

Report to the community

Hi Everyone –

With this issue of our newsletter, we are celebrating a second fun and inspiring month for the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project officially launched on May 22, 2007.

A huge thanks to all of you for your continued support and enthusiasm in learning and sharing about biological diversity – and how this “variety of life on earth” supports and sustains us in so many ways.

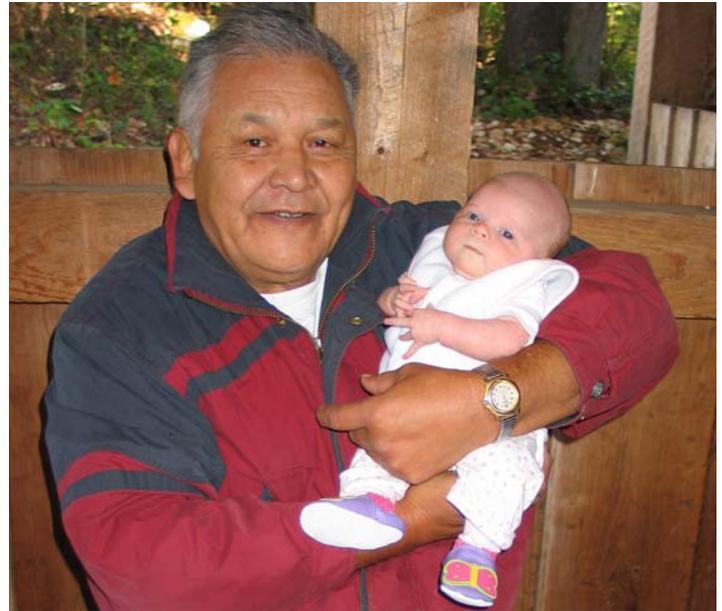
This is the heart of the message from Penelakut elder August Sylvester who co-led our food and medicine walk with Dr. Nancy Turner last month at Echo Heights (see letter at right).

We are learning a great deal together. In June we focused on forests, July was largely marine life, and next month we plan to explore biodiversity of the Chemainus River.

We’ll also learn about the many ways that water supports our environmental, social, cultural and economic needs. As we explore local forest, ocean, and river biodiversity it is becoming clear how much everything is interconnected.

In addition to more great field activities (described below), a recent highlight for the project was receiving a special invitation to the University of Victoria’s opening of a new Office of Community-Based Research on June 19. The office was created to facilitate collaborations between university and community that lead to positive changes for society.

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Augie Sylvester thinks Echo Heights is a good place to take our children to learn

Why cut down a pharmacy?

The following letter by Augie Sylvester, a respected elder of the Penelakut First Nation, was written to North Cowichan’s mayor and council. Augie accompanied Dr Nancy Turner on our walk through Echo Heights Forest in June. He impressed many of us in the Biodiversity Project with his knowledge and deep understanding of the significance of the forest. We thank him for sharing his letter with us.

I was walking in Echo Heights last month with the university professor, Dr. Nancy Turner. I’m still thinking about that day. We didn’t even get very far along the path because there was so much to talk about. Everywhere I looked I saw medicine.

People need to know about this. If we don’t say something now, maybe it’s going to be too late. Here is what I’m saying to you.

There’s so much medicine in that one spot alone. We didn’t even go far, only 100 yards and there was so much medicine. I can find all those medicines on Kuper, but not close together, not all in one place like that. I usually have to walk a long ways to find the medicines I need. Some are hard to find. It takes me a long time.

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Kelly Bannister and Kathy Wachs at UVic

Report to the community (cont)

Kathy Wachs and Kelly Bannister attended the launch, which featured our project. A giant poster display with an action photo from the Echo Heights forest was used as part of the event.

It was an honour to be selected out of the hundreds of great projects supported by UVic, and giving profile to something many of us already believe. Our project is making a difference in a way that matters to people.

We even made it onto the UVic homepage under the prestigious title “UVic is Outstanding People, Real Life Experience, Making a Difference.” (see the archive at <http://communications.uvic.ca/uvicinfo/buildsite/preview.php?ptype=PAGEMAIN&id=209>)

It was quite a spectacular accomplishment to be recognised in this way after such a short time in operation, and we gratefully share this accomplishment with everyone involved in the project.

Stay tuned to the project website and listserv for notice of upcoming activities for August – especially the *Honour the River* celebration being planned in collaboration with Halalt First Nation. We hope to see you there!

And don't forget to get in touch if you have ideas and inspiration.

**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).

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– Augie Sylvester's letter continued –

Echo Heights is a good place to take our children on a walk to learn. We have to organize a walk through there taking teachers from Kuper. They can learn a lot all in a short distance.

