



Arrowsmith Naturalists Newsletter
Volume 31, Number 1
February 2026

Trumpeter swans over Hamilton Marsh

We respectfully acknowledge that we live within the unceded traditional territories of the Snav-naw-as People and the Qualicum First Nation, the traditional keepers of these lands.

We intend to nurture better understanding and pursue opportunities for collaboration with our First Nations neighbours.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Hello all Anats, I hope you all had a good Christmas and are looking forward to an interesting and enjoyable New Year. Well, we've had our atmospheric river, followed by a frosty but sunny spell and now we're back into the warm and wet. My crocuses are up and look like they mean business. But a little voice keeps telling me, "We haven't done February yet!". So I'll wait before I start planting anything yet awhile.

The great good news for the Biosphere Region is that the RDN have approved the purchase of Hamilton Marsh! After 20 years of unceasing efforts by the Hamilton Marsh Society, it's a deal! Happy dance!!

There's one caveat though. We still have to raise \$2 million although Hamilton Marsh people are pretty sure they can do it with the extended fund-raising deadline that they also received. Got any rich friends..?

It's always fun to walk down to the Community Park from our house. The boardwalk is a great place to watch the mallards and buffleheads diving; The winter flock of 19 snow geese are often seen grazing and our small flock of wintering Brant sometimes hang out on the gravel bar. Last week, in the rolling fog, hundreds of Canada Geese were grazing in the fields. Which reminds me, the Brant count starts at the end of February.

And that brings me to the many events we will be attending with our table and displays in the coming months starting with Seedy Saturday, and the Coombs Family Day event in February alone. It's going to be a busy year again. But don't write off winter just yet!

OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

President: Elizabeth Thorne	Website: Kerry Baker
Past President: Sally Soanes	BC Nature representative: Jasmine Tomczyk
Vice President: Marion Lea Jamieson	Newsletter: Liz Bredberg
Treasurer: Helen Davidson	Facebook: Claire Summers
Executive Secretary: Randy Richardson	Outreach Contact: Sue Wilson
Membership: Bonnie Mullin	Email & Zoom: Liz Bredberg
Special Projects: Lynne Brookes	Stewardship: Dave Hutchings

CONTENTS

President's Corner	p. 1
Club Activities	p. 3
Meetings: Notice re Venue change	
Outings	p.3
Events	
Mushroom and Nature Festival	p.7
Christmas Bird Count	p.8
Christmas Potluck	p. 11
Stewardship	p.14
Advocacy	p.17
Nature Notes	p.18
Book Reviews	p. 24
Coming Events	p.26

CLUB ACTIVITIES

MEETINGS

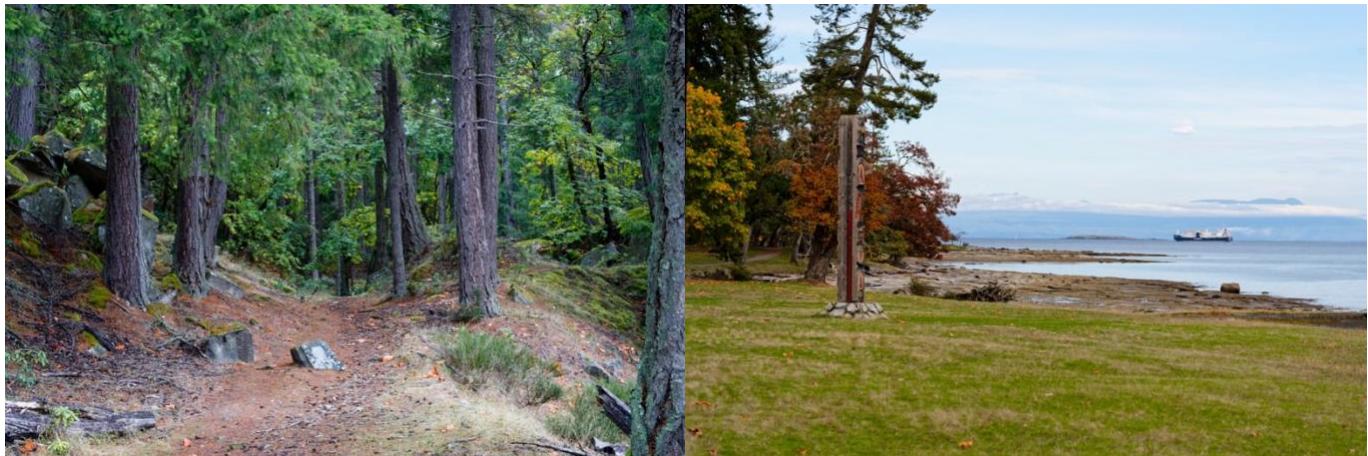
Arrowsmith Naturalists meetings take place on the 4th Thursday of each month. Their location has changed from St. Edmund's church to the Qualicum Beach Community Hall, 664 Memorial Drive. (by the Farmer's Market)

OUTINGS

Arrowsmith Naturalists continue to take an active part in regular outings:

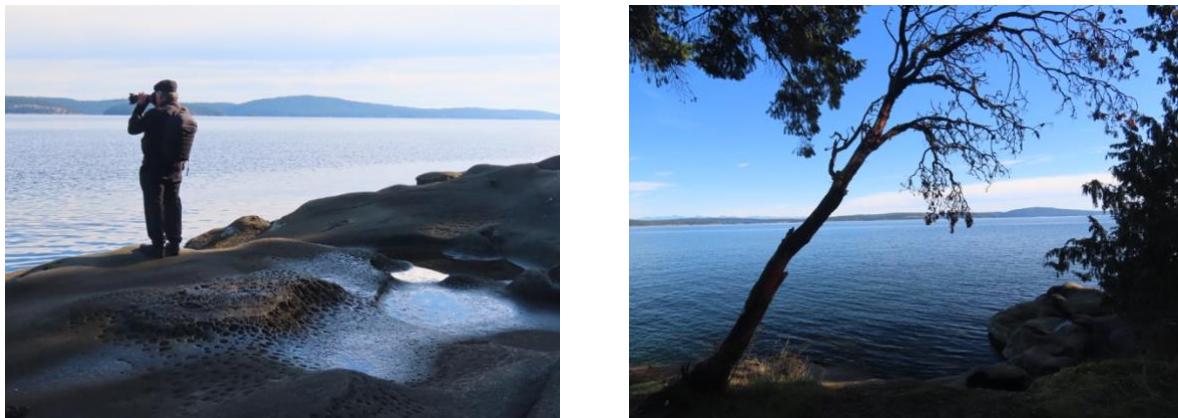
9 October

Toni and Ron Wyckhoff led a walk in Sayshatshun (Newcastle Island).



