Scouting for Scoters in Stanley Park

There’s nothing subtle about the annual return of the wintering Surf Scoters, is there? Boy howdy, you can walk around the seawall for weeks and weeks after summer’s end and not see one. Then, one day...

sometime in mid-October, maybe preceded by a few pioneers, the saltchuck along the seawall becomes covered by dense crowds made up of thousands of these portly black sea-ducks with the technicolor clown face and the ululating take-off. And they’ll be here until they leave for their northern breeding grounds in late April and early May. So why winter here? And why do we see the flocks chilling only at certain locations along the seawall?

The answer to those two questions is hinted at by the pale drifts you see along the beaches. Next time you’re walking the beach, take a closer look at the sand that makes it up. Along with the sand, you’ll see that much of certain beaches around parts of the park, particularly that part which faces the open waters of the outer half of Burrard Inlet, is made up of millions of fragments of mussel shells. Much of this is the wave-chewed remnants of the great shellfish middens left by the native people which have inhabited this part of the coast for thousands of years, but a certain proportion is comprised of the remnants of thousands of years’-worth of scoters’ feeding on the mussels. Wintering scoters eat prodigious amounts of protein-rich mussels, diving for them over the major mussel-beds. A hard bony plate forms the roof of a scoter’s mouth; when feeding, the bird’s strong tongue crushes the shells of the mussels against that plate, extracts the meat and spits out the bits. When you see a large flock of scoters diving close to shore, you’ll know there’s a mussel-bed there; and when you see the millions of shell-fragments on the beaches of the park, you’re seeing in part the results of several millennia’s worth of scoter chowdown.

continued...
Greetings from Katimavik

Hello! We’re Karina (age 18, from Belleville, Ontario) and Andrew (age 19, from Terrace, BC). We are the first Katimavik participants to ever volunteer at the Stanley Park Ecology Society. From the first time we visited, it was clear that SPES was going to be a lot of fun! What could be better than having the opportunity to plan activities for kids? We, as School Programs volunteers, get to share our ideas to help create four exciting new school programs. We have also had the opportunity to chase coyotes in the suburbs! We are very fortunate to be able to work with such intelligent and creative people. We have already learned so much this trimester and can’t wait to learn more. Thanks everyone!

What’s Katimavik?

Katimavik is a government-funded program that sends youth between the ages of 17 and 21 on an incredible adventure across Canada. We volunteer in different communities across the country. Twelve people live in one house and eat, sleep and learn together for nine months. Most importantly, we come together as youth to help other people. For two weeks during our stay in Vancouver, we billet at a local family’s house to get a better understanding of the culture we are immersed in. To volunteer to billet, call Holly at 604-257-6907.

Winter for one, or a thousand

Nobody is precisely sure where all the little brown bats of Stanley Park spend their winter, but it is generally thought to be a relaxing one. Once their main food source, the bugs of summer and early fall disappear, the bats follow shortly thereafter, but where they go is still a mystery. Some of the population is likely to embark on a journey that could easily exceed a hundred kilometers of flight. These bats are likely to gather in groups of hundreds, if not thousands and pass the winter in a comparatively warmer underground cave or abandoned mine.

Others are known to make use of the hospitable design of Douglas Fir bark and crawl into one of the many natural depressions, grooves, holes or “mini caves” that exist among the trunk of any mature Douglas Fir tree. These individuals find a “Cave for One” in the tree trunk and avoid the winter there. Other individuals are known to have an urban winter – in a building attic, loft or groove.

The bats, wherever they may find their winter roost, relax themselves, lowering their body temperature and heart rate until they reach a state of torpor, which is not unlike a self induced and regulated coma. They remain that way for all of winter. Once the weather warms in spring the bats do as well, and return to a life of activity. It is not always a graceful waking for urban bats. Some emerge into places of human activity in broad daylight, totally disoriented. If you encounter such a bat, do not handle it. Contact 604 681 9453 or 257 8510 for situation specific advice.

(Robert Boelens
Co Existing with Coyotes Coordinator)

Ironically, scoters are most conspicuous when they’re in panic flight, and no Vancouver seabird has a wider panic radius—about one hundred meters—than the Surf Scoter. The Surf Scoter is by far the most skittishly unapproachable seabird, and is especially intolerant of approaching kayakers who, unfortunately, and in ever-increasing numbers, ply the same inshore waters used by these large sea-ducks (and most other seabirds) for feeding, socialising, courting or sleeping. Accordingly, no Stanley Park seabird suffers more displacement.

