

## Community Extends Beyond the Human World: Relating with Endangered Garry Oak Ecosystems.

By Samara Ironside, Fall 2021

### 2.Objectives of the session:

I hope that from this session listeners will gain a basic understanding of what Garry Oak Ecosystems are, how they came to be, what circumstances they face today, and why it is important to try to protect them in the future. On top of this, I hope that this session will help people self-situate in the greater ecosystem and community and contextualize their relationships with the world around them. I hope to prompt people to internalize the reality that humans are not separate from the ecosystems surrounding us, and that protecting them requires not only initiative, but relational accountability to more than the human world. In leading this session, I hope to get a read and understanding about where people are with their understanding of relationships as something that extends beyond our human connections. I hope to see if prompting people to think about restoration in this way is effective, or if people shut off and get the impression that this way of looking at things doesn't align with their worldview. I am curious if this is something that is relatable to most people, or if it is just a way of looking at conservation and restoration that really aligns with my personal beliefs and experiences.

I think that this is an important and interesting session to give because I think it provides a re-framing of the way we think about ecosystems, species at risk and our role in protecting them. I think that too often we think of the natural world as a separate entity and we externalize it through science, so in this session I aim to bridge this divide and use ecological understandings to prompt people to consider the ways that they relate to the natural world. I believe that in a time where people live so separate from natural environments, prompting this shift in thought, even temporarily, is very valuable and important. I hope that listeners will also experience some internal stirring or reflection by things being talked about in this way.

Beyond this session in class, I will be using aspects of this material to put on a similar session at the Nature House to prompt Nature Sanctuary staff, volunteers and visitors to consider their connection to the natural world as well. Hopefully the materials from this session will be used as a baseline to grow and evolve through time and use in the Nature Sanctuary, and thus continue to educate and stir perspective shifts in peoples' relation to the natural world as time goes on.

### Resources:

- <https://youtu.be/sSpFpTo3erg>
- <https://goert.ca/>
- [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what\\_happens\\_when\\_we\\_reconnect\\_with\\_nature](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_happens_when_we_reconnect_with_nature)
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4157607/>

Visual aid (see appendix)

I will be using printed photos of various species common to Garry oak ecosystems and pages open to writing, for people to consider how those species' ecosystem roles relate to the things and roles in human society. The hope is that this will make people draw the connection between the similarities of the way human societies function and how natural ecosystems function, and thus motivate them to support ecosystem function as much as they would try to support the function of human societies.

## Conference Session Plan

### Activity description

The session will consist of a 2min video explaining the background of Garry oak ecosystems; <https://youtu.be/sSpFpTo3erg>. This will be followed by me discussing environment and community and framing conservation and restoration efforts within the context of relationship. Discussing the ways in which viewing ourselves as a part of the system, in relationship with the ecosystems and species we are trying to protect can help us to reframe our efforts in a way that positively impacts all involved. What would happen if we were to extend our concept of community to include more than just the human world: other species, plants, animals, land, waters?

Activity: prompt different species in Garry oak communities, list their community roles and have people put ideas of other parts of our communities or societies that fill similar roles – this prompts the ideas of thinking how we are all connected and how there are parallels in the structure and organization of nature and of society. Then we have an interactive activity where people try to find the similarities between species and parts of society, according to their roles. Then we open the floor to discussion about these concepts and questions, followed by time for feedback.

### Plan for session

- Video: Brief preamble about Garry oak ecosystems. What are they, how do they work, what is their history and risks for the future. (if no video prepare info)
- Talking about reframing our relationship to land or our communities to include the more than human world. Talk about Garry oak ecosystems; communities within them, how that relates to our communities; swan lake and Victoria
- Activity: Compare plant/species roles within the community to roles within human society and community
- Time for questions and to prompt people to share their perspectives about human/their relationship with nature
- order can be fluid depending on the vibe

### Script for session

Garry Oak Ecosystem Facts:

