

## Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary - 2010 Annual Executive Director's Report

Highlights of the year:

### **Fund Raising Activities**

Most fund raising efforts in 2010 focused on the Bridges to Nature capital campaign to raise funds for the replacement of the aging floating boardwalk system. Kari Frazer was hired as Director of Financial Development in February to coordinate and implement the fund raising initiatives.

The campaign was divided into two phases, with the first phase directed at a \$46,000 target to replace the wharf below the Nature House. This goal was achieved through generous donations from individual supporters, with assistance from the Thrifty Foods Smile Card program. The wharf was constructed and placed in June (details below under Facilities).

Phase 2 of the Bridges to Nature Campaign was launched in September as part of the Nature Sanctuary's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. The goal, to replace the floating walkway and south wharf, was determined to be \$450,000. By the end of 2010, \$35,750 was raised, with generous contributions from the Victoria Natural History Society, Vancouver Island Trails Information Society, Victoria Parks & Recreation Foundation, Country Grocer, Uptown, and many generous individual donors. Partnerships with Country Grocer, Spinnakers Brew Pub, and Silk Road Tea were developed, and will continue to provide revenue for some time.

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 2010 sale was our most successful ever. Over 5,000 plants were sold during the two-day event. Our second annual Fall Native Plant Sale in October was less successful than the previous year's sale, reflecting a similar drop in native plant sales throughout the region. Between the two sales, a total of \$22,140 net profit was realized.

A number of other grants were received during 2010 for a variety of projects, including Gaming funds, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Walmart/Evergreen Foundation, Royal Bank, BC Hydro, New Horizons for Seniors, Victoria Foundation, Van City Savings and Public Conservation Assistance Fund.

### **Facilities**

The largest single project in 2010 was the creation of Founders Wharf. Plans to replace the aging floating boardwalk system resulted in a significant change in design, and it was decided to begin with a pilot project to test the new materials by replacing the wharf below the Nature House. An invitation to tender was released in February, and in March Heavy Metal Marine was awarded the contract for the project. With the help of large crane truck, the old wharf was removed and the new sections were lifted and floated into position on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The wharf was designated as Founders Wharf, equipped with a custom cedar octagonal bench, and with a series of plaques honouring the Nature Sanctuary's founding members

and long-time staff, as part of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in September. The staff feel very grateful to be recognized for their contribution and commitment to the Nature Sanctuary

The response to the new materials – aluminum frame and railing posts, stainless steel cable railings, and composite fiberglass-reinforced plastic decking – have been overwhelmingly positive. With a few minor adjustments, this facility will serve as the template for the larger project to follow.

The hedgerow trail extending from the end of Ralph Street eastward toward Saanich Road was closed for the latter part of the year while a large bridge spanning a significant wetland area was replaced. The aging cedar structure was removed to allow for a sizeable ecosystem restoration project (details below), and was replaced with a metal framework supporting the same composite decking material used on the new floating boardwalk. The project was supported by funding from Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Cedar benches were added to the seismic wall platform, beginning the process of making the seismic wall a functional and pleasant people place. The bench was made possible by donations in memory of long-time site volunteer Ken Brown, made by his loving family and friends.

Two sections of the floating boardwalk were replaced and a thorough survey of its condition along with a report to the Board indicating its status. General trail maintenance and camp removal continues.

### **Ecosystem**

The year 2010 saw a number of projects throughout the sanctuary that will improve the ecological health of the hill and lake properties. A major step in the ecological restoration of Swan Lake was realized with the development of the Swan Lake Ecosystem Management Plan. Contractor Lise Townsend brought together regional experts in a series of workshops to develop a comprehensive plan and timetable for ecosystem restoration and water quality improvement activities. The process was truly a community effort and by the end of 2010 only a few details remained to complete the plan.

As part of process of the LEMP Lake Workshop, funds were sourced from the Public Conservation Assistance Fund for purchase of water quality testing equipment. A full assessment was made and orders for equipment placed with for testing in 2011.