15 October

Liz and Jim Thorne led a walk in Roberts Creek Memorial Park.



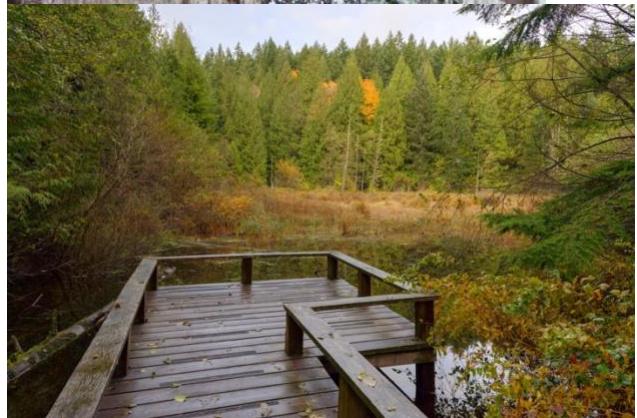
22 October

As a warm-up for the annual Mushroom Festival, Terry Taylor led a walk at the Big Qualicum Fish Hatchery



2 November

The scheduled leader was unavailable, but ANats members found much to appreciate at Morrell Nature Sanctuary, after a rainy Saturday. Lipstick cladonia is showing its red fruiting bodies.



11 November

Jeanne & Rob Schippers led a walk up Notch Hill, to mark the annual Remembrance Day observation.



17 November

David Helem led a walk in Hemer Provincial Park in south Nanaimo.



26 November

Helen Davidson led a walk at the Little Qualicum Hatchery, where dippers are frequent visitors to the river.



17 January

Dianne Anderson led a walk along the Lighthouse Regional Trail, a well-maintained natural scenic trail through a Coastal Douglas-fir forest with streams, ferns, and wildlife.



EVENTS

Mushroom and Nature Festival

The Annual Mushroom and Nature Festival took place in the Qualicum Beach Civic Centre on the 26th of October, with ANats team members working at the set-up on the 25th

It was, as usual, very well attended, offering the public displays of fungi, an instructional series of notices about fungi prepared by Rosemary Taylor, an assortment of vendor tables, and games for children and adults. The season's proximity to Halloween has inspired us to wear costumes, which adds to the fun.



Two very exotic mushrooms!



Festival greeters.



Terry Taylor, inspiration of the Mushroom Festival.



Autumn Forest Spirit and a Wizard

Christmas Bird Count

Fifty-one ANats observers braved heavy rain and windy weather on December 14th to take part in the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Jeanne Schippers sent this account.

The 35th Annual Christmas Bird Count Held on the 14th of December 2025

Report Jeanne Schippers



The weather was not very conducive to productive birding, lots a rain (12.4 mm fell on Parksville/QB that day) The total Species observed was 113 on count day - above 104 last year - and 4 additional species during count week. The 2025 total bird count of 33,562 was higher than last year's count of 25,649, partially due to an unusually large number of Bonaparte & Unidentified Gulls. The average of the last 10 previous year total count is 27,600. The number of Bird count participants was 78 up from 52 last year.

This year we had low counts for *Western Grebes* 1 compared to 222 last year; *Pine Siskins* 259 from 3,400 last year, avg is 1,700; *Turnstones* 35 near min. ever recorded of 20; *Pileated Woodpeckers* 4, avg is 17 & *California Quails* 6 , avg is 70 , note: both near the min. ever recorded of 2; *Varied Thrush* 8 from 93 last year, avg is 63; *Plovers* 22 ,from 95 last year, avg of 140. No *Ancient Murrelets* were found this year, compared to 163 last year (probably due to low visibility)

There were a bit above average numbers for *Wigeons*, *Nuthatches*, *Pacific Loons*, *Trumpeter Swans* & *Collared Doves*; the trend for *Bonaparte Gulls* that seems to have started last year, has exploded to 8,900 this year compared to a 10 year average of 145.

This year we saw 5 *White Throated Sparrows*, having only ever seen a single one three times over the years. Often not seen: *Sanderlings* 1, from 0 last year and then there is this elusive *Yellow Billed Loon* that seems to be seen once in a while, and during count week but not on count day....

New/never recorded before on the Christmas Count were *Shearwaters* 262, *Clark's Grebe* 1 & *Swamp Sparrow* 1 Canada Geese 1614 are steady at around mid range.

The 23 feeder count participants (47 last year), put in 46 hours of effort and saw 866 birds (last year 2,097)..

Support for the feeder count was provided by: [Buckerfield's](#) * [Mulberry Bush Bookstore](#) * [Cultivate Garden & Gift](#) * [North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre](#)

We had our traditional Potluck on December 18th, but bad weather and possibly the flu kept many members away. And as usual thank-you to everyone who brought varied & delicious number of dishes, and to Toni & Ron Wyckoff and the helping crew . Toni came up with a challenging quiz which perplexed many of us!!!

Our results from this year's 126th National Audubon Society Christmas count have been submitted to the National Audubon Society, where they will be used to inform conservation strategies and scientific research, including studies on climate change impacts on bird populations. B C led the way in Canada last year with 99 counts, making it one of the most active provinces:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

Summary of the BC Christmas Bird Counts: www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/Christmas-bird-count



Thank you to Arrowsmith Naturalists members, the rest of the birding community and to private landowners who allowed access to their farm & forest. Lynne Brookes, coordinated the Feeder Count, and Susan Knoerr & Jeanne Schippers did the organizing and compiling. Anyone Interested in putting their name forward for future counts please e.mail Arrowsmith Naturalists arrowsmithnaturalists@gmail.com

Susan Knoerr sent this tabulation.

