

Report to the community

Hi Everyone –

Thanks very much to all of you who shared that great day with Dr Nancy Turner and other experts on June 15. Despite the rain, the morning walk in Echo Heights Forest was a clear success.

We were privileged to have elder August Sylvester of Penelakut welcome us to Hul'qumi'num territory and share his extensive knowledge about plants as foods and medicines. The other day he was still marveling at the richness of traditional medicines in Echo Heights that we encountered in our short walk.

Every seat was filled at St Michael's church hall for Nancy Turner's talk. We were honoured that Dr Arvid Charlie of Cowichan Tribes, a long-time friend of Nancy's, contributed significantly to the presentation and discussion.

So many people who attended the walk or talk expressed their gratitude and assured us that they would 'go forth and share' what they have learned with others. This is, of course the point of the project, to create opportunities for people to share knowledge and work together for the health of our communities and ecosystems.

While the project is not directly about Echo Heights, one couldn't help but note that the experts among us independently concluded that it is a place of biological and cultural significance for a multitude of reasons. And from that we can each draw our own conclusions.

Looking back at the first month of activities of the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project, we have a lot of reason to celebrate and look forward to what's still to come. Some highlights include:

- A biodiversity display at the Chemainus Branch of the Vancouver Island Public Library that has been held-over till end of June due to popular demand!
- **Spring Tune Up!** variety show held May 25 at St Joseph's School organized by Mark Kiemele to build community spirit and raise some seed funds for the project. The generosity and caliber of local performers was unbelievable, and the guest appearance by host Briony Penn added the perfect touch.
- **Survivor Saltair** on June 6, the first official outdoor classroom activity where the project leaders partnered with an annual outdoor youth leadership event to strengthen the biodiversity focus. The *Survivor Saltair* event was organized by Karla Ryan.

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Nancy and Arvid... two great educators

Echo Heights is a real treasure

The day after her first walk through Echo Heights Forest, Dr Nancy Turner kindly sent the *Biodiversity Project* her impressions. She visited the forest before her talk and was accompanied by Augie Sylvester from Penelakut and about 30 other interested people.

Echo Heights is a real treasure. I saw it as a little oasis, a habitat for many wild creatures, and a beautiful outdoor classroom, just a hop, skip and jump from schools and houses.

At a time when globalization and electronic media are depriving our children and youth of their local knowledge and understanding of the natural world, we should be extremely appreciative of places like this where they can regain that knowledge, where they can spend time watching pileated woodpeckers and caterpillars, and where they can hear the birds singing.

Knowing our "homeplaces" and the habitats of our regions is so important. We can never properly care for these special places if we don't become familiar with them.

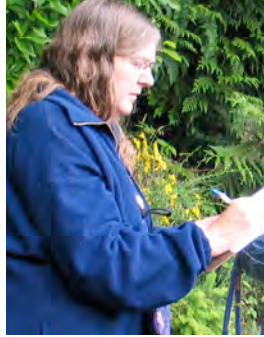
The wealth of plant life that we encountered yesterday, even in our short walk, was remarkable.

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– A real treasure continued–

I know we really saw only a fraction of the species that occur there, but here are some of the ones I noticed, just on that little stretch of pathway that we were on:

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
Western red-cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
Big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*)
Red alder (*Alnus rubra*)
Scouler's will (*Salix scouleriana*)
Bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*)
Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*)
Tall oregon grape (*Berberis aquifolium*)
Oregon grape (*Berberis nervosa*)
Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)
Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*)
Bird cherry (*Oemleria cerasiformis*)
Orange honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*)
Twinflower honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata*)
Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*)
Flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)
Thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*)
Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)
Trailing blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) as well as introduced blackberries
R. procerus; *R. laciniatus*)
Red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*)
Large-leaved avens (*Geum macrophyllum*)
Vanilla-leaf (*Achlys triphylla*)
Foamflower (*Tiarella tridentata*)
Licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*)
Sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*)
Bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*)... and lots more!!!



Dr Turner signing the petition to preserve Echo Heights Forest from development.

Children today are suffering from "nature deficit disorder" – they are not learning the knowledge or skills for sustaining themselves in their home places. As I said in my talk, it's very sad when children, even indigenous children, don't recognize the most common edible wild berries, like red huckleberry, as being edible!

