# Comox Valley Naturalists Society

November 2026 Newsletter




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We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which we gather and operate is the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

## American Bullfrogs

### Invasion needs an all-hands-on-deck response

*By Bruce Moffat*

The history of American bullfrogs coming to Vancouver Island is approaching 100 years. Sadly, it's more hard reality than centennial celebration.

They were brought here from eastern North America by some entrepreneurs in the mid-1930s to raise and sell into the restaurant market, boosting employment and hopefully making money for the investors. It turned out that the cannibalistic nature of the frogs had not been well considered, with the adult frogs 'eating' into the profits. After a short time and with little success, the ventures folded, and the frogs were left on their own.

Fast forward several decades, and the bullfrogs took advantage of their freedom without oversight and spread north making it as far as the Comox Valley in the last 5 to 10 years. Golf course and farm ponds are a favourite habitat for the largest frog species in North America, but they seem just as happy with any bay or backwater they can find along the way. This story has been repeated in other areas of the Pacific Northwest and the interior of BC. The impacts have been well documented and are significant on local fauna.



An underwater photo of an American bullfrog tadpole taken with a waterproof probe lens.

*Photo: Bruce Moffat*

The bullfrogs faced none of the regular predatory fish that keep their tadpoles in check, such as Northern Pike and the Basses. Our local terrestrial predators have to contend with an unfamiliar bitter taste and a mild toxin the frogs

produce to deter their ingestion, leading to a population unbounded.

Females can produce up to 20,000 eggs up to twice a season, making rabbits look like the Hare in the fable with the Tortoise when it comes to reproduction. The only good news here is that the tadpoles can take 2–3 years to become frogs, and after that another 2–3 years to become sexually mature.



Large gathering of young frogs on a grassy island. *Photo: Bruce Moffat*

In January of this year, Laura O'Brien from the Tsolum River Restoration Society (TRSS) presented to CVN the scope of this problem in their watershed. She introduced the RIBIT project, Regional Invasive Bullfrog Initiative, which received funding from the Comox Valley Community Foundation.

Since then, a team of volunteers guided by the biologists at TRSS and Cumberland Forest Society (CFS) monitored and captured bullfrogs on Maple Lake in Cumberland, the latest large outbreak. The learnings from Maple Lake during 2026 will drive actions for 2027 to reduce the tadpole and frog numbers significantly in Maple Lake and other areas requiring control.

I made a short video of the scale of the bullfrog tadpoles in May 2026 that can be found here: https://youtu.be/lJTf2j_V_r0.



A large tadpole specimen showing how big they can get. *Photo: Bruce Moffat*

The CBC News put together an informative story soon after following a few of us around Maple Lake explaining some of the challenges and how they are being addressed: https://youtu.be/skqcn9VSY8c?si=nvw6IaNzO7Op1BDH.

A CVN keynote presentation on RIBIT and the learnings from others, including Maple Lake, is planned for March 2027. Watch for the call for volunteers that will follow soon after to help with control measures across the Comox Valley.



A large bucketload of tadpoles and young frogs captured. *Photo: Bruce Moffat*

# Seed Sharing for the Airpark

*By Whitney Peek*

Courtenay Airpark restoration volunteers have a lot of fun planting native plants and removing invasive species together at our work parties, but we also like to share. We are looking for people interested in growing a few native plants with seeds we've collected from the Airpark and Frank's beautiful garden. There's enough in a seed packet to grow some for you and a few for the Airpark too. Here are the seeds we have, and a little about each one:

**Great camas (*Camassia leichtlinii*)**

Camas are jewels of the Airpark when they're in bloom, and these are the larger of the two species grown there. Camas is a great pollinator plant that loves full sun but can tolerate part shade as well. They enjoy deep, rich soils with dry to medium moisture. Mature height will be 20–100 cm. Since camas forms a bulb, starting from seed takes patience while the bulb develops. Expect blooms around year 4 or 5.