2025 Christmas Bird Count - Summary Date Dec 14, 2025
Parksville Qualicum Beach 33rd Christmas Bird Count (Audubon 124th)

51 Observers (in field)		Households with Feeder Counts			
Temp 7 to 12	Wind E Velocity high at times	Time Start 7 a.m.	Finish 5 p.m.		Water Condition
Snow 0 inches	Circle A.M. Rain heavy at times	Circle Rain P.M.	Still Moving	open	open
Observer Effort				Observer distance	
Minimum # of parties 8	# hours (on foot) 42.6	# hours (by car) 21.12	# hours (by boat) 1.25	km distance (on foot)	55.09
Maximum # of parties 14	# hours (on foot)	# hours (by car)	# hours (by boat)	distance (by car)	371.7
				distance (by boat)	1
				distance (cycling)	
Field Notes Req'd If Not Listed		#	#	#	#
Snow Goose	19	Dunlin	348	American Crow	411
Gr. White-fronted Goose		Wilson's Snipe		Common Raven	333
Brant	143	Spotted Sandpiper		Chestnut-backed Chick.	234
Cackling Goose	67	Greater Yellowlegs	5	Bush-tit	54
Canada Goose	1461	Common Murres	281	Golden-crowned Kinglet	180
Mute Swan		Pigeon Guillemot	1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	36
Trumpeter Swan	432	Marbled Murrelet	8	Red-breasted Nuthatch	83
Tundra Swan		Ancient Murrelet	cw	Brown Creeper	17
Wood Duck	7	Rhinoceros Auklet	27	Pacific Wren	28
Northern Shoveler	1	Short-tailed Shearwater	112	Marsh Wren	2
Gadwall	7	Parasitic Jaeger	1	Bewick's Wren	8
Eurasian Wigeon	3	Glaucous Gull		American Dipper	3
American Wigeon	2362	Bonaparte's Gull	8900	European Starling	1038
Mailard	2047	Short-billed Gull	817	Townsend's Solitaire	
Northern Pintail	70	Western Gull		Varied Thrush	6
Green-winged Teal	99	Ring-billed Gull	1	American Robin	206
Eurasian (Common Teal)		California Gull	4	Hermit Thrush	
Common Pochard		Herring Gull		Cedar Waxwing	5
Canvasback	1	Iceland (Thayer's) Gull	109	House Sparrow	18
Redhead		Glaucous-winged Gull	1203	American Pipit	
Ring-necked Duck	34	Red-throated Loon		Evening Grosbeak	39
Greater Scaup	9	Pacific Loon	1374	House Finch	145
Lesser Scaup	7	Common Loon	76	Purple Finch	13
Harlequin Duck	77	Yellow-billed Loon	cw	Pine Grosbeak	
Surf Scoter	369	Brandt's Cormorant	3	Red Crossbill	cw
White-winged Scoter	35	Pelagic Cormorant	25	Common Redpoll	
Black Scoter	10	Double-crested Cormorant	28	Pine Siskin	247
Long-tailed Duck	5	Great Blue Heron	26	American Goldfinch	
Bufflehead	477	Turkey Vulture	cw	Fox Sparrow	13
Common Goldeneye	197	Golden Eagle		Dark-eyed Junco	521
Barrow's Goldeneye	80	Northern Harrier		White-crowned Sparrow	80
Hooded Merganser	67	Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Golden-crowned Sparrow	101
Common Merganser	138	Cooper's Hawk	4	White-throated Sparrow	5
Red-breasted Merganser	140	Bald Eagle (adult)	87	Savannah Sparrow	
Ruddy Duck		Bald Eagle (immature)	9	Song Sparrow	83
California Quail	6	Bald Eagle (unaged)	93	Lincoln's Sparrow	
Ring-necked Pheasant		Bald Eagle Total	189	Swamp Sparrow	1
Ruffed Grouse		Red-tailed Hawk	7	Spotted Towhee	81
Pied-billed Grebe		Barn Owl		Western Meadowlark	1
Horned Grebe	84	Western Screech-Owl		Red-winged Blackbird	246
Red-necked Grebe	41	Great Horned Owl	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	
Eared Grebe		Northern Pygmy Owl		Brewer's Blackbird	583
Western Grebe	1	Barred Owl	1	Orange-crowned Warbler	
Clark's Grebe	1	Short-eared Owl		Yellow-rumped Warbler	3
Rock Pigeon	3	Northern Saw-whet Owl		Townsend's Warbler	
Band-tailed Pigeon		Belted Kingfisher	11	Palm Warbler	
Eurasian Collared-dove	88	Red-breasted Sapsucker	2	Unidentified Cormorant	3
Mourning Dove		Downy Woodpecker	6	duck sp	30
Anna's Hummingbird	63	Hairy Woodpecker	5	Herring Glaucous hybrid	
Virginia Rail	1	Pileated Woodpecker	2	Glaucous/Western hybrid	
American Coot		Northern Flicker	71	Unidentified Larus	15
Black Oystercatcher	32	American Kestrel	3	Unidentified passerine	
Black-bellied Plover	22	Merlin		Unidentified woodpecker	1
Killdeer	37	Peregrine Falcon	1	Unidentified shearwater	150
Black Turnstone	35	Hutton's Vireo	1	Unidentified sparrows	
Surfbird		Northern Shrike	2	Unidentified Gull	5195
Sanderling	1	Steller's Jay	30		

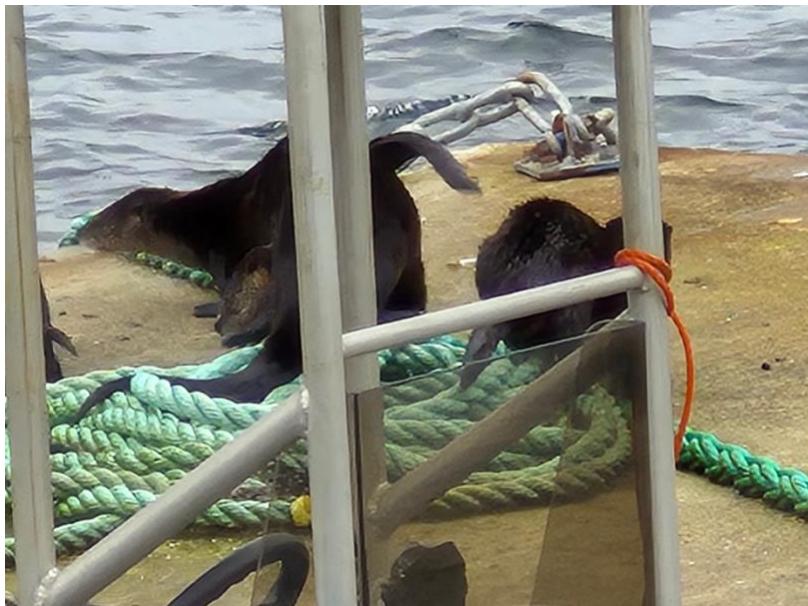
High Count
Low Count
Unusual
New This Year