This is a serious thing. Most children today, even in rural areas, can distinguish more different makes of cars than they can different kinds of trees. If we are ever to properly care for our Earth, this situation has to change.

That is why it is so critically important to keep Echo Heights as a natural area, a classroom and, for our First Nations friends, as their pharmacy – their grocery store, as Arvid said... To allow a place where children can keep on learning, and where adults find peace and renew their spirits, as well as continuing their own education and passing on what they've learned to others.



August Sylvester

No one ever made a mistake by NOT destroying a piece of land. Places that have been kept intact, through someone's vision of the future, become treasures within just a generation or so. We can all think of some of these places. The more development that happens around them, the higher their value.

The grandchildren of today's decision-makers will thank them for their foresight, and their long term view of the value of a place.

Warm regards, Nancy

Received by email at
bio-variety@shaw.ca – June 16, 2007

Report to the community (continued)

- Karla worked with Kelly Bannister to create a "Bio-Aware and Bio-Beware" station, which taught students about the "mouth-watering, medicinal and murderous" properties of plants and helped them to come up with a basic survival strategy if lost in the woods.
- Walks in the Echo Heights forest in June with **Paul McCuish's** class and some parents to assist with plant identification and learn about the importance of plants as foods, medicines and habitat for birds and animals.
 - Exploring the importance of Garry oak ecosystems, ecological restoration and conservation planning at Echo Heights with expert

- Dr. Brenda Beckwith** on June 10, organized by Kathy Wachs.
- Wonderful conversations and exchanges of information and native plants around the project display at the Chemainus market on June 13, organized by Diana Hardacker and Kathy Wachs.
 - A morning walk in Echo Heights with **Dr Nancy Turner** and elder **August Sylvester** and a public talk in the afternoon by Nancy and **Dr Arvid Charlie** at St Michael's church hall.

We're pleased to report that several hundred dollars have been raised through donations in the last few weeks for the Biodiversity Project. We also received some generous donations

- from local businesses, such as:
- ✓ theatre tickets from the Chemainus Festival Theatre
 - ✓ a gift basket from MeadowVale Farm Gourmet Foods
 - ✓ and refreshments from Richardson Foods Group (Nanaimo).

We greatly appreciate the generosity of contributors, especially as we are all volunteers on the project. All contributions, go to support activities and production of materials throughout the summer and into the Fall.

Our ability to stay in touch and notify you of events, activities and resources has been aided by the creation of a project listserv, thanks to Ann Zurbrigg at the POLIS Project.

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For current and upcoming activities, see also our activities page on the project website.

We'll be turning our attention two special activities in the coming weeks.

The first is an all-day outdoor learning blitz on June 28 in Saltair for local teachers on their last Pro-D day of the year. We will learn about marine and forest biodiversity with leaders Andy Lamb, Karla Ryan and Kelly Bannister.

On July 12, **Andy Lamb** will treat project participants to a marine shoreline biodiversity walk adjacent to his property on Thetis Island.

The whole point of the Biodiversity Project is to bring people together to share and learn. We continue to receive kind offers from people with knowledge and expertise to contribute, so lots of activities are in the works.

We are keen to hear from you about your interests and how you would like to be involved. If you have a specific request for accessing information or expertise, please get in touch.

At its heart, the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project is meant to create opportunities and seed synergies. It is about all of us working together from our diverse perspectives and in our different capacities.

We appreciate your support, in all its forms, and we look forward to many more opportunities to share and learn together for the health of our communities and local ecosystems.

*Sincerely, CBEP coordinators
Kelly Bannister, Karla Ryan,
Kathy Wachs and Mark Kiemele*

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project is a pilot collaboration between the community and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (University of Victoria).

THE BIODIVERSITY PROJECT SCRAPBOOK

Diana Hardacker and Kathy Wachs were hamming it up at the Biodiversity Project native plant display at the Wednesday night market at Waterwheel Park. Look for us at the August 8 market from 4-7 p.m.



Dr Brenda Beckwith talked about the significance of the Garry oak ecosystems during a field trip to Echo Heights.



About 30 people gathered in the rain at the top of Channel Blvd before setting off for a walk in Echo Heights Forest with Dr Nancy Turner and Penelakut elder August Sylvester

Donna Konsorado was one of the many fine performers who donated their talents to the variety show.



**Web site – www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation
Email – bio-variety@shaw.ca**