**Nodding onion (*Allium cernuum*)**

These enjoy full sun to part shade and dry to medium soil moisture. Mature height is 15–40 cm. All parts of the plant are edible and are great for pollinators. When growing from seed, nodding onion may take a year or so to be ready to bloom, but once established, bulbs will divide and spread happily through the garden.

**Harvest brodiaea (*Brodiaea coronaria*)**

This is a pollinator-friendly, full-sun-loving plant with purple flowers. It prefers dry soil and will get to about 10–30 cm height when mature. They grow from a corm, which takes time to form. Expect blooms approximately 3–4 years after germination.



Harvest brodiaea (*Brodiaea coronaria*) found at Cattle Point in Victoria. *Photo: W. Peek*

**Menzies larkspur (*Delphinium menziesii*)**

Another pollinator attractor that prefers full sun and dry to medium moisture soils. Mature height will be 20–60 cm. Growing these from seed can be tricky, but what a beautiful reward for your work!

Fall (October and November are ideal) is the best time to sow many of our native seeds so they can stratify over the winter, which means they need cold temperatures and winter weather to break dormancy and germinate in spring. Here are the basic steps for growing native plants from seed:

1. Add moist, well-draining potting soil to a tray in fall. Use a soil marked as "high porosity" or add perlite to your soil mix to increase drainage. If you use a tray with individual cells, the seedlings will be easier to transplant later.
2. Add one seed to a cell of the tray, cover loosely with more soil. No need to pack it down too tight.

3. Cover with a lightweight mesh plant tray, chicken wire or hardware cloth to keep wildlife out & let sun/rain/snow in.



An array of trays covered with lightweight mesh trays to exclude birds, secured with rocks for high winds. *Photo: W. Peek*

4. Set in a sunny spot outside and leave them out all winter. If you have room to not set them directly on the ground (patio, raised bed, on mulched ground, etc.) you may have fewer issues with slugs.
5. Transplant from your tray to a 4" pot when two "true" leaves are present in spring. True leaves are the leaves that sprout after the first "seedling" leaves. True leaves look similar to those of the mature plant. Try to time transplanting when there aren't heavy freezes in the forecast.



A seed tray with seedlings that have two true leaves. This may be a good time to plant them into larger pots so roots can develop. *Photo: W. Peek*

6. Plant out in late April to early May in your garden or donate to the Airpark!

Contact Frank for an envelope of native seeds or to get more information at: fhovenden321@gmail.com.

Want to get more involved with the restoration work at the Airpark? Frank will add your name to the work party notice list. Work parties are every other Thursday for most of the year, and all are welcome!

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## BC Nature Changes

When you renew your membership, you will find that CVN no longer requires you to agree to the waiver each year. Following a directive from BC Nature, CVN can now keep your agreement on file while you are continuously a member, that is, if you renew before the end of the one-month grace period (January 31). You will still need to fill in the registration form each year to ensure that CVN has your current information.

Another change by BCN is the optional fee for receiving a printed copy of *BC Nature* magazine by mail. The fee, which covers four issues per year, has been raised from $5 to $10. All members can still access the digital version of the magazine on the BC Nature website (bcnature.org) for no additional fee.

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# Comox Valley Trees

## New events, new name!

*By Carol White*



The valley from Carol's place. *Photo: Carol White*

The Trees of the Year (TOTY) committee agreed that it was time for a new name that would better reflect the range of tree-related activities that the group now undertakes. Thus, Comox Valley Trees (CVT) was born.

The Tree of the Year (TOTY) event was introduced in 2018 by Comox Valley Nature and was held annually until 2024. It was dedicated to the memory of CVN member Cathy Storey, who inspired others with her enthusiasm and passion for the many gifts trees give us. Its goal was to foster a strong connection with nature, highlight cherished local trees, and raise interest in the value and protection of trees growing in the Comox Valley.

