

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary  
2009 Annual Executive Director's Report

2009 was a busy year full of challenges, changes and accomplishments.

Highlights:

**Fund Raising Events**

The Native Plant Sale continues to be our signature fund raising event, one that promotes our values of encouraging the creation of wildlife habitat in urban spaces, and that contributes significantly to our budget.

The Spring 2009 sale, with over 765 people attending, was our most successful ever. We started the weekend with 5,400 plants, and ended up with 22 plants by Sunday afternoon. The net result was a profit of \$15,800.

It was decided to introduce a fall plant sale, shifting the focus from wildflowers to shrubs, ground covers and ferns. It took place on October 17, on a smaller scale than the spring event, and was considered a success, raising an additional \$7,680. The public response was encouraging, and we now seem to be committed to two plant sale events per year. These events wouldn't be possible with the considerable effort of our volunteers.

We also launched a new fund raising and program event in May, under the guidance of Robyn Burton, called Bring on the Birds. Over \$6,400 in items were donated for the auction and over 600 hours of volunteer time was involved, qualifying for a Gaming Grant encouraging volunteers. The event netted \$10,267.

Two other grants were received during 2009. A Victoria Foundation grant of \$6,745 was received to assist with protection of the unique vernal pond ecosystem on Christmas Hill, and a \$10,000 grant was received from Mountain Equipment Co-op to replace an aging footbridge in the hedgerow trail north of the parking lot. Both projects will be completed in 2010.

**Facilities**

Some significant repairs were made to the floating walkway structural lumber components. An analysis of the aging floating structure indicated the system is nearing the end its useful life, and plans were developed to raise the funds required for that undertaking. A new design was created to increase the life-span of the new structure, incorporating an aluminum frame, composite material for decking and stainless steel cable for the railings.

At the same time, we finalized the plans for the seismic upgrading project, and in October, awarded the contract to Campbell Construction. Work began in November, and

after a very long couple of weeks of drilling and blasting, the reinforced concrete wall rose from the ground and was tied into the structure of the building. Funds for this project were supplied by a Gaming capital project grant, and from the Society's Special Purpose Fund, which arose from the Nature House Fund Raising campaign in the late 1980's. Plans are now being considered for the finishing of the wall's surface.

Earlier in the year, we completed a trail improvement project on the south side trail between the south wharf and the Lochside Pond by installing a raised walkway. This project was funded in large part by memorial donations made on behalf of staff member Byron Horbaty.

The other significant improvement was the installation of a sturdy outdoor bird-watching telescope in the native plant garden overlooking the lake. The unique platform, an imaginative rock mosaic creation depicting a pair of nesting Red-winged blackbirds, was created by the Mosaic the City group as part of the Bring on the Birds event.

### **Education Services**

We had another very successful year with the Nature Sanctuary's education programs and activities. During 2009, over 14,000 participants took part in Nature Sanctuary programs, including 6,265 school children throughout Greater Victoria, in 290 classes.

We acknowledge the continuing financial support from Ducks Unlimited, providing access for 19 school classes to both the Wetlands Discovery (Grade 4) and Watersheds (Grade 7) programs. The Evening Optimist Club of Victoria also provided sponsorship for 15 classes to Sanctuary programs during 2009.

Through the sponsorship support from the CRD Water Board, a total of 19 native plant gardening programs for adults were offered, with over 360 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 2009 contributed a total of 10,555 hours. If you apply a monetary value to those hours, it is the equivalent of a donation of \$235,800.

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.