Total Number of Birds	32,696
Total Species on Count Day	112
Additional Species Count Week	4

Nanaimo Christmas Bird Count

Helen Davidson sends us her account of curious events at the Nanaimo Christmas Bird Count:

The Nanaimo Christmas Bird Count almost did not happen. The organizers stepped back and no one stepped up. But suddenly on December 28, with less than one day's notice, it happened. I was counting with David Helem's team and in the late morning we found ourselves at the Seaspan terminal in Cedar. There was a small floating dock down from where we had set up our scopes and a passing worker asked us not to go down there without flotation devices. We were fine with that, but as we looked across the channel towards Gabriola Island, five otters came swimming in and clambered up on the small dock. There was a large coil of heavy rope on the dock and, inexplicably to us, the otters proceeded to poop and pee all over the rope. Nowhere else, just on the rope. Once they had taken care of their business, they slid back off the dock and swam away. We shook our heads in wonder and turned around only to see five California Quail, running across a small boat launch ramp into the shrubbery. Again we shook our heads, thinking it was a very strange place to see quail, right at the waterfront, on a busy industrial piece of land. It is always wonderful to get out for a bird count because you just never know what you're going to see! Try it sometime, extra eyes are always welcome, even if not experienced. It is a great way to get out in nature!



Christmas Potluck

ANats marked the holiday season with a fine potluck. In addition to our membership's deep knowledge of natural history, the potluck always shows our ability to assemble a wonderful assortment of delicacies.

We formed into teams to solve Toni Wyckoff's very challenging quiz.



As an especially welcome event, we had our richly deserved Champion of Nature Awards. This year they went to Roger Simms and Maggie Little. Dave Hutchings MC'd the event with his characteristic fluency and graciousness.



ROGER SIMMS: Champion of Nature Award December 18, 2025

How many of us have maintained a passionate interest from childhood to "senior-hood"?
Roger Simms— Come on down

Growing up in England, Roger developed a curiosity about birds. It evolved into a desire to identify species and their distinctive habitats.

In 1960, Roger emigrated to Canada, where his Banking career let him explore all the fantastic bird habitat in Ontario. Places like Long Point Bird Observatory, and Point Pelee. All on the lovely shores of Lake Erie. While in Fort Frances, he was able to observe a major migration route of North America. Of course he took his son Jonathan along to catch the BIRDING BUG too.

Roger was asked to contribute data to a Breeding Bird Atlas of Ontario. During his time in Corunna and Sarnia, Roger was an active member in Lambton Wildlife.

Roger and his lovely wife Maggie retired to Oceanside in 2002 where he soon became an active member in Arrowsmith Nats. He also served as our President for 6 years starting in 2003. We don't let our new members even get their feet wet when we rope them in to the President position. In 2005, Roger established our stewardship at the Englishman River Estuary. Over the years he has done the CBC, Brant Count, Backyard feeder count, Costal Bird count for 18 years. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has 30 years of Data from Roger.

Every spring he took on the Great Canadian Birdathon, raising money for Birds Canada and The Arrowsmith Nats. He conducted the GCB in places like Hungary, Sweden and the BC Interior. He would solicit pledges from club members, other clubs and friends. A portion of each dollar was earmarked by Roger to support the Arrowsmith Nats.

Over the years he raised \$3500 for us.

During the pandemic, Roger was awarded a selection of birding tours by Birds Canada. Because of Covid his first choice of Costa Rica was not meant to be, he stayed in Canada and took the tour to Point Pelee, and Southern Ontario, his old stomping grounds.

It is an absolute pleasure to present this Champion of Nature Award to Roger.

MAGGIE LITTLE: Champion of Nature Award December 18, 2025

The next award goes to an individual who has been a fixture of our organization for 23 years. Now we don't usually go back in people's history but this lady was born in Rhodesia Africa. Maggie Little, I'm talking about you.

Maggie's fascinating life in Africa really got her close to nature. She has many great stories to tell. Once she finished her schooling she moved to London England for her formal training in Physiotherapy. Here she met another of our members, Allison Bakker studying nursing. In their spare time, the two of them hitchhiked all over Europe gaining many experiences. They both traveled back to Africa to work. When the political unrest was getting dicey it was time to move back to England again.

Maggie moved to Canada where she found an interesting life on Vancouver Island, raising 4 kids, sheep, goats and a menagerie of animals on a farm in Errington.

The North Island Wildlife Centre was close by and a great place to volunteer.

When Knut, a black bear cub from the mainland was brought in, Maggie was on 3hr bottle duty. It's not easy being a surrogate mother to a bear. Knut lived for 25 years at the Centre.

She was the ultimate TREE HUGGER. When the logging company was flattening Clayoquot Forests in the 80's and 90's. She and her friends were out there demonstrating. She says she never got arrested.

Maggie joined the Arrowsmith Naturalists in Nov 2002. It didn't take her long to get involved in all things nature. She helped Roger with the 18 years of Coastal Bird Count, Counted Canada Geese, CBC., Brant count, She even did the Beached Bird Survey every month for many years.

She organized and led outings, was chief steward at the ERE for 6 years and kept a record of all the hours ANats worked. She was a Warden of a forested area in Bowser. **Ask her about the time they found a grow-op.**

When asked for volunteers Maggie is the first to put her hand up.