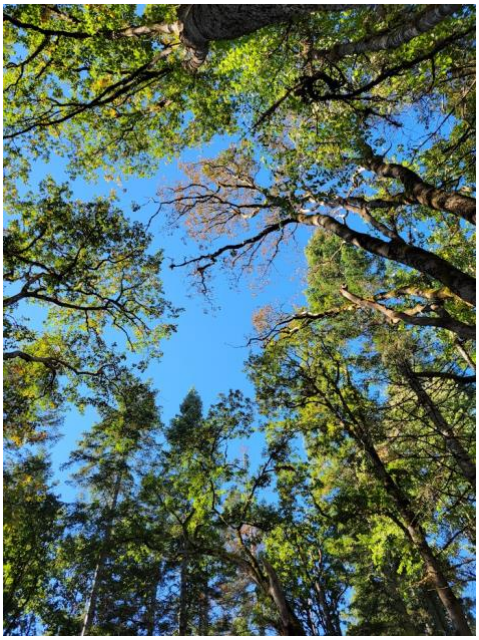
From the success of TOTY in engaging the public and in sharing knowledge, there grew new ideas for events involving the public and CVN members that enhance our understanding of the importance of the trees that grace our valley.

The TOTY brochure developed in 2025 is a self-guided walking and cycle tour of significant trees nominated by residents of the Comox Valley from the 2018–2024 TOTY events. These tour maps cover tree-rich areas in Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and Royston. The brochure is available at the CV Tourist Bureau and other locations in the valley.

CVT now offers a series of knowledge walks that cover a wide variety of tree-related topics. Led by subject area experts and passionate tree lovers, they cover a wide range of topics from concepts such as Finding the Mother Tree, to the effects of drought and climate change on trees, tree biomechanics, geological history and ecological development, and walks that celebrate the biological features and historical significance of some of the glorious native and exotic trees in the town of Comox.

These knowledge walks enable CVT to reach out and engage with the community, share information about the vulnerability of trees in an ever-developing urban landscape. They help to foster respect for the treed environments as well as to highlight and appreciate the work done by CVN members and others in the rehabilitation and preservation of sensitive ecological habitats.

The walks are held in various locations in the valley, offering participants an opportunity to explore somewhere new, or to look more closely at an environment that they already know. To date we have held walks in Seal Bay Regional Nature Park, the Courtenay Airpark, the Filberg, MacDonald and Mack Laing Parks, Brooklyn Creek, the Curtis Road shoreline and dunes, and the Vanier Nature Park.



Garry oak restoration site at Vanier Nature Park.
*Photo: Eloise Holland*

Response to these walks has been overwhelmingly positive. They provide a forum for sharing and enhancing our knowledge of trees.

In addition to the walks, CVT launched the Autumn Tree Celebration event, which invites residents of the Comox Valley to share their stories and photographs of a favourite or notable tree as it changes and prepares for the winter season ahead. These stories and photos will be made available on the CVN website and social media sites, giving us another glimpse of how trees in our environment change through the year.

Through these and other initiatives, CVT endeavours to connect with the community and share and build on our appreciation of trees and to keep the need to protect our trees at the forefront, so that they can continue to contribute to a healthy environment.

New members for the CVT committee are always welcome, as well as your suggestions and ideas for topics and locations for 2027 knowledge walks. Contact us via the CVN website's contact form.

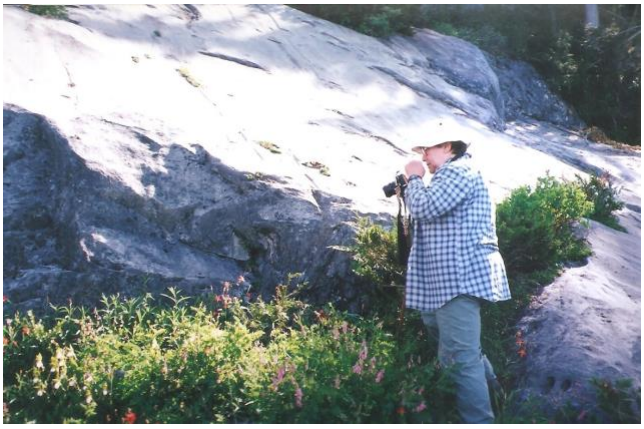
It's not too late to contribute your photos and stories of trees in your neighbourhood that are preparing for the winter.

