

## Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary 2008 Annual Executive Director's Report

### Highlights

#### Staffing

The staff and board were deeply saddened by Byron Horbaty's sudden passing in the spring of 2008. Byron worked as assistant to the Site Manager on a variety of contract positions over an eight year period, including the building of the stone stairway that flanks the east side of Christmas Hill. This stone trail is a lasting testament to his love of working outdoors, and was acknowledged by naming the trail, and placing small signs at either end of this section.

#### Facilities

There were not a lot of new facilities added in 2008, the focus was mainly on maintaining and upgrading existing facilities.

Having developed and documented a detailed set of signage guidelines, we re-designed and printed 140 trail and site signs in 2008 that are now in the process of being installed.

We replaced an aging foot bridge in the hedgerow trail, with materials and labour generously donated by Home Depot.

The trail upgrading project on the south side has been put on hold while Saanich staff reviews the flood boundary issues. Over a kilometre of trail is below the flood plain boundary, and therefore work on those trails is subject to strict environmental guidelines, including the prohibition of importing any materials into this area. Saanich environmental staff is going to take a proposal to Saanich Council to exempt the trail area from the fill prohibition area, to allow maintenance and upgrading on an ongoing basis.

To help out with facilities and ecosystem management, we submitted an application to ESRI for an updated suite of GIS mapping software, (Arc Desktop, AcrMap, 3D Analyst, Spatial Analyst) which was approved and is in place. The software and licensing has a value of approximately \$10,000, for which we will pay \$400 for administrative fees.

The plans to bring about a seismic upgrading of the Nature House, spearheaded by Greg Ovstaas, moved one step closer in 2008 with refinement of the construction design, and an application for capital funding being submitted to the Gaming Commission.

#### Education Services

We had another very successful year with the Nature Sanctuary's education programs and activities. During 2008, approximately 16,000 participants took part in Nature Sanctuary programs, consisting of 7,000 school children, and 9,000 members of the general public.

We acknowledge the continuing financial support from Ducks Unlimited, providing access for 42 school classes to both the Wetlands Discovery (Grade 4) and Watersheds (Grade 7) programs. The Evening Optimist Club of Victoria also provided sponsorship for 20 classes to Sanctuary programs during 2008.

With the addition of Renée Cenerini as a fully bilingual Program Naturalist, we were able to begin offering some of our programs in French for immersion classes, starting in 2008 with the Traveling Owl program

Margaret has developed a partnership with UVic's education faculty to provide an opportunity for student teachers to do their practicum here, with an environmental education focus.

Through the sponsorship support from the CRD Water Board, a total of 19 native plant gardening programs for adults were offered, with over 400 participants. This topic continues to be in demand, and is a great adjunct to our annual native plant sale event.

Other adult programming includes volunteer-led weekly bird walks, and courses (offered under contract) in Marine Birds, Nature Photography and advanced native plant gardening programs. Partnership events with the Palaeontology Society (Fossil Fair) and the Mycology Society (Mushroom Day) continue to be very worthwhile in attracting visitors.

#### Volunteer Services

The Sanctuary's volunteers continue to make the impossible possible. There are a lot of things that could not be accomplished without their contribution. They assist with every aspect of the work load, from broom pulling to program delivery, from trail construction to bagging grain, from leading bird walks to tending our bee hive.

Volunteers in 2008 contributed a total of 6,486 hours. If you apply a monetary value to those hours, it is the equivalent of a donation of \$141,330.

We are blessed with a dedicated group of volunteers who are very generous with their time and talents, and they deserve a hearty vote of thanks.