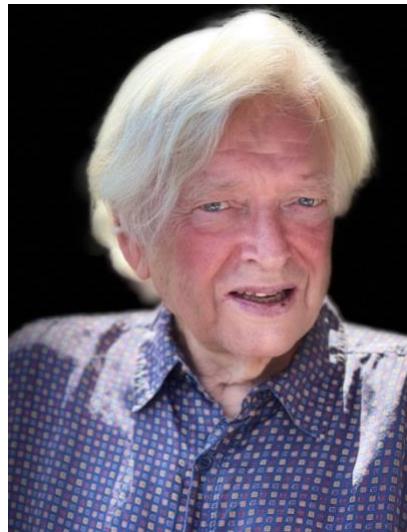
Champion of Nature—Tom Constable

This year, ANats has added a third Champion. Tom is experiencing some severe challenges to his health, and we have decided that he should know now how very much his contributions have meant to us all.

Helen Davidson's comments sum up our feelings well:

There is a tree at the edge of the path to Hamilton Marsh in which someone has carved the initials "TC". Now, I know Tom would never have done this but I think of him every time I see it and it makes me smile to remember all his jokes and laughter on many trails with the ANats. And don't get me started on the t-shirts...!!

Tom has meant a great deal to the ANats through the years and is a very worthy recipient of the Champion for Nature award. He has monitored and maintained our club Facebook page for many years but is now easing into his second retirement! Many stewardship activities have benefited from his cheerful involvement. He has emceed past club picnics and was instrumental in the coup of getting Chef Paul Moran, fresh off his win of Top Chef Canada, to be a speaker at our Mushroom Festival in 2019. Tom has led many outings for the ANats and who hasn't admired the way he can pull off a mushroom hat as he did as our prized greeter at several Mushroom Festivals? Be it a rainy outing or a particularly difficult stewardship day Tom often is the supplier of fun and laughter to brighten the day. Many thanks to him for his contributions over the years!



Tom



Tom and Evelyn



Adventure Travel

STEWARDSHIP

Our traditional stewardship of nature in the Oceanside region continues.

Englishman River Estuary and Mariner Way

Dave Hutchings provides guidance to us and organisation in tending this area. Here is his report:

2026:Winter into Spring

As we move into 2026, our stewardship of the Englishman River Estuary (ERE) for The Nature Trust of BC moves into its twenty-second year, but with an extended mandate. As many know, the area under our watch has been extended to include the north side of the estuary at the west end of Mariner Way.

Over the past one and one-half years, much has been done to naturalize the exposed Mariner Way site with native plant species typically found on ocean spits along the eastern coast of Vancouver Island. Soils in some sections of the site were amended with a bark mulch- based medium, into which were planted a variety of native trees, shrubs and forbs which were watered weekly during the hot, dry months. Despite some attrition (some suspected vandalism, some damaged by deer), many of the larger seedling trees survived, as well as most of the shrubs and smaller evergreen seedlings. And, encouragingly, a good number of arbutus, shore pine and fir seedlings from mature trees which existed on the site have seeded naturally. However, to complicate our efforts, it seems that the introduced soil amendment brought with it a multitude of weed species and grasses which we will need to remove.

To supplement our planting, Yana Maltais, Liz Thorne and Marion Jamieson have collected seed from other mature tree, shrub, and forb species common to the Estuary, and have begun to disperse the seed in selected areas and also to propagate seedling plants for later planting. Hopefully, by using seed from the area, the resulting plants will be better adapted to the specific conditions of Mariner Way. Over the next few months, part of our task will be to continue nurturing the newly-germinated seedlings and plants, as well as maintaining the existing plants.

Our other immediate task is to dig out and compost the many thistles and non-native grasses which been introduced by the imported soil. The thistles, in particular, must be removed before they begin their prolific seed cycle. And, of course, there is the ever-present Scotch broom which persists.

And speaking of Scotch broom, sometime soon we will have to return to the southern side of the Estuary. Although we have removed virtually all of the mature broom, new seedlings crop up each year and these need to be removed before they mature. Also, any mature broom which remains will need to be removed before seed is set.

Another restoration site which “waits in the wings” is the recently-acquired addition to the ERE, adjacent to Shelly Road. Any work to restore this area awaits the obligatory archeological testing and review. Once the review is complete, a restoration plan and a work schedule can be drawn up.

It need not be said that the work we do as stewards is important to maintaining Nature’s beauty. We need areas where the air is clear and fragrant in every season of the year, where adults and children alike can marvel at the change of seasons and Nature’s creatures can thrive. Will you join us as we continue our stewardship the ERE? Whatever time and effort you can contribute will make a difference, not just now but for the future.



Thistle removal and seeding at Mariner Way

French Creek Estuary Nature Preserve

ANats have been engaged in three stewardship projects in the FCENP.

The area that was cleared of invasives and planted with native shrubs and trees in November 2023 continued to receive weekly watering through September.

Clearance of invasive species continues, with cardboard spread over cleared areas to inhibit regrowth.



We must acknowledge the generous help of Warren Kinney, who has loaded invasives into his truck and taken them to the RDN transfer station, and helped with the transport of cardboard to the site.

A third project involved resloping a section of the pond shoreline, allowing wildlife a gentler access to the pond. Silt fencing was then installed to control sediment runoff into the pond. A mixture of soil, compost, and mulch was spread over the planting area, and perimeter fencing to protect the planting area from wildlife, dogs and people. Finally, a selection of native vegetation was planted and native seeds spread over the area.



The survey of reptile populations in the FCENP ended on October 31st, with a fine report provided by Elke Wind. It is posted on the ANats website.

The survey of amphibian populations was temporarily discontinued due to wintry conditions but will resume shortly when (we hope) we have warmer weather. Surveys began in November with a training session led by Elke Wind. Volunteers formed into groups of two or three investigating the coverboards that were deployed some months ago. We can now try to determine which areas are most used by the several salamander species we might expect to find. The data we collect will help inform restoration work, add to our understanding of biodiversity on site, and also serve as a baseline survey with which to compare species and numbers increase (decrease) as we improve/protect habitats for salamanders and plant native plants to support their arthropod & other small prey.

ADVOCACY

Arrowsmith Naturalists continue to advocate for preservation of land that is vulnerable and that supports vulnerable populations.

We have made donations toward the purchase of the 1 hectare adjacent to the French Creek Nature Preserve and taken part in informational sessions supporting its preservation.

