city to

host outreach, or open house information sessions to encourage support of the stewardship group.

5. The reduction of the first over-topping conifers and large sweet cherries to open up the canopy will take place in the fall of 2024. The oaks so released will be monitored for the duration of our proposal to assess the success of the methodology. We will continue to lead groups of interested people through the grove to explain the work we are doing there.

The photo shows a group walk that the Vanier Garry oak team and members of the Birders and Botany Groups did on February 24, 2023. From left to right they are Art Martell and Kelly Kline (Birding), Jocie Brooks (Botany), Eloise Holland, Karen Cummins, and Frank Hovenden (3 Vanier Garry oak team members).



CVN birders and botanists survey Vanier Forest.

*Photo: Jim Boulter*

### Board Vacancies

Three vacancies have recently opened on our Board of Directors. Isabella Erni, Loys Maingon, and John Neilson have retired from the Board.

Isabella has been our excellent Treasurer for about 10 years. She has graciously offered to continue doing a lot of the “back office” work to keep our finances organized, but will no longer sit on the Board.

Loys has been a key director for even longer, formerly as President and in recent years as Project Director. He has led many important activities, including Garry oak restoration projects and the popular (pre-pandemic) weekend walks, and many others.

John has been a valued Director at Large, bringing a wealth of experience to bear on our efforts “to keep nature worth knowing”.

We wish to express our gratitude to all three for their valued service to our Society and its objectives.

## Trees of the Year 2024

By Karen Cummins



**Bigleaf maple in Hurford Hill Park, Courtenay, nominated by Shane Tillapaugh in 2023.**

2024 will mark the fourth anniversary of our CVN Tree of the Year as a public event to raise awareness of cherished local trees as well as the benefits and protection of trees. It has been stressed that all the nominated trees are winners, and the community has been encouraged to visit the trees to experience the impact of a tree's presence and to reflect on the story of the tree as told by the nominator.

This year we are refocusing on the goals of the event. Our refining of the event name, to *Trees* of the Year, reflects this focus along with our commitment to feature all the nominated trees and their stories in various ways throughout the event year, without a winner being declared. Our energy will go into providing a list of nominated trees with their details as well as tree tour maps, facilitating public feedback about the trees, and promoting areas of the community rich in trees that have no trees nominated to date.

We came to this decision in reviewing the past event participation as well as feedback from past nominators. The number of tree nominations continues to be robust every year. The event cycle route maps are visited by increasing numbers of people over a long timeframe. In comparison, the number of people who vote for a winner is small. Our conclusion from this review was that the community participates in the event to find and nominate a tree and/or to experience the nominated trees, as opposed to voting for a winner. This refinement to Trees of the Year removes the need to create and maintain a voting platform as well as the tasks to declare and reward winning nominators.

Watch for an announcement in the CVN email news for the opening of nominations for Trees of the Year in mid-January 2024. You can, however, get out anytime now and find your tree!

## NatureKids Comox Valley

By Karen Cummins

NatureKids (<https://naturekidsbc.ca/find-a-club/vancouver-island/naturekids-comox-valley/>) is a nature discovery and environmental action organization that helps children form meaningful and enduring connections with nature alongside their families. The Comox Valley chapter has a new volunteer leader, Kim Rose, who is now planning monthly Explorer Day outings for children 5–12 and their families. Kim is also a CVN member.

The first outing was October 15 at Puntledge Park. You can see in the photo here what a great outing it was for the 20 children and families that attended.



**NatureKids trip to Puntledge Park. Photo collage: Kim Rose**

Kim would love to have some volunteers from CVN join them on any of their Explorer days. Please contact Kim at [comox@naturekidsbc.ca](mailto:comox@naturekidsbc.ca) if you would like to join them or receive more information to share with the children in your life.

## 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. The carpooling location is usually the Driftwood Mall (Canadian Tire) parking lot, near Cliffe Avenue close to Boston Pizza. For trips going north, it is the Courtenay Country Market on Hwy 19A about 2 km north of Veteran's Memorial Parkway.
- 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

For general club activities, watch for the latest information and additional details in the Board's periodic email announcements and on the website.

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

In accordance with the post-pandemic guidance of provincial health authorities, interest-group field trips have resumed. A couple of general-interest weekend walks have also taken place, but an extended schedule for these was not available at the time of publishing.

### Reminder for Field Trip Leaders

All field trip participants who are not CVNS members must sign our *Assumption of Risk, Release of Liability and Waiver of Claims* agreement, and those who are not members of BC Nature must also pay the day membership fee before participating.

## About the Society

### Website

<https://comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca/>

### General Email Address

[cvncoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:cvncoordinator@gmail.com)

### Mailing Address

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

### Board of Directors

President: [vacant] ([cvncoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:cvncoordinator@gmail.com))  
Vice-President: David Innes ([cvncoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:cvncoordinator@gmail.com))  
Secretary: Kathie Woodley ([cvnsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:cvnsecretary@gmail.com))  
Treasurer: [vacant]  
BC Nature Director: Sharon Niscak  
Wetlands Restoration Director: Karen Cummins  
Directors-at-Large: Royann Petrell, Ernie Stefanik, David Orford

### Group Leaders and Other Volunteers

Membership Secretary: Aileen Williams ([cvnmembership@gmail.com](mailto:cvnmembership@gmail.com))  
Birding: Kelly Kline ([cvnbirds@gmail.com](mailto:cvnbirds@gmail.com))  
Botany/Mycology: Jocie Brooks ([cvnbotany@gmail.com](mailto:cvnbotany@gmail.com))  
Shoreline: [vacant]  
Photography: Bruce Moffat ([moffat.images@gmail.com](mailto:moffat.images@gmail.com))  
Conservation: Loys Maingon  
Garry Oak Restoration: Loys Maingon  
Vanier Forest Garry Oaks Project: Jim Boulter  
Airpark Restoration: Frank Hovenden  
Environmental Heritage and Culture: Gordon Olsen ([cvncoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:cvncoordinator@gmail.com))  
Swan Count: Ernie Stefanik, Krista Kaptein ([ernie.stefanik@gmail.com](mailto:ernie.stefanik@gmail.com))  
Comox Valley Conservation Partners liaison: Kate Panayotof, Karen Cummins  
Speakers Planning: David Innes  
Bursary Committee: Barbara Neilson ([cvnbursary@gmail.com](mailto:cvnbursary@gmail.com))  
Tree of the Year Committee: Karen Cummins ([cvn.toty@gmail.com](mailto:cvn.toty@gmail.com))  
Education and Outreach Committee: Karen Cummins  
Website: David Orford ([site\\_info@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca](mailto:site_info@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca))  
Facebook: Jillian Jones ([cvnaturefacebook@gmail.com](mailto:cvnaturefacebook@gmail.com))  
Newsletter Advertising: Kathie Woodley  
Newsletter Editor: David Orford ([newsletter@comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca](mailto: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. This must be completed each year.

Fee: \$30 per year per household (1 or 2 adults plus children 18 and under)

Discount of \$16 if you are already a paid-up member of BC Nature (either directly or through another club).

An optional additional fee of \$5 is payable if you wish to receive printed copies of *BC Nature* magazine (otherwise available online).

Pay at general meetings, on the website, 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 if not renewed by January 31. Lapsed members are removed from the CVNS and BC Nature membership lists.

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

## Meeting and Field Trip Schedules

Post-pandemic, the schedules for in-person meetings are still variable. Watch for email announcements.

**General meetings** are held at a place and time to be determined.

**June meeting:** Picnic at a designated location.

**No general meeting in July, August, or December.**

**Guest speakers:** Typically, one talk per month, either at an in-person general meeting or as an online webinar. Details announced in the periodic email notices to members.

**Birding Group:** Birding walks are held weekly, most on Thursday mornings, and once per month on a Sunday. For information or to be included on the birding group list, send email to [cvnbirds@gmail.com](mailto:cvnbirds@gmail.com).

**Botany/Mycology Group:** Meets for one walk per month, usually on a Thursday or Friday morning, with occasional additional outings. An email is sent prior to the meeting to confirm location, time and topic. To be included on the botany group list, send email to [cvnbotany@gmail.com](mailto:cvnbotany@gmail.com).

## Newsletter

The newsletter is published 3 times per year (March, June, and November). The full-colour version is available on the website in PDF form, and a link is emailed to all members on the email list.

The newsletter depends on your contributions. Please consider contributing an **article** or **note** on any topic of 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](mailto: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 <https://www.naturekidsbc.ca/>.

## From our online Nature Viewing Guide



From our online Nature Viewing Guide (cont.)