There's more medicine in that one little area where we went to walk than I've ever seen all in one place. Only people who understand the medicine at Echo Heights know the value of it. Why should we cut down the pharmacy? That's the Indian peoples' pharmacy, Echo Heights is. But money is easier to understand than trees.

That cedar is used for colds, so is balsam fir. Good strong cure, I use it all the time. I use it on all my children. You don't take more than you need. Just a little handful is usually enough to cure a cold. You can kill a tree by taking too much. The old people say you never over do it. Always take just enough. The prayers that go with taking medicine are important. My grandfather said you can never pray enough. If you don't know how to pray, you may as well not be that medicine man.

That medicine is the one that's going to save the life of who you are thanking it for. If that tree doesn't live, that means you're doing something wrong. We have to be careful how we skin the tree. And we have to look after our pharmacy.

There's strong medicines up there for fighting cancer, like the cherry. Alder is one of our penicillins. Maple is another. You can mix plants to make the medicines stronger. All that takes a lot of time to learn. Not many people know about Indian medicine. You have to study a long time to learn about medicine. My grandfather took a long time to teach me so I know it's important.

When I was a little boy, my grandfather told me “Some day you'll be buying this.” He had a cup in his hand with water in it. We were at a natural spring that boils out of this ground.

I was maybe eight years old. I laughed. I said “Grandpa, don't talk like that.”

He said, “You listen. I'm telling you something. It's coming. Someday you'll be buying this water. You won't be able to scoop it out of the ground.”

We aren't taking our water from the ground to drink anymore. And we see changes in the water table already since all the houses were built up on that hill. If more trees are cut down at Echo Heights, we don't know what is going to happen to the water. Everything is connected.

Everything there are Echo Heights has a purpose. Food, medicine, ceremony, spiritual purposes. Everything there is important. All that medicine, I couldn't get over it. I kept saying “there's not much here we can't use. This place is so important.”

I told the story about Indian people. That Indian people were turned into things to keep our medicines here. A rock was kept there at Echo Heights. It was an old man. He was turned by a trickster into a rock. So he chose which rock he wanted to be. And he chose a medicine rock. That was to keep our medicines here with us. We have to think like that. This forest is alive. We can't abuse it. That's what I have to say.



**August Sylvester
Kuper Island
July 19, 2007**

Teachers explore ocean and forest

An import goal of our project is to bring together biodiversity experts with local educators, such as teachers and naturalists, to share understandings on the importance of biodiversity in our backyards.

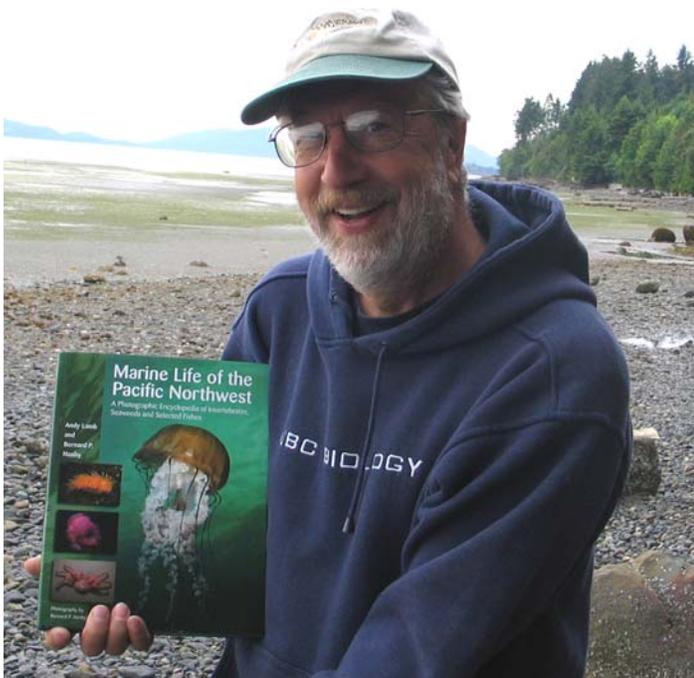
In May, we received a request from teachers in Ladysmith who wanted to use their last Pro-D day of the year to look for places to take their students and ways to incorporate the local environment into their fall curricula. They especially wanted to learn about marine life and how to use their local beach as an outdoor classroom.

Marine expert offers incredible experience

Marine naturalist and educator, Andy Lamb of Thetis Island, generously stepped up to the call for a local marine expert to lead a shoreline walk at Boulder Beach in Saltair. We knew we were fortunate to have Andy's offer of expertise. But we had no idea what an incredible experience awaited us.