ANATS NEWSLETTER JAN 2026

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU to the Arrowsmith Naturalists Club Executive and Members for your generous \$1,000.00 donation in support of the Save Estuary Land Society's, Viking Way Fundraising Campaign - it means the world to us! Your donation helps protect the Great Blue Heron Colony (which raised 51 chicks from 2023-2025) and to preserve the critical ecosystems, irreplaceable habitats, and biodiversity of the French Creek Estuary Nature Preserve and surrounding areas.

Together let's create a lasting natural legacy for future generations, ensuring that one of BC's most threatened ecosystems remains a thriving refuge for wildlife.

Photo by Save Estuary Land Society



Moving Ahead Together

- Qualicum and Snaw-Naw-As First Nations sent a united letter to the BC Parks Foundation asking them to lead a campaign to acquire the remaining one hectare of their ancestral lands to add to the French Creek Estuary Nature Preserve.
- Dr Andrew Day, CEO of the BC Parks Foundation, advised the Save Estuary Land Society to fundraise and then will consider hosting a crowdfunding campaign if support is first demonstrated through community donations.
- MP Gord Johns and MLA Stephanie Higginson provided letters of support for the land acquisition.
- Mr Tom Osborne, RDN Director, Recreation and Parks, stated the Parks Department will manage the land upon Board approval.
- The property owner of the Viking Way one hectare is willing to sell.

Over \$35,000 in funds raised in two months – Next Target Goal is \$50,000

Donations gratefully received by e-transfer, cheque or through Canada Helps.

Please see website for more info: saveestuariesociety.ca

Email: saveestuaryland@gmail.com Phone: 250 248 4548

The Save Estuary Land Society is a registered charity No: 786588079 RR 0001

In addition, we have donated funds towards the purchase of Hamilton Marsh, guided walks in that area, and attended and spoke at film screenings in its support. Many of us attended a recent RDN council meeting to support its purchase and have been very pleased to learn that the application for purchase has advanced. Mosaic, which manages the property for Island Timber, has reduced the purchase price by 2 million dollars—down to \$28 million. The closure date for the purchase is March 31. Efforts continue to secure donations. Nanaimo and Area Land Trust is accepting donations at <https://nalt.bc.ca/hamilton-marsh/>. MABRI is

accepting pledges <https://www.mabr.ca/hamiltonmarsh> (Don't be put off by the January 30th closing date—it's no longer applicable.)

ANATS NATURE NOTES

Toni Wyckoff writes in praise and defence of juncos:

THE UNDERESTIMATED JUNCO

I hear it all the time "All I have is Juncos eating the bird seed, where are all the other birds?" I too was miffed "No you can't have those peanuts, I put them out for the Chickadees and Nuthatches!"

One January, 9 years ago I was raking leaves in the back yard when all the birds were squawking around my head and jumping from tree to tree. I followed them around the garden shed to a Douglas Fir. There on a branch was a Northern Pygmy Owl with a junco in its talons. My first reaction was "Oh thank goodness it wasn't a Chickadee or Nuthatch."

As the years have gone by and I have watched 89 different species in the yard, I have come to admire our little Dark-eyed Junco. They don't just eat peanuts, sunflower seeds and suet. They scour the yard for weed seeds, go around the house footing eating ants and spiders, digging bugs out of the flower bed, then they are scouting the eavestrough for anything crawling, always accurate at jumping up and catching moths and beetles. They vary their diet when feeding young which is healthier for them, then just eating feeder seed.

A Junco has a small beak so it likes the smaller seeds that the other birds don't eat. When they are dancing around on the patio as I sit and drink my morning coffee, I chop up the peanuts in tiny pieces for them.

They are resourceful in reusing abandoned nests. They like Robin and Violet-green swallow nests. The centre is rebuilt to fit their body and it is cosier for the babies. Both parents are attentive. The male will click at us if we go anywhere around a nest and they really like to nest in the woodshed.

One day I heard a lot of clicking in the side yard. Thinking it was a cat, I walked over and into the trees. The Juncos were right around my head making an awful racket and looking at the ground. I could not see a thing in this leafy understory. Finally I spot a slithering body of a garter snake under the leaves. I had a flyswatter in my hand, so I slipped it under its 3ft long body and flung it out into the yard where it quickly took off. There was only one egg in the ground nest.

The next day there was another cacophony in the same spot. Thinking the snake was back, I ran over and picked up a bigger stick this time. Out of the woods came a big orange cat. It took one look at me and ran.

CBCounts always produce a high number of Dark-eyed Juncos. Ever wonder why? Birds tend to go in big flocks when not nesting. This gives them more of an advantage when a hawk attacks. My yard is often visited by a variety of hawks. It's fun to watch one fly in and then look around with a puzzled look. Yes I know the hawk has to eat too.

The next time you see so many Dark-eyed Juncos at your bird-feeder, please have a little more respect and admiration for this little resilient bird.



Roger Simms has given us an account of the birds who visit his feeder.

At the end of a recent Summer I wrote on my reflections of the various birds coming to our backyard and feeders.

More reflections, this time on the birds either at the feeders and/or in the backyard.

Dark-eyed Juncos are always in the yard, even though most migrate northwards in late Spring. They are often a boisterous and aggressive bird especially towards their own species and other smaller birds. I have always felt that although I have not found any nests that they do breed in the immediate area, but no more than two pairs.

Chestnut-backed Chickadees are cute and energetic. I often see up to 4 or 5 of them. They are local nesters and have at times used our Violet-green Swallow boxes.

Red-breasted Nuthatches. These birds are always present but never more than 3 at a time. They often announce their presence before feeding and will peck rapidly at the peanut feeder.

Woodpeckers. Downy first settle on our Maple tree before coming to a feeder, whether suet, peanut or general mixture of seeds. They never land on the ground.

Hairy Woodpecker, the same comments as the Downy except, of course they are larger.

Pileated Woodpecker as most will know are our largest Woodpecker and they noisily announce their arrival, which usually scares off all the other species. Their main attention is towards the suet feeder or if not they will try any wooden structure first-trees, wooden posts etc.

Sparrows-- During the feeding Season we will see Song, Fox, White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and on very rare occasions White-throated. These are all ground feeders but sometimes just to prove me wrong they will hop up to a raised feeder.