Photos: BCI International

(Michael Price)
“Adopt a Nest” -

In the past two years, Great Blue Herons have nested in unprecedented numbers in Stanley Park. Up 8-fold since 2003, the heronry last Spring grew to 176 nests in 25 tight trees. SPES has been monitoring these provincially-threatened birds to track their rearing success, and to provide interpretation for hundreds of locals and tourists alike, who now include the squawking Spring sensation as a destination.

For a child, a co-worker, a class, or yourself, we invite you to “Adopt a Nest” in our Herald-a-Heron program. This innovative opportunity will provide resources for the non-profit Ecology Society to continue to monitor and participate in management directions.

Your Adopt-a-Nest includes:

- Certificate of Adoption
- Background information bimonthly updates on the heronry, and access to the annual report
- Special notice of firsts for your adopted nest: the arrival of the adult pairs, the first egg laid, the first hatching, and when the young fledge (try out their first flights)
- An onsite tour of the heronry and your adopted nest
- Annual individual membership in SPES, giving even more special opportunities to join diverse programs and events throughout the year, plus receipt of the quarterly newsletter

Adoption fees are $24 per year. Nest adoptions can be arranged by emailing nests@stanleyparkecology.ca or by calling SPES at 604-718-6522.

Freaks of Nature (Andrew Scott)

As winter sets in here in British Columbia’s lower mainland and in Stanley Park, insects are doing their best to cope with dropping temperatures and increasing rainfall, as well as decreasing availability of food. There are some interesting ways in which insects have adapted to scarcities in temperature and nourishment.

Some insects are radically transformed, altering their reproductive cycle in order to facilitate survival. Other species seek the shelter of the great trees. Still others find refuge in the growth beneath the forest canopy.

Throughout the summer months, aphids reproduce parthenogenetically, producing live, female offspring without fertilization from male aphids. In temperate climates like this one, an additional process must be undertaken to ensure survival through the winter rains and occasional freezes. The aphids accomplish this by producing male aphids, which fertilize females. The females can then lay resilient eggs which will survive the winter months, nested in forest undergrowth. In springtime, the eggs hatch and the aphid life cycle continues.

Insects, like the Ten-Lined June beetle, produce larvae that tunnel underground, avoiding harsh climatic changes in the above ground environment. Many beetle larvae undergo pupation during the winter. This sessile and heavily protected stage of development ensures that some beetle pupae will survive long enough to awaken in spring as mature adults. Still other beetle species produce larvae that bore into both living and dead wood, spending winter in the safety of BC’s giant trees.

Ponds and streams in the forest can also provide refuge for insects’ young. Dragonflies’ larvae are aquatic, and spend winter hunting under the surface of bodies of water. In Springtime, these larvae emerge as adult dragonflies, ready to begin the cycle again.

Book Review by Laura

It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend the book Wolf Island, written and illustrated by Celia Godkin. Based on an actual event, this book tells the story of what happens to an island and its inhabitants after all the wolves leave for the mainland. Things seem great at first, especially for the deer, but soon the effects of the absence of wolves on the island are felt by many of the animals and plants. Godkin highlights each animal’s experience separately and in a sequence that makes the interconnectedness of this ecosystem easy to follow for readers of all ages. My favourite part is the illustrations. You can turn from one to another to see the changes in season and the effects on the island of the moving of the wolves. This has been one of my favourite books for many years and I’m sure it will become a favourite of your family too.
STANLEY PARK ECOLOGY SOCIETY
Connecting People with Nature

YOUR GUIDE TO

winter nature programs

DISCOVERY WALKS

Venture into Stanley Park on a two-hour guided walking tour with a naturalist or local expert. Walk themes and leaders vary. Leave from the Lost Lagoon Nature House every Sunday at 1 pm. RAIN OR SHINE! $8 public, $5 members/student.

NATURE STORY & CRAFT

Nature games, stories and crafts for 3- to 6-year-olds. A fun way to learn about local plants and animals! Last Saturday of each month at 11 am at the Nature House. $5 per child, $2 per member; parents no charge.

BIRDING IN STANLEY PARK

Join naturalist and bird watcher Cathy Aitchison for a 2-hour tour in Stanley Park to identify migratory and resident birds and learn bird watching skills. Meet at the Nature House. By donation. The last Sunday of every month at 9am.

Dec 4
The Edge of Winter Looking for ideas on how to get through the winter? Join naturalist Murray Lashmar and find out how other animals and plants do it.

Dec 18
Celebrate the Solstice with Jennifer Swanston. The growing darkness of winter is approaching and we will cast a bit of light on the history and traditions of midwinter festivals. Join us for an exploration of the natural symbols we include in our holidays. We will share a warming toast to celebrate the return of the light during the walk.

Dec 24
Children’s Nature Story and Craft.

