




GO Restore!

Newsletter of the Garry Oak Restoration Project in Saanich

Spring/Summer 2005

ISSUE 4

This site is part of the
GARRY OAK RESTORATION PROJECT
towards ecosystem restoration and education.
Sponsored by: The Corporation of the District of Saanich
Environment Canada
Restoration of Natural Systems
The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society
Volunteer efforts by local individuals
and community groups



For more information please phone: 475-5475
or www.gorpsaanich.com

Look for new signs coming soon to a site near you!

GORP is in the season of monitoring, inventories and training on our sites. This is a sensitive time for many species and education plays an important role in protecting these sites. You will find some great educational events on page 4 to get you out enjoying Garry oak ecosystems. In August we'll start gearing up for our high season for restoration - so get your pulling arm ready!

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At Risk in Our Communities

Garry oak ecosystems are unique for many reasons, including their incredible biodiversity. For example, did you know that there are more plant species in Garry oak ecosystems than any other terrestrial ecosystem in British Columbia? At the same time, the limited area covered by Garry oak ecosystems has one of the fastest growing human populations in western North America. This contributes to a very high number of species at risk – presently sitting at 114 species (and growing).

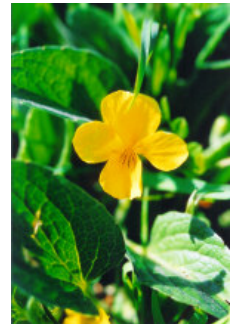
“Species at Risk” are assessed at provincial and federal levels, each with their own risk categories. There is a Canadian listing for species through COSEWIC (the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). Species listed as “at risk” by COSEWIC are categorized as:



Propertyus Duskywing (*Erynnis propertyus*)
Blue-listed in BC
Photo: D. Lock

- Extinct** • no longer exists
- Extirpated** • no longer exists in the wild in Canada
- Endangered** • facing imminent extinction or extirpation
- Threatened** • likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed
- Special Concern** • particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events

In BC, the provincial listings for Species at Risk were created in 1992 through the BC Wildlife Act. The Red-List includes BC species that are extirpated, endangered or threatened (or are candidates for these categories). The Blue-List includes species that are vulnerable or of special concern.



Yellow Montaine Violet (*Viola praemorsa*),
Red-listed in BC;
Nationally “Threatened”
photo: K. McCuish

To date, the Garry Oak Restoration Project has identified at least 8 species at risk in the GORP sites. There are also more species at risk that have been historically recorded at these sites. These species require special considerations during restoration efforts.

GORP has been working with local experts to develop special plans to manage the species at risk on our sites. Our volunteers also receive training to help them identify native flora and fauna on the sites and help us to keep track of species at risk and their essential habitat requirements.



For more information on species at risk in Garry oak ecosystems visit the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team website: www.goert.ca and the Conservation Data Centre website: <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>.



Site Profile: Mt Tolmie Park

Mt. Tolmie Park is a well-known gem of a natural park in Saanich. What many people may not know is that there is an active ecological restoration program at Mt. Tolmie to restore the Garry oak meadows and rocky outcroppings. Since 1995 the Mt. Tolmie Conservancy Association has been working hard to remove invasive plants and raise awareness of the need to protect Mt. Tolmie. In 1999, a section of the park became a site of the Garry Oak Restoration Project. Both GORP and the Mt. Tolmie Conservancy Association now work together to protect and restore Mt. Tolmie.



The GORP site is located on either side of Mayfair Drive at the first parking area on the way up the hill. When the restoration site was chosen, one side of Mayfair Drive was heavily infested with Scotch broom, and the other to a lesser extent. Today, the broom is much more under control,

though it is necessary to work hard at this each year. The restoration site has also been undergoing removal of many different species of ornamental plants that were planted on the site a number of decades ago as a “beautification project”.