Spotted Towhees usually number 3 or 4 and are again ground feeders but will sometimes fly up to the raised feeder for the mixed seeds.

Steller's Jays have sometimes numbered 5-8, that is very unusual, and this year we have had no more than 4 of them. They are noisy and aggressive and arrive after noisily announcing their arrival.

Northern Flicker once known as either Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted, but now just the Northern Flicker which makes them easier to identify because on Vancouver Island it seems they have continually inter-bred with colouring the mixture of both species.

There are other species, but they are irregular and usually one at a time, such as Bewick's Wren, Brown Creeper, and red-breasted Sapsucker.

All the Blackbirds and others in the Spring, Eurasian-collared Doves, Band-tailed Pigeons, Coopers Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk, rarely Merlin.

My apologies if I have missed any.

Bonnie Mullin enjoyed a recent visit from a distinguished birder and bird photographer:

Greetings Arrowsmith Naturalists: I have known and worked with and known Myrna Pearman for 30 years in Red Deer Alberta. She spent 40 years as Manager and Biologist for Ellis Bird Farm. After retiring from that she has travelled the world taking the most marvellous photographs.

Her recent trip out here was to photograph birds on Vancouver Island, especially at bird feeders as she had been working for Chin Ridge Seeds (Taber, Alberta); so, this was an assignment trip paid by them. They sell their Wild Bird Seed at Buckerfields so she is visiting their stores too.

She and Claudia, another friend from Red Deer, were at my place for a couple of nights. They had just Friday, January 30 to be out getting places for pictures. We visited several spots but especially had a great time at Roger Simms yard. Thanks to all, Bonnie Mullin



Claudia, Roger and Myrna



Bonnie, Maggie and Roger



Myrna

Terry Taylor provides clarification for those of us who have wondered at the numerous trunks that we sometimes see on broadleaf maples.

THE COPPISED MAPLES OF QUALICUM BEACH

Coppicing is a woodland management system that was practiced extensively in Europe for many centuries, in order to produce wood for furniture, lumber and other commodities. Groves of deciduous trees, especially willow, were felled and allowed to regrow new shoots. Shoots were then cut for uses such as furniture construction or were allowed to grow into new trunks to produce lumber. It produced a renewable timber resource and also protected woodland plants and wildlife. Many, but not all, deciduous trees regrow several sucker shoots from stumps. Almost no conifers do this, so it cannot be used for conifer stands.

Our broadleaf maples grow many new shoots from cut stumps. A maple tree growing from seed produces a single trunk. However, if a maple tree is cut down, it grows many new shoots. If left for several decades, these shoots grow into a tree with many trunks. If you hike our local trails you will often see such trees. The tree from seed develops one shoot. This shoot produces chemicals that prevent other shoots from competing with it. This means the tree can grow taller and is more able to outcompete its neighbours in the struggle for sunlight.

When you walk along the Qualicum Beach waterfront, you will pass a slope, across the road, where there is a long row of concrete blocks. This slope has a stand of maples and alders. Even at a distance you can easily see which are the maples. They have many trunks. The alders have only one. If an alder is cut, the stump does not re-grow.

Judging from the size of the trees, they were cut down several decades ago. Technically speaking this is probably not a true coppice because they do not look to be cut for the purpose of a new timber crop, although the result is a coppice type forest. If you look closely at our local surroundings you can see lots of interesting features, such as this.



Sheri Plummer reminds us that we can nominate recipients for Climate Hugs:

Next time you are visiting MABR, have a look at our new Climate Hugs display. Helpful friends of CPOC erected the new bulletin board,

We are looking for submissions of worthy candidates. Just pop your ideas in the envelope at the bottom of the display.



Sylvia Riessner sends us valuable information about fire-proofing our homes.

Planning for resilience

After last summer's wildfires and a persistent drought on Vancouver Island, you probably have some anxiety about what we might face in 2026. Despite the atmospheric rivers we've experienced recently, all the experts seem to agree that the situation isn't likely to improve. So, what can we do to protect our gardens, green spaces and the precious biodiversity we still have on Vancouver Island?

February seems like a great time to look ahead to changes we can make to adapt to changing climate and diminishing water resources. The Firesmart BC "Fire-Resistant Plants" site is a good place to start. The online resource provides a searchable listing of fire resilient plants, organized by type (e.g., Trees, Shrubs, Perennials, etc) and recommended planting areas. The Ignition Zone graphic uses a single family home and yard as a basic planning tool, with colour-coded zones that allow you to plan how to make your own home "fire-resilient". The information is also available in various downloadable documents you can print out (see Resources below).

But my focus is not just on fire resiliency (and water conservation) but how to protect the pollinators and other creatures that find food and shelter in my yard. I have a similar "lens" when I think about "fire-smarting" our urban green spaces and local forests. The native plant and drought-hardy resources I'd already collected in the past needed to be updated to include fire-resilient characteristics. It took a little digging but I found a simple pamphlet that provided a clear framework for my spring planning! Check out "FireSmart for the Regional District of Nanaimo: A Guide to Native Plants". The pamphlet pulls together the essential elements:

- Characteristics of highly flammable plants (what to avoid)
- Characteristics of Fire-resistant plants
- Benefits of native species
- Species to Plant (Shrubs, Groundcover, Perennials & biennials, Bulbs)

And a final resource for the gardeners in our group: Plant of the Month posts from Firesmart BC. With the help of experts like Brian Minter, these posts explore different ways to incorporate fire-resistant plants in your garden. Although not focused on native plants, the ideas may be helpful.

Resources:

Downloadable:

Regional District of Nanaimo, Firesmart Guide to Native Plants - <https://rdn.bc.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/FireSmart%20Guide%20to%20Native%20Plants.pdf>

Firesmart BC Plant Chart Booklet (divided into sections: Trees, Shrubs, Vines & Groundcovers, Grasses, Perennials & biennials, Annuals, Bulbs) https://firesmartbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FSBC_PlantChartBooklet_4A-copy.pdf

Online

- Fire-resistant Plants – Firesmart BC - <https://firesmartbc.ca/landscaping-hub/fire-resistant-plants/>
- Plant of the Month - Current - <https://firesmartbc.ca/landscaping-hub/#fire-resistant-plant-of-the-month>
- Previous posts (organized by plant type) - <https://firesmartbc.ca/previous-firesmart-plants-of-the-month>

And some notes about Pacific Wrens:

Wondering about wrens

Have you ever walked through the woods and heard a bird song that was so melodic and long, that you stopped and started peering into bushes and fallen trees to find the singer? Well, if you did, it might have been a Pacific wren.