Andy is an amazingly animated marine guru with just the right balance of fact and fancy about who's who and what's what on our coastal shoreline. From mating crabs to jumping shrimp to the near death experience of a giant cockle under siege by a sunflower star, we were all mesmerized by Andy's wealth of expertise about local marine life. His knowledge was only surpassed by his generosity and enthusiasm to share with others of all ages.

"Every beach walk is unique," he told us. "You never find everything you are looking for and you always find things you don't expect." With an attitude like that, you have to know an adventure is in store!



Andy Lamb with his book *Marine Life of the Pacific Northwest*



Studying marine life at Boulder Beach

The image etched in our collective memory is ten barefoot teachers and one four-year-old, all standing with pants rolled up in the cool Pacific waters.

Toes poised gingerly between sand dollars and spider crabs, squealing with a mixture of fright and delight, they fired several questions per minute at our seasoned expert. Un-phased and clearly in his element, Andy took delight in answering every single question while skillfully avoiding the perils of pending pinches, stings and scratches.

Ethnobotany and invasive species

The afternoon was spent ethnobotanizing in Saltair's newly created Stocking Creek Park. Karla Ryan and Kelly Bannister led a forest biodiversity walk and discussion about plants and forest habitat as a place of foods, medicines and poisons. The impacts of invasive species such as English ivy were also examined.

The teachers showed a great deal of concern about "nature deficit disorder", the recent observation that today's children and youth are spending more and more time in front of a television or computer than outside.

Potential for integrated curricula

Our seashore and forest walks not only tapped into all our five senses but clearly showed us their potential for developing integrated curricula on biology, chemistry, physics, math, art, writing, geography and more.

If we are ever to properly care for our Earth AND our children, what more could we want than outdoor classrooms such as the ones we are discovering through the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project? We hope other schools will join the Davis Road teachers in their vision and commitment to get young learners into the environment.

Thetis hosts marine walk



On the Thetis Island shoreline with Andy Lamb

Andy Lamb kindly agreed to lead a second activity for our project on July 12, this time on the beach fronting his and wife Virginia's Thetis Island property in Clam Bay.

Our ocean adventures included peeing sea cucumbers, secretive eel-like prickleback fish hiding under rocks, the elegant looking long-armed brittle star (the first Andy had ever seen on his beach!) and many more.

About 15 participants spanning three generations spent their morning learning about plants and animals in the marine environment, followed by a lovely catered lunch at Telegraph Harbour Marina.

National Marine Conservation Area

The Thetis Island group also discussed the feasibility study that is underway for a southern Strait of Georgia National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) Reserve. A presentation by project manager Bill Henwood is planned for Thetis Island on Aug. 18 and he is open to meeting with neighbouring communities (Chemainus, Ladysmith, etc) if interest merits.

Contact is straitofgeorgianmca@pc.gc.ca or phone 604-666-0285.

For further information go to:

www.pc.gc.ca/progs/amnc-nmca/cnamnc-cnmca/dgs-ssg/itm3-/page4_e.asp

Thank you Biodiversity supporters

Polster Environmental Services Ltd for support and contribution of ideas and expertise.

Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society for support and participation in project activities.

Chemainus Residents Association for support and participation in project activities.

Saint Joseph's Elementary School (Chemainus) for expression of interest in the project through former principal Dianne Wilson.

Paul McCuish and students of Chemainus Elementary School for joint Echo Heights forest walks.

POLIS Project (especially **Ann Zurbrigg**) for significant in-kind administrative support and financial management of donations.

University of Victoria for issuing charitable tax receipts for donations over \$10

Office of Community-Based Research (UVic) for support and media exposure.

Dr Nancy Turner for expertise in ethnoecology and leading activities in June.

Dr. Brenda Beckwith for expertise in Garry Oak ecosystems and leading activities in June.

Elder August Sylvester for support and contribution of cultural and biological

expertise in June and July.

Dr. Arvid Charlie contributing for cultural expertise in June.

Brian Egan for expertise in forest conservation and cultural history.

Don Maroc for support and contribution of expertise in ethnohistory.

Genevieve Singleton for support and expertise in natural history interpretation.

Andy Lamb for support and expertise in marine biodiversity and leading shoreline activities in June and July.

Matt Brister and Ron Bannister for providing water taxi service for Thetis events.

Warren Goulding editor of the *Chemainus Courier* for assisting us in sharing accurate project information with the public.

Chris Weicht for community liaising and planning.

Diana Hardacker for help with the Chemainus market table and many other things.

Ladysmith teachers for collaborating on field activities in June.

Rosemary Ratcliffe and Shirley Blackstaff for ideas on production of educational materials.

And everyone who