The GORP site steward for Mt. Tolmie, Dave Lock, knows Mt. Tolmie very intimately as he is also the president of the Mt. Tolmie Conservancy Association and spends much of his time educating others, removing invasives and mapping natural features throughout the whole park. He is an extremely dedicated volunteer who is also a teacher at Mt. Doug High School.

Mt. Tolmie Park: GORP site at Mayfair Drive off Cedar Hill Cross Road

Dave Lock:
Mt. Tolmie Site Steward



In was in early February when I received the benediction: the return of the Satin-flowers in Mt. Tolmie Park. They are the “reigning queen of the genus” (Clark) and to enjoy their exquisite beauty provides ample reward for the many hours of broom bashing during our damp and chilly winter days.

Looking back, I realize how obsessed I can get with pulling broom germinates. After three hours of “bashing” my hands are usually too sore to continue, but when I return home my mind won’t let me stop and I’m still at it many hours later. Even my Oak Bay High environment club members remark how easy it is to get caught up in the task. They rarely want to quit, even on the wettest of days.

The east side of the Mt. Tolmie GORP site was first cleared of mature broom in January 1997 and this site has seen removal of thousands of seedlings every year since. Each year brings about a reduction of the seed bank and maybe in fifty years our work will nearly be done. One park visitor remarked to me that it was a war of attrition. Will the broom bashers outlast the broom?

Now that it’s spring I look forward to seeing the effects of our restoration work. Every year there is more diversity in the meadow. Camas, spring gold, fawn lilies and shootingstar have made a significant recovery. Last year I discovered our first occurrence of *Allium acuminatum* and our first chocolate lily. This April the chocolate lily count increased by seven. I use an aerial photo of the GORP site and a GPS to determine the coordinates of sightings. Maintaining an inventory of this data is essential for future reference and to assess our progress.

Each spring I am rewarded, rejuvenated, and restored by the beauty of our Garry oak meadows and it is more than enough to get me ready for another season of broom bashing in Mt. Tolmie Park.

- Dave Lock



The Disappearing Seas

Camassia quamash & *Camassia leichtlinii*

One of the most identifiable and historically significant species found in Garry oak ecosystems is the camas. Creating a sea of blue during flowering season in many of our Garry oak remnant areas, camas meadows have an important history both with First Nations and as a draw to early European settlers. Growing in local meadows and on grassy slopes, there are actually two species of the native *Camassia* lily.

The common camas (*Camassia quamash*) and great camas (*Camassia leichtlinii*) are very similar, though the great camas is larger, varies somewhat in its flower from common camas and tends to flower a few weeks later. Pojar and MacKinnon, in their book *Plants of Coastal British Columbia*, describe camas as “pale to deep blue, occasionally white”. There is also a white death camas (*Zygadenus venenosus*) with smaller, denser flowers and not common in this area. The bulbs and leaves of the death camas are poisonous to humans and animals.



Camassia leichtlinii

At one time, camas meadows were very common and widespread throughout Victoria, which was known as “Camosun” or “place to gather camas”. The camas was historically an important food staple and trade item for local First Nations. In 1868 Gilbert Sproat wrote that “one of the bitterest regrets of the natives is that the encroachment of whites is rapidly depriving them of their crops of this useful and almost necessary plant [camas].”

Camas meadows were cared for and passed down through First Nations families. Cultivation included weeding, removing stones and controlled burning of meadows. Camas bulbs were harvested during or just after flowering using pointed digging sticks. The bulbs were steamed for at least 24 hours, changing this carbohydrate from inulin to fructose, making it sweet and easily digestible.

Today, Garry oak ecosystems, including camas meadows, are still disappearing at an alarming rate. GORP sites with camas remnants include Playfair Park, Mt. Tolmie, Camas Park and Chatterton Hill.



Introducing: Carolyn MacDonald

Carolyn MacDonald, Chair of the GORP Steering Committee, is the Environmental Education Officer for the Saanich Planning Department. Carolyn’s position at Saanich includes community outreach and environmental education support for Municipal staff and departments. She also coordinates projects such as the Native Plant Salvage Program, Our Backyard newsletter and facilitates stewardship processes in the community.