Pacific wren, *Troglodytes pacificus*, is a tiny, brown puffball of a bird with a short, cocked (standing straight up) tail, a rounded dark eye with a pale eyebrow (aka supercilium), and a straight, sharp beak that looks like it was made to eat a lot of small insects (which it does).

The first time I saw a Pacific wren, I was walking through an unmanaged forest patch in QB with Kerry B. Her eyes are attuned to bird movement and she'd spotted a small bird flitting from branch to branch (it took me some time to see it too). She began making odd sounds (she calls 'phishing') and the bird actually held still and peered at us. During other forest walks I've heard their songs and been amused to see how cocky the male looks when belting out the notes.

This Fall I had a different experience that made me think I'd discovered another type of wren. As I walked trails near Bowser, on a gloomy wet day, I kept seeing a small, dark bird, hopping on the ground, moving quickly across fallen, rotting logs or peeking out from roots around big trees. I couldn't see any markings but I did clearly see a wren-type tail cocked up at its back. I had read somewhere that there were four species commonly seen on southern Vancouver Island so I took a look through my bird guides when I got home. I found an entry in Sibley's that described the behaviour I'd seen; the guide entry said it was a "winter wren." I checked the BC Breeding Bird Atlas and found that winter wren is an eastern bird—my Sibley's guide was so old it didn't include the 2008 report ([Toews and Irwin 2008, 2012](#)) that the winter wren is NOT the wren we see on the Island. Researchers found both birds in one area close to the Rockies where their territories overlap. They distinguished the two based primarily on the distinctive differences in song. And two years later (2010) Sibley's published an update and described in detail the intricacy and beauty of the Pacific wren's songs. (Final note: the male has more than a hundred songs!)

If you are intrigued by the Pacific wren's song, here's more to learn:

<https://www.sibleyguides.com/2010/08/distinguishing-pacific-and-winter-wrens/>

<https://ebird.org/species/pacwre1>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/listen-every-pitch-change-pacific-wren-call>



Photos by Guy Monty

BOOK REVIEWS

Kerry Baker enjoyed reading Zoë Schlanger's [The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth](#)

"What is a plant?" she asked. Every chapter in this book impressed me with all the new research being done into plants. Zoë travelled the world visiting top biologists to talk about their new discoveries. She even made one herself while in Chile. My favourite chapter.

I no longer think a plant just sits in the ground waiting to grow. They are actively engaged in their future. There are so many different ways to survive and thrive that are rather surprising. Mind blown! I highly recommend this book. You will be thinking about it for a long time.

Sylvia Reissner reviewed a classic:

Gathering Mosses by Robin Wall Kimmerer

A collection of essays, threaded together by deep experience, scientific and indigenous knowledge, and infused with a sense of wonder, the book, Gathering Mosses, by Robin Wall Kimmerer, never fails to intrigue and educate. Although the book was published in 2003 and reprinted 20 times or more, I have reread it more than once since I discovered it four years ago. The award-winning author introduces us to the complexity of what we might think of as a simple plant. The line drawing of the life cycle of a typical moss (p23) shows the complexity of reproductive structures (and that doesn't include the structures of asexual reproduction). Her description of the randomness of fertilization helps us realize that the success of mosses is somewhat miraculous. The sperm is short-lived and dependent on water and often fails to meet up with the female eggs. A further complexity is explained later in the book, as Kimmerer explains factors that affect successful reproduction in the micro-world of the "boundary layer" (the warmer, still place between the land and the air currents) where mosses can thrive. Kimmerer believes in the power of scientific research and asking questions about why or how, when and where. Yet she also demonstrates the value of indigenous approaches that involve listening, exploring and direct experience. She introduces students to the language of the microscope; so many terms to describe different leaf edges and textures that build a relationship with the plants and their environments. Leaves with large, coarse teeth are "dentate"; fine even teeth are "serrulate". Yet she encourages students to carry a hand lens to slow down and observe mosses constantly and think about what they see. She thinks of some mosses, like the diverse species of *Dicranum*, by the hairstyles they evoke (*D.monatum*-corkscrew curls or *D.flagellare*-buzzcuts)

Each essay focuses on different aspects of mosses, shared through stories about her research enlivened by personal anecdotes of friends, family and her experiences. Kimmerer describes how mosses succeed by their responses to the challenges of competition or environment and the power of "smallness" and ability to live where other organisms cannot. She marvels at the ability of mosses (and, surprisingly, tardigrades "waterbears" and rotifers) to dry out completely, withstand extremes of temperatures and seem dead (anabiosis) and still be resuscitated. But her stories also illuminate the complex connections mosses have with their immediate environments, the micro-creatures that live within their structures, and their effects (presence or absence) on entire ecosystems.

The final essays in Gathering Mosses present deeply moving stories of the impact of our careless destruction, clearcutting forests or ripping apart ancient moss-covered landscapes to line flower baskets or decorate the estates of wealthy people. While research tells us about the important role that mosses and forests have in our world, it seems that not enough people understand the message.

Note: I've been told that the audio recording of her book is also popular but I encourage you to find a copy of her book as it includes simple line drawings that make it easier to understand the moss structures she describes.

COMING EVENTS

- Feb. 7 - Seedy Saturday, Qualicum Beach Civic Centre—10:00-3:30
- Feb. 13-16 Great Backyard Bird Count see <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/great-backyard-bird-count>
- Feb. 16 – BC Family Day, Coombs Fairgrounds—1:00-4:00
- Feb. 21 – Power of Stewardship Event, Qualicum Beach Civic Centre—9:00-12:00
- Mar. 5 – Brant Wildlife Children’s Festival, Qualicum Beach Elementary School Gymnasium—3:00-4:00
- Apr. 10-13 – Brant Wildlife Festival <https://www.mabr.ca/brantfestival>