Jan 8
Rainforests of the World Take a walk with Biologist/Geologist David Cook along some of the trails in Stanley Park, a fragment of North America’s Temperate Rainforest, the largest area of Temperate Rainforest in the world in spite of extensive exploitation. Compare and contrast features in our Stanley Park forest with those of Tropical Rainforests of the globe. Learn why a Temperate Rainforest is more effective than a Tropical Rainforest in removing atmospheric carbon dioxide and may be a major factor in slowing or reversing global warming.

Jan 22
Children’s Nature Story and Craft.

Jan 29
Birding in Stanley Park with Cathy Aitchison.

NEW! Just for Kids

The Holly & The Ivy: Christmas Art in the Park

This fun & educational art workshop features ecogames, puppet shows and a quick exploration in the park.

The last Sunday of every month at 9am.

Children’s Nature Story and Craft.

Birding in Stanley Park with Cathy Aitchison.

NEW! Just for Kids

The Holly & The Ivy: Christmas Art in the Park

This fun & educational art workshop features ecogames, puppet shows and a quick exploration in the park.

The last Sunday of every month at 9am.

Create natural yuletide art, ideal for gifts or for the tree.

Ages: 6-12 years old
Sat, Dec 17: 10-12 am
Sat, Dec 17: 1-3 pm
Sun, Dec 18: 10-12 am

Where: Upstairs Dining Pavilion, Stanley Park. Cost: $12, $3 discount for 2nd child and SPES members.

Registration recommended: 604-718-6522

DECEMBER 2005

3
winter nature programs

Overwintering Waterfowl with Robyn Worcester. Learn to identify the many species of overwintering waterfowl and other birds. Discover Stanley Park’s role as a major migratory stop over point and destination.

An Ecology Walk with Terry Taylor. Renowned botanist Terry Taylor will look at a number of different habitats and see how different the plants are in those habitats, and learn what causes those differences.

Children’s Nature Story and Craft.

Birding in Stanley Park with Cathy Aitchison.

Seeing the Forest for the Trees. Want to turn over a new leaf or get to the root of the matter? Join naturalist Murray Lashmar and explore Stanley Park’s forests. Learn how they depend on one another.

Come to Stanley Park for a fun work party. Join our winter Ivy Busters events!

Come enjoy the beauty of the park in the morning, and help us to make Stanley Park a better place for wildlife and people alike. Our Ivy Busters program removes invasive plants that smother native foliage.

Bring your family, friends, and spread the word! Refreshments will be provided. Receive discount coupons for our Discovery Walks.

Meet at the Stanley Park Dining Pavilion at 9:00 am (sharp) till noon, rain or shine. Bring a bottle of water and wear solid footwear. Free parking passes available.

Thank you. Your social Saturday exercise of pulling invasive plants makes a positive difference for Vancouver’s natural wildlife! See you here!

Next Ivy Pulls - Saturdays, Dec 3, Jan 21 & Feb 18.

For more information, check our website at www.stanleyparkecology.ca or call (604) 718-6522

www.stanleyparkecology.ca
The Cob Collects Kudos

On November 2, SPES was proudly presented with an Award of Excellence from the Vancouver Regional Contractor’s Association (VRCA). This first annual Innovation Award recognizes the creativity of the Stanley Park Earthen Architecture, a structure hand-sculpted in an ancient technique of reclaimed, recycled, and local natural materials. Over 200 community volunteers invested 2500 hours mixing wet clay, sand and straw to shape the whimsical structure that - in model strength tests at UBC - withstood earthquakes of Richter 9. True to its thoroughly sustainable intent, the “Cob”, which is located in the miniature train plaza, is complete with a living garden roof courtesy of BCIT, and serves CAPERS organic popcorn as a fundraiser for the educational and stewardship programs of SPES. Come see it in Christmas splendour, Dec 2- Jan 2.

Yes, I Want to Become a Friend of the Park!

Enclosed is my gift of:

- $20
- $50
- $100
- Other $ ________

I Want to Become a Member

- Family $30
- Individual $15
- Senior/Vol $10
- Junior (<19) $7.50

I Want to Become a Monthly Donor

I authorize the Stanley Park Ecology Society to receive the following monthly donation:

- $10
- $15
- $25
- Other $ ________

Payment Method

- Cheque
- Visa
- Master Card

Card Number ___________________________ Name ___________________________
Expiry Date ___________________________ Address ___________________________
Signature _____________________________ City _____________________________ Postal Code
________________________________________ Phone ___________________________
I understand that I can change or cancel my pledge at any time

Please make cheques payable to:
Stanley Park Ecology Society, PO Box 5167 Vancouver BC Canada V6B 4B2
Charitable Tax Receipts issued for donations of $30 or more
SPES is a registered charity: # 11916 6890 RR0001
All information will be kept confidential according to the Personal Information Protection Act.