The Evergreen Foundation, Vancouver Island Equipment Operators Association, AllTerra Spider Excavating and Mountain Equipment Coop all contributed to replacement of a decaying footbridge and control of a highly invasive grass species in the Hedgerow Trail on the north side of Swan Lake. Giant Manna Grass, an invasive species of special concern, was removed; a large pond constructed above the foot bridge, a stream constructed between the bridge and Tuesday Pond, and another pond within the Tuesday Pond trail cleared of Reed Canary and manna grasses. The benefit to wildlife is clear with many mallards, buffleheads, herons and small mammals' tracks such as mink and raccoon on view from the footbridge. The extensive earth-work will be followed by native plantings and monitoring as control of manna grass continues in affected areas.

The Evergreen Foundation Funding also supports the Northeast Woods Reforestation Project. This project includes the removal of invasive trees and shrubs such as holly, hawthorn, and blackberry, the improvement of the trail from Saanich Road to Nelthorpe Cul-de-sac, the rerouting of the Lake Trail and enlargement of a spring fed pond to

provide a year round water source and potential amphibian habitat, and the installation of numerous native shrubs, trees, and ground cover. The resulting sinuous trail with a gentler sloop and native planting has been well received by sanctuary visitors. Restoration and reforestation will continue through 2011.

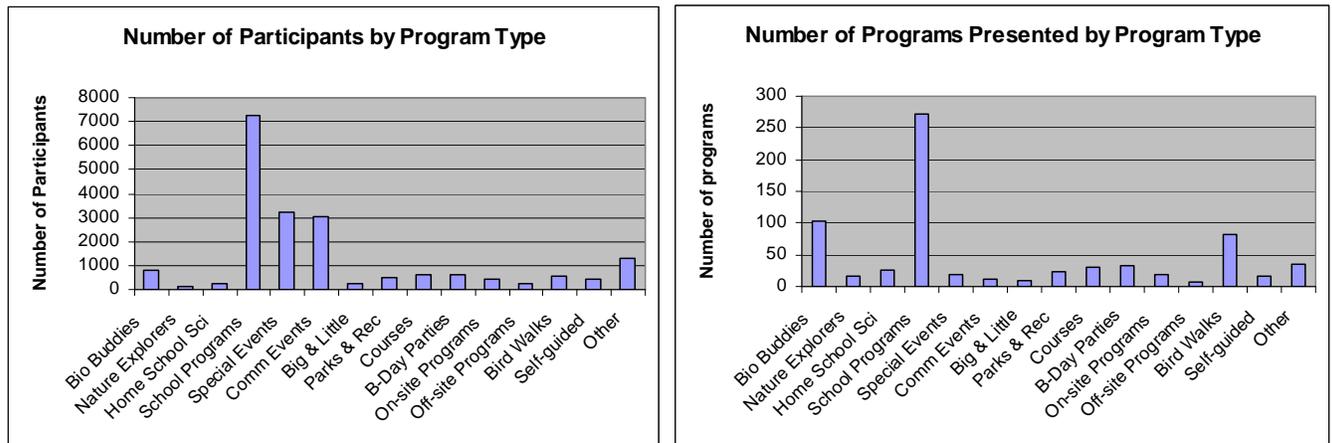
Other restoration projects include:

- Restoration of the native hedgerow continues with ivy removal resulting in welcome regrowth of native sedges, rushes, and other wetland species proving that a little effort goes a long ways.
- The removal of common hawthorn, an invasive tree that grows throughout the sanctuary, began in the fall. Informational signs were posted to provide public information. Inquiries were made to Saanich for a pesticide application permit and discussion will continue with DOS and the SL Ecosystem Committee
- Numerous trees, shrubs, and wild flowers were planted including alder and wild flowers in Nelthorpe Field, wetland trees and shrubs to replace invasive plants, and specimens for the native plant garden
- One year ago in April the first helicopter flight on Christmas Hill in years lifted 250 split rails to the vernal pond area. One year after installation of the split rail fence, foot traffic into the pond and damage to rare plants has stopped with good regrowth of the two established trails
- For the third year the wetlands in the northeast section of the lake have been mown, this year by the District of Saanich who expanded the area. This area provides needed overwintering habitat and forage area for migratory birds such as snipe.
- As part of our intention to develop small ephemeral ponds, a scrape 10 x 10 meters was established in the south east corner of Nelthorpe field and protected with a brush border to develop shallow water habitat for various plant and animal species. Trees such as alder and wild cherry were planted to screen the area from public view. Note that in 2011 Stan Orchard was consulted and toured the ponds with June Pretzer, site manager, to check that improvements would not encourage bullfrogs and assured this was not a problem.
- In 2010, a plant propagation program was initiated to provide seed and plants for restoration projects and seed sharing. Seed was collected from the native plant garden, native grasses on Christmas Hill and Nelthorpe field for propagation and restoration. Kirsten Dales who specializes in propagation of alpine species was enlisted as volunteer propagator and there are now many flats of native plants and cuttings are growing in the shade house.
- The Western Painted Turtle Program with Habitat Acquisition Trust had excellent results. Turtles were captured and tagged for telemetry monitoring, 13 basking and one whole logs were installed in the lake, a turtle nesting area completed below the Native grass garden with four turtles nesting there. Telemetric results provide new information for the management of this red listed species.
- The native plant garden continues to be a source of seed and plant information with many plant tours lead by Pat Johnson and others as well as a great plant