Visit CVN on the web at `cvnature.ca` for information on upcoming events and how to submit your Autumn Tree Celebration photo and story. Past TOTY-nominated tree photographs, descriptions, locations, and cycling and touring route maps are also available on the site, as is a downloadable version of the TOTY brochure and maps.

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# Another CVN Memory

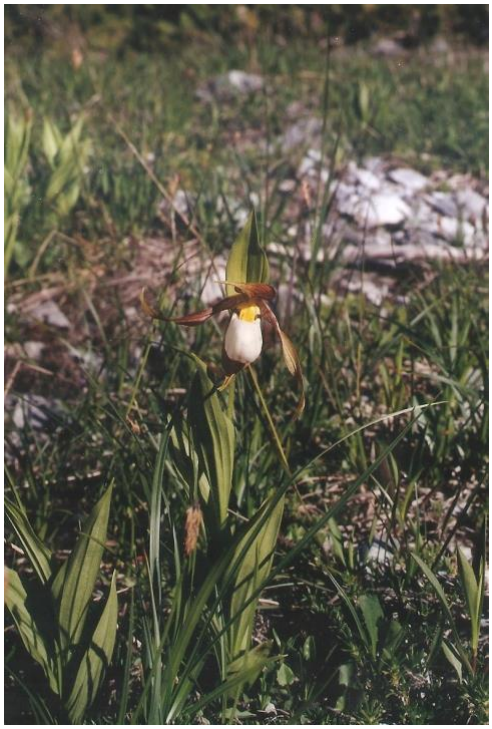
*Note and photos by Frank Hovenden*



Betty photographing mountain ladyslipper in 1999.
*Photo: Frank Hovenden*

As our 60th anniversary year of reminiscences winds down, Frank sent along another fond memory item:

> Here are two photos of club member Betty Brooks photographing the mountain ladyslipper. This was a club trip from 1999 when we flew into White Ridge Park from Gold River by helicopter to look at interesting flora growing in the karst environment.



Mountain ladyslipper in White Ridge Park, 1999.
*Photo: Frank Hovenden*

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# Kim's Trip: Caspian Terns

*Note and photos by Kim DeLisle*

[On June 22, Kim shared the following item with the Birding Group.]



I had the immense pleasure of being out on a boat yesterday near the Discovery Islands, and we went by Centre Islet. There were so many Caspian Terns it was almost overwhelming. I learned that they nest there, or at least that is what I was told.



[Kim subsequently found the following Conservation Status Report which confirms that Centre Islet is a breeding ground for the species:
a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/eswp/esr.do?id=18360.]



Centre Islet is very close to Subtle Islands which are between Read Island and Cortes Island in the Sutil Channel, so if you know anyone who has a boat, it would be a great time to be out there.



The Caspian Terns are sharing space with some gulls (I think Glaucous-winged) who are nesting and some sea lions as well. Nature at its best.

## Liberating Native Plants on the Courtenay Rotary Trail

*By Karen Cummins*

As Eloise said in her November 2025 newsletter article about work on the Vanier Garry Oak Restoration project, "you meet the nicest people in the woods". It was a sentiment I reflected on last week whilst pulling together with like-minded people on the Courtenay Rotary Trail to remove ivy, daphne and Himalayan blackberry.



Megan and Paula with daphne.
*Photo: Karen Cummins*

I also remembered a comment from David Haskell in his book, *How Flowers Made Our World*, after he took part in a stewardship event – "What we learn through bodily experience has a habit of spreading. We tell others." I agree with him that the people who tend to show up for stewardship events such as these are "energetic and are often well connected in their communities". They may think they are coming to pull ivy and dig blackberry, but consciously or not they are actually helping to rebuild connections between plants and people.



Audrey and Whitney removing ivy.
*Photo: Karen Cummins*

We work pretty hard for a couple of hours to prise out ivy and such while naming and celebrating the native plants around us in this latest stretch of the Rotary Trail off 17th St.