After five years of serving this important function, the District of Saanich and GORP will be losing Carolyn for a year at the end of June. She, Michael and their 8 year old son, Bryn, are expecting a baby in July.

Carolyn has been the wheels and the driver behind GORP - constantly making things happen and ensuring that what happens is done well. I am certain the municipal government will also miss Carolyn who has a rich background in environmental education and natural history interpretation.

Carolyn’s interests, besides her family, are gardening (she has started a native plant garden at her new home), kayaking, writing and traveling. She looks forward to doing more of the above, but in particular, spending time with Bryn and her new baby. We wish her the very best. And, we will miss her positive energy and enthusiasm over the next year.

- Pat Johnston



UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Victoria Butterfly Count

June 18th - 19th
Contact Coordinator James Miskelly at 477-0490



Connecting for Conservation in the CRD

June 25th, 9 am - 4:30 pm
Arbutus/Queenswood Room
Cadboro Commons Building
University of Victoria
To participate, contact
Habitat Acquisition Trust at
995-2428



Garry Oak Ecosystems Display @ Show

July 28th - August 1st
The Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) will be taking part in the Victoria Flower and Garden Show. The show is in a new location, Topaz Park. Please visit us at our display, which will be adjacent to a small patch of Garry oaks near the main entrance.



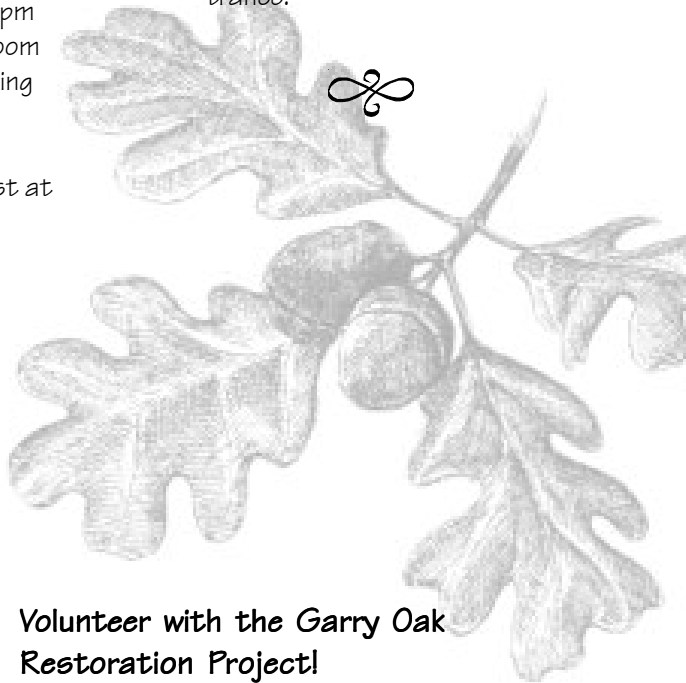
Biological Invasions: Ecological, Social and Economic Impact of Introduced Species

August 15th-19th
8:30 am - 4:30 pm
UVic Restoration of Natural Systems Program
Instructor:
Dr. Purnima Govindarajulu
For more information:
Donna Bracke at
dbracke@uvsc.uvic.ca or
721-7797



Native Plant Salvage Program Orientation

Monday, June 20th
7 - 8:30 pm
*registration required
An orientation session for new program members. Program brochure and member forms available on the saanich website (www.saanich.ca)



Volunteer with the Garry Oak Restoration Project!

Gear up for fall and plan to join GORP's volunteer crew. Most of the active restoration takes place in the fall and winter. Spring and summer are good for monitoring, inventories, education and pure enjoyment!

For more information contact:
Pat Johnston at 595-5600 or
patj@islandnet.com



Guided Bird Walks

Swan Lake Nature Centre
Sundays & Wednesdays @ 9 am
Bring your binoculars and meet in the parking lot. Donations appreciated.

Submissions and questions can be sent to the Editor:

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