- ❖ Garry Oak ecosystems are one of Canada's most threatened ecosystems
- ❖ With only 5% of their historical range on Vancouver Island remaining
- ❖ They are biodiversity hotspots for plants and wildlife:
  - **These habitats support just under 700 species of plants, 104 species of birds, 7 amphibians, 7 reptiles and 33 mammal species.**
  - **Eight hundred insect and mite species are directly associated with Garry oak trees**
  - **24 rare and endangered plant species on the Species at Risk Act & over 70 threatened plants**
  - **More plant diversity than any other terrestrial ecosystem in Canada**
- ❖ Threatened by invasive species choking out native vegetation and development: causing habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation.
- ❖ **In the spring they have a large array of wildflowers. Most famously including Blue Camas, western buttercups and spring-gold.**

When you hear the word community, what do you think of? Often when we think of community we think of our friends, families, neighbours, our places of worship, study, work. When we are thinking about our relationships, we often jump first to our human companions. But what if we were to reframe that thinking to include all the other species around us?

Just like us, species around us also organize themselves in communities. Plant communities grow together and support insect communities, and communities of mammals and birds, which all interact together in ecosystems. These ecosystems then make up communities in the bigger landscape, and landscapes can be thought of as communities within the bigger matrix. This goes on and on as you change scale, planet, solar system, galaxy, universe. There is always some commonality connecting us to what is around us. Humans also organize ourselves in neighbourhoods, cities, provinces, counties, and so on. But the key is that these also exist within ecosystems and landscapes and ecoregions. In this way, we are a part of the systems we often think of as external to us. There is a web of relationships connecting us with the world around us. In this intricate web of connection, we are in relationship with everything around us. In this view it makes sense to treat the tree you are shading under with the same amount of respect and care you would a loved one holding an umbrella for you.

I am interested in the way this simple shift in thinking can influence efforts of conservation and restoration. When it comes to Garry Oak Ecosystems, how might our motivation to protect them change if we think of them as a valued member of our community who is vulnerable and at risk of dying? Ecology or science in general tends to objectify study material, and this can lead to de-contextualizing knowledge. As a result, many people's understanding of the natural world doesn't include the context of their relationship to and place within it. If we see the camas flowers in the park as our neighbours, will we be more likely to protect them? If you turn to Indigenous knowledge systems, the answer would be yes. It is a central belief in Indigenous paradigms that humans are a part of the natural world, all species are kin. This results in relational accountability to something beyond ourselves and our species, and as a result there is strong advocacy for environmental stewardship and protection spanning Indigenous cultures globally. With respect to the origins of this worldview, and without appropriating specific beliefs, westerners can learn a lot from this perspective. If we broaden our interpretation of community to involve more than just the human world, we can see how important it is to protect, care for and help the vulnerable members of our family here on earth.

**Garry Oak ecosystems are particularly interesting because they have been cultivated by Indigenous groups on the southern island and surrounding islands through relationship, stewardship and advanced 'management' practices. These relationships have made Garry Oak ecosystems a living representation of humans and nature working together to create opportunity for life, growth and expansion. As such, they are an opportunity to respect the environment and acknowledge humankind's relationship with the natural world.**

In a world where environmental degradation is looming around every corner, we as individuals have an opportunity to get involved and have a lasting impact. I feel like Garry Oak ecosystems are a keystone in this movement, as they represent not only an extremely vulnerable ecosystem as far as risk to species, but also a rich eco-cultural landscape where we can literally see how beautiful the world becomes when we work with nature instead of against it.

#### Questions

How does this sit with you?

How would you describe your relationship with the natural world around you?

How have you been taught about nature in your life?

Have you been taught about how you fit into it as well?

Can you think of any examples of ways humans have worked together with nature for mutual benefit?

How do you think that this perspective shift would influence our society?

Do you think the way that our society is structured makes this view inherently difficult or exiled?

Do you feel humans and nature have a healthy relationship? Do you think we can?

How does this framing relate to the eco-movements you see happening in recent years?

Is it positive or negative? Are there obvious blind spots or limitations?

### Activity

Now let's do an activity to get you thinking about these concepts. On the table we have a few different species common to Garry oak ecosystems, with a little description of their roles in their communities or ecosystems. The challenge for you guys is to think of other things that fill the same or similar role in a community. This can be in whatever way feels right for you, your family community, the university, Victoria, global communities, other ecosystems, etc... The point is to start thinking of the commonalities shared between different things and how we all relate to one another in diverse and intricate ways.