Why bother? Isn't it just a narrow band of woodland, close to the trail and nearby houses? Yes, but it's a treasure! This is a place loved by streams of people of all ages, either walking or cycling through it all day long or living nearby. It's lush and very birdy, even now in the late fall. These places of urban nature where

humans and nature intersect have incredible potential to reenergize us, to help us slow down, look and breathe deeply.

Every day this small woodland shares its benefits. Let's reciprocate by helping nature out here. Let's answer questions about the native plants from people on the trail and the neighbourhood. Save most of your Sunday afternoons from now to mid-December and mid-January to mid-March to join us. We even provide cookies.

Get on the volunteer list for work party dates and meeting points: wetlands@cvnature.ca.

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# Vanier Nature Park Garry Oak Restoration Project

## Fall 2026

*By Karen Cummins*

Our third fall season on the Vanier project began as it has the previous two years with tree work – the Grow Tree Care contractor reduced 10 grand firs to wildlife trees and thinned a whopping 50 sweet cherry trees. This marked the completion of tree work on the east side of Tributary 1 (or as we refer to it, "the ditch", since it has long been channelized).

However, this fall also marks a change in tasks and a new trajectory for the project as we begin to implement the Restoration Prescription provided to us in August by Tal Engel from WolfTree Integrated Forest Rehabilitation. You can read his surprisingly informative and readable prescription by looking for it on CVN's Vanier project web page, cvnature.ca/vanier-forest-garry-oaks-project/ (scroll down to Key Project Documents).

One of the first tasks was to use the coarse woody debris (CWD) of the thinned sweet cherries as "obstacle fencing" to restrict deer movement into the main Garry oak grove. This task was completed for us by Grow Tree Care with their strategic felling of trees into a "complex obstacle pattern" that deer are generally too lazy to navigate. The strategy is to deflect deer interest in this area long enough for newly planted or naturally recurring native plants to become well established and be resilient to some deer browse. The thinned cherries also lock carbon into this oak woodland.

Another use of CWD from the tree thinning and reduction work has been the soft decommissioning of "the ditch" with wood placed into the ditch to act as beaver dam analogues (leaky dams) which slow stormwater and retain it longer in the adjacent soil. Grow Tree Care accomplished this task for us as well with more strategic felling and bucking of logs.

Vanier project team volunteers used the sweet cherry logs thinned in previous seasons to build Assembled Nurse Logs (ASNLs). This is a strategy developed by Tal Engel to consolidate these smaller logs together with arbor chips, branches and wood ash to mimic decaying large diameter wood which is scarce in the Vanier forest. These structures will help build soil organic matter and retain moisture year-round. ASNLs offer refugia for creatures such as amphibians that need very moist habitats, and they also lessen fire-risk in the grove.




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292 5th Street, Courtenay, BC



Tal Engel and Leslie working on an Assembled Nurse Log. *Photo: Karen Cummins*

Our next task this fall is to put up Multi-terrain Smart Net fencing to enclose about 60% of the east grove where we will be planting the Garry Oak Forest Garden. This is an assemblage of native plants that Tal has recommended for their ability to provide ecological and cultural values as well as their suitability for the site conditions. They will create a densely layered mid-story that will not compete with the legacy Garry oaks. While the oaks provide hard mast acorns for wildlife, the other Forest Garden plants such as cascara, Pacific crab apple, salmonberry and others will provide soft mast (berries, fruit) through the seasons for a range of wildlife.

There are so many more facets of this work to share, including our work on relational stewardship with our Indigenous neighbors. Please read the prescription and let us know if you have questions or wish to join us for work parties by emailing vanier@cvnature.ca. Also, please donate to the project through the CVN website at cvnature.ca/donate (noting that your donation is for the Vanier Garry Oak Restoration Project).