demonstration area and seed source. The grass garden is the only one of its kind in this district

## Education Services

The Education Program at Swan Lake enjoyed a very successful year in 2010. A total of 19,658 people took part in 702 programs in 2010 a 39.7% increase over 2009, with revenues of \$61, 832 a 16.9% increase over the previous year.



Some programming highlights for 2010:

- In an effort to make it easier for visitors to include our special events into their schedule we began scheduling our special events on a consistent day, the last Sunday of each month and alternate Tuesdays in July and August. As people get used to this idea we expect participation in our special events to continue to grow.
- We continue to work with our community partners to offer exciting educational events. In 2010 we hosted Fossil Fair with the Victoria Palaeontological Society, Astronomy Day with the Victoria Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and the Mushroom Show with the Southern Vancouver Island Mycological Society.
- Thanks to the commitment and dedication of our staff we've expanded the frequency of the delivery of our very popular Biology Buddies and Homeschool Science programs which are enjoying excellent subscription.
- The Birthday Party program that we initiated in 2010 has become increasingly popular as word-of-mouth promotion spreads – 640 people took part in 32 birthday party programs. An exciting ancillary benefit of doing Birthday parties is many of the families invited to the parties have never visited Swan Lake before.
- In 2010 we worked to expand the number of adult courses we offered. Over the course of the year classes on Native Plant Gardening (sponsored by CRD), Stargazing, Marine Birds, Beginning Birding, Dragonfly Watching, Native Plant Garden Design and Mushrooms were offered. 611 people took part in 30 individual classes and field-trips. We hope to expand the number and diversity of classes in 2011.

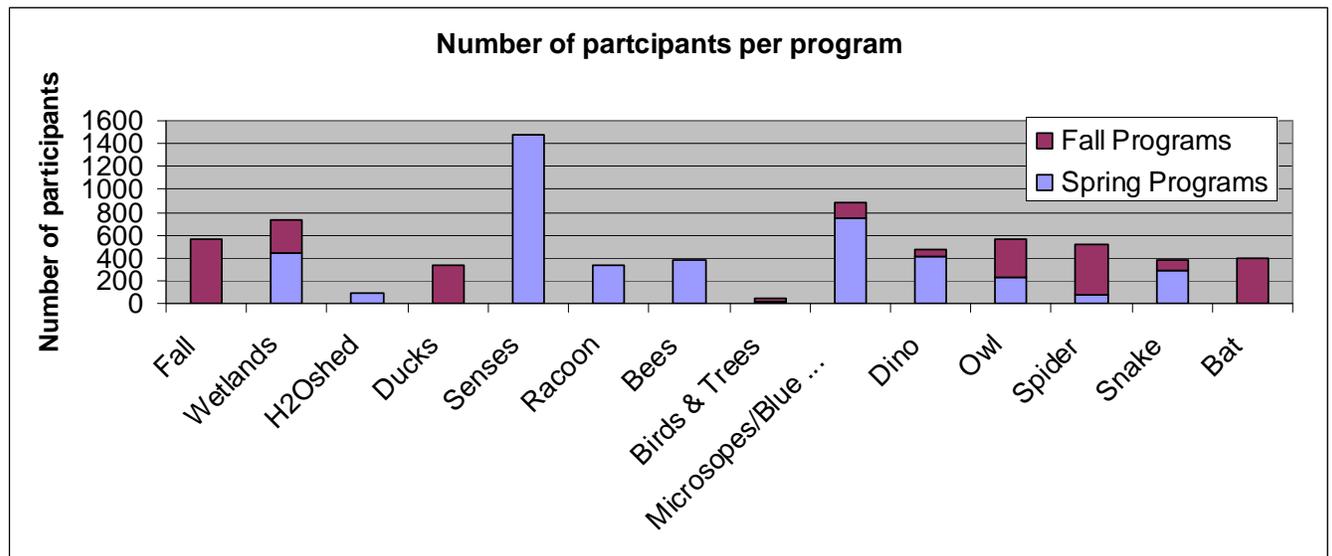
School Programs continue to be the most important source of visitor contact and revenue of our educational programs. In 2010 we delivered 273 school programs for 7,261 participants; paradoxically, a 15% increase over 2009 despite delivering 17 fewer programs.

Primarily the increase in the number of people reached through our school programs is due to the addition of new single staff delivered programs (ie. Dino Bones) and offering our traveling programs on-site as well as in the classroom. This means that a greater percentage of our programs are delivered by one staff member.

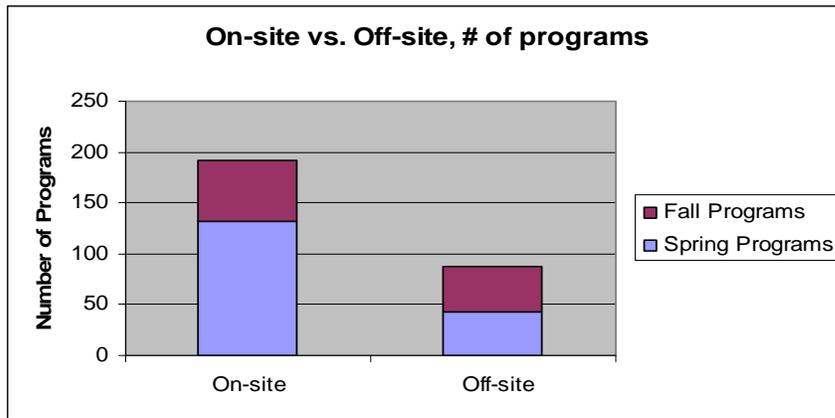
The reduction in the number of programs delivered has many contributing factors: Teachers are no longer permitted to collect money directly from students for classroom activities; the downturn in the economy makes it more difficult to PACs to raise money for field trips; and suspension of funding from BC Gaming eliminated funding for many non-profits that support our field trips – in 2010 Ducks Unlimited was only able to fund 9 wetland programs (compared to 19 the previous year) and the Evening Optimists of Victoria, a long time supporter of our programs, was not able to fund any. On the plus side, a generous grant from RBC provided transport and programming for 10 schools as part of a Blue Water Day celebration.

As usual, the most popular school programs are those directed to the youngest grades.

Programs that are suitable for a wide range of grades (Dino Bones, Owl, Spider, Snake and Bat – grades 1 to 6/7) or provide a specialized educational experience (Microscopes) continue to maintain reasonable subscription rates.



With the constant challenge teachers face to arrange transport and provide suitable levels of adult supervision on field trips we have noticed a gradual increase in the requests for in-school programs. In 2010, 69% of our school programs were delivered at Swan Lake.



## Volunteer Services

Volunteers continued to provide incredible support in all aspects of the operation including: site maintenance; restoration projects; special events; plants sales; animal care and administrative support. Through a mutually beneficial program, in 2010 we were fortunate to attract international volunteers from France, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Japan and Germany. Participants learn about Canada, environmental issues; educational programming and restoration techniques

Our partnership with the Garth Homer Society strengthened and we now have 10 regular volunteers from that organization who in addition to the chores they complete also enliven our environs with the joyful energy they bring on every visit.

We were extremely lucky to have highly professional input to our Lake Management Plan with over 500 hours of time donated by some of the regions' foremost experts in wetland habitat management. This contribution of time alone is valued at over \$50,000 and facilitated a process otherwise not possible due to budgetary restraints.

A sincere vote of thanks goes out to all who support us through their generous donation of time and expertise.