### Appendix

## Garry Oak Ecosystem Cover Change Over Time

Area	Year: 1800 (Cover in hectares)	Year: 1997 (Cover in hectares)
Victoria	1,460	21
Oak Bay	850	25
Saanich	3,473	192
Central Saanich	740	7
Sidney	30	0
North Saanich	1,040	1
Esquimalt	470	20
Colwood	320	16
Langford	370	105
View Royal	270	39
Metchosin	1,180	49
Indian Reserves	240	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,443</b>	<b>512</b>

Source: <https://goert.ca/>

How do people connect with nature and how does that benefit different people?

This research found that the inclusion of nature in self led to the highest levels of connectedness.

What does this say about feelings of interconnectedness at the centre of relationships?

### **The relationship between nature connectedness and happiness: a meta-analysis**

Colin A. Capaldi, Raelyne L. Dopko, and John M. Zelenski\*

Abstract:

Research suggests that contact with nature can be beneficial, for example leading to improvements in mood, cognition, and health. A distinct but related idea is the personality construct of subjective nature connectedness, a stable individual difference in cognitive, affective, and experiential connection with the natural environment. Subjective nature connectedness is a strong predictor of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors that may also be positively associated with subjective well-being. This meta-analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between nature connectedness and happiness. Based on 30 samples ( $n =$

8523), a fixed-effect meta-analysis found a small but significant effect size ( $r = 0.19$ ). Those who are more connected to nature tended to experience more positive affect, vitality, and life satisfaction compared to those less connected to nature. Publication status, year, average age, and percentage of females in the sample were not significant moderators. Vitality had the strongest relationship with nature connectedness ( $r = 0.24$ ), followed by positive affect ( $r = 0.22$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = 0.17$ ). **In terms of specific nature connectedness measures, associations were the strongest between happiness and inclusion of nature in self ( $r = 0.27$ ), compared to nature relatedness ( $r = 0.18$ ) and connectedness to nature ( $r = 0.18$ ).** This research highlights the importance of considering personality when examining the psychological benefits of nature. The results suggest that closer human-nature relationships do not have to come at the expense of happiness. Rather, this meta-analysis shows that being connected to nature and feeling happy are, in fact, connected.

# Historical Garry Oak Ecosystems of Greater Victoria & Saanich Peninsula

- 1997 Garry Oak Ecosystem
- 1800 Garry Oak Ecosystem
- Study Area Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

### Credits

Ecosystem mapping by Ted Lex, Terrestrial Information Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Victoria, B.C.

Digital Products by Dan North and Duncan Richards of HR GISolutions Inc., with support from Tim Briesley, Terrestrial Information Branch, B.C. Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management.

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Projection: BC Albers NAD 1983  
Zone: 12S, UTM  
Date: May 3, 2002  
Scale: 1:225,000



**HR GISolutions Inc.**  
HRGISolutions@shaw.ca  
(250) 685-7727



## California Oatgrass (*Danthonia californica*)

Native bunchgrasses like California oatgrass are valuable for enhancing biodiversity. Healthy stands can reduce invasion by exotic species yet exhibit a spatial distribution compatible with forbs. California oatgrass improves habitat diversity for feeding, nesting, and hiding by songbirds, as well as other animals. The grains are eaten by small birds and mammals (Mohlenbrock 1992).



What things in your communities might serve similar roles?

Ex. having different parks amongst neighbourhoods helps keep habitat diversity for humans

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## Common Cammas (Camassia quamash)

Common camas was one of the most important cultural foods in Coast Salish territory and it continues to play a key cultural and ecological role, providing early season nectar for two federally endangered butterflies and countless other pollinators.



What things in your communities might serve similar roles?

ex. community cabbage program helps get food to people who need it

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Sharp-tailed snake (Contia tenuis)

The Sharp-tailed snake spends much of its life underground and is rarely seen. Complexity of the substrate is important to the Sharp-tailed Snake as it lives most of the year underground. play both the predator and prey role. They make for a healthy snack for hawks, eagles, weasels, foxes and more. They also help control pest populations as middle-order predators that keep our natural ecosystems working.



What things in your communities might serve similar roles?

ex. Universities have TAs who help keep balance between students and professors

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