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# Marbled Murrelets: Interviews with Royann Petrell



Marbled Murrelet.
*Photo: Martin Raphael (Creative Commons)*

Comox Valley Nature members Royann Petrell and Sylvain Alie have been working for several years, along with others, to preserve old growth forests and monitor the birds that depend on these endangered habitats and the nesting sites they provide, notably for the Marbled Murrelets at Fairy Creek. CBC Radio recently interviewed Royann for the program The Current, and the episode aired on November 5. Here's the CBC's written introduction:

> Deep in the old growth forests on Vancouver Island, a group of citizen scientists, birders and artists gathered this summer to try to catch a glimpse of the secretive Marbled Murrelet, known to some as the "potato bird." Royann Petrell, co-founder of Old Growth Birders and BioBlitzers, talks about her work to document the bird and try to stop the destruction of its habitat.

You can listen to the program here: tinyurl.com/rp-on-the-current. The segment with Royann starts at 46:10 and lasts about 14 minutes.

The CBC news website also has an earlier interview with Royann on this subject from 2023 which you can read here: tinyurl.com/rp-on-mamu-article-2023.

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## CVN Board News

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that a new Director at Large has been appointed. **Vanessa Scott** has joined the board with the primary goal of becoming our Comox Valley Conservation Partnership Representative. Kathie Woodley is planning to step down from that role in February, and Vanessa will shadow her until then. Vanessa brings not only her passion for conservation but also significant experience with Brooklyn Creek Watershed Society and a previous stint at CVCP.

## Time to Renew Your Membership

CVN's membership year is the calendar year, so it's time to plan your renewal. The easiest way to renew is to visit our membership web page (cvnature.ca/membership) and select the option to register and pay online at our payment processor's website. The membership page on our own site lists other options if you prefer. The membership fees for 2027 have not changed (apart from the increase noted elsewhere for getting the printed *BC Nature* magazine).




# CVN Needs You

*By Kathie Woodley (for the Nominating Committee)*

The efforts of the Nominating Committee over the past two years have not been successful in finding Comox Valley Nature members with the time and energy to take on the positions of Vice President and President of our club. This is a serious problem.

For our club to continue to provide the many activities our members enjoy and have come to expect, we need a few more people to step up and take a turn with the behind-the-scenes work that needs to be done.

The Board has been considering several solutions, one of which is to divide up the work by drafting new job descriptions for the President and Vice President positions that would share the responsibilities currently performed by the President.

Another solution, on which the Board is about to embark, is to post on our social media pages an invitation to non-members interested in serving on the CVN Board as Directors at Large and who could be interested in taking on the role of Vice President or President in the future.

If you have had experience in creating criteria, short-listing or interviewing candidates for a position and would consider joining the Nominating Committee, please contact cvcp_rep@cvnature.ca. We could use your skills.

We would also be delighted to talk further with any member who would like to learn more about the positions of Director at Large, Vice President and President.

# Field Trips and Nature Walks: General Information

## Interest Group Field Trips

**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 birding@cvnature.ca.

**Botany Group**: Typically meets for one walk per month, 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 botany@cvnature.ca.

**Shoreline Group**: Aims to have several field trips and/or guest speakers per year, with details communicated by email. To be included on the Shoreline Group list, send email to shoreline@cvnature.ca.

## General-Interest Nature Walks

CVN offers opportunities for members and the public to participate in guided nature walks, ideally about once a month. These may focus on a particular theme or simply promote appreciation of our natural areas.

To learn about upcoming walks and register to attend one, visit the Events page on CVN's website (cvnature.ca/events/). Note that the number of participants for most walks is limited, and registration is required. Also note that a walk may be designated for the public only or for members only.

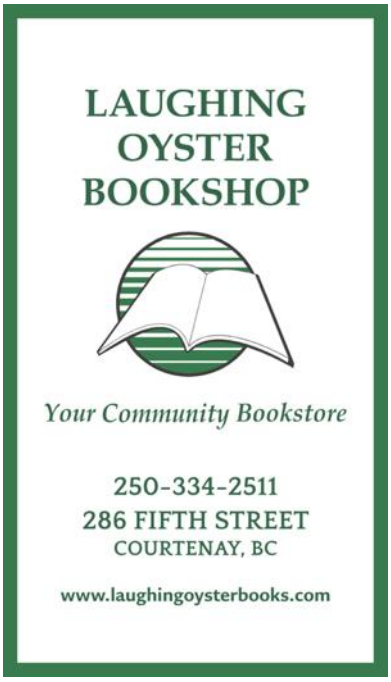
## General Instructions for Field Trips

- All field trips are club events and reserved for members only unless otherwise stated.
- Meet at the specified location10 minutes before the specified start time.
- 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.

## Participation by Non-Members

Other members of BC Nature are welcome on CVN members' field trips. Other guests can participate at the discretion of the trip leader (numbers may be limited). Those who are not CVN members must also sign our *Assumption of Risk, Release of Liability and Waiver of Claims* agreement.

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# About the Society

## Website

cvnature.ca

## Email Contacts

You can reach most of our interest groups and projects directly by using the contact form on our website (cvnature.ca/contacts).

## Mailing Address

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

## Board of Directors

President: Betsy MacKenzie
Vice-President: [vacant]
Secretary: Eloise Holland
Treasurer: Brian Storey
Past President: Lynn Gray
BC Nature Representative: Warren Michelow
Wetlands Restoration Director: Karen Cummins
CVCP Representative: Kathie Woodley
Directors-at-Large: David Innes, David Orford, Whitney Peek, Vanessa Scott

## Group Leaders and Other Volunteers

Membership Secretary: Aileen Williams
Volunteer Bookkeeper: [vacant]
Birding: Heather Lindholm (retiring)
Botany: [vacant]
Shoreline: Yvette Crane and Mary Mitchell (retiring)
Nature Photography: Bruce Moffat
Vanier Forest Garry Oaks Project: Karen Cummins and Eloise Holland
Airpark Restoration: Frank Hovenden
Bird Counts: Krista Kaptein
Swan Count: Bill Stewart
Program Committee: David Innes
Bursary: Barbara Neilson
Charles Brandt Memorial Committee: David Innes
Education and Outreach: Karen Cummins
Comox Valley Trees: Verna Mumby
Website: David Orford
Facebook and Instagram: Eloise Holland
Newsletter Advertising: Kathie Woodley
Newsletter Editor: David Orford

## Constitution and Bylaws

Available in PDF form on this web page:
cvnature.ca/about-us/

## Membership

Annual Fee: $30 for a one-member household; $40 for a two-member household; $10 for a youth voting member. Discount of $16 if you are already a paid-up member of BC Nature (either directly or through another club).

Includes membership in BC Nature.

The membership year is the calendar year (January to December), and payment for renewals is due by January 31.

The registration form is available at meetings and on the website. This form or the online equivalent must be completed each year. New members must also agree to the *Release of Liability, Waiver of Claims and Indemnity Agreement* (the "waiver").

An optional additional fee of $10 is payable if you wish to receive printed copies of *BC Nature* magazine by mail, four issues per year (otherwise available for all members online at bcnature.org).

Pay at general meetings, on the website, or mail a cheque payable to Comox Valley Nature (with your completed form) to:

CVN Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 3222
Courtenay BC, V9N 5N4

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

## General Meetings

A **monthly general meeting** is held most months except June, July, August and December. Details are given in the President's email notices to members. The current location for in-person meetings is the Main Hall of Comox United Church.

The **annual general meeting** is usually held in February.

## Guest Speakers

Typically, one presentation by a guest speaker is held per month, either at an in-person general meeting or as an online webinar. Details are announced in the periodic email notices to members and on our website.

## Newsletter

The newsletter is published three 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 general 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. Send your contribution by email to newsletter@cvnature.ca.

New contributors should contact the newsletter to receive some guidelines.

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




## NatureKids

CVN 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 naturekidsbc.ca.

## From our online Nature Viewing Guide




California sea lions. *Photo: Terry Thormin*




Sweat bee. *Photo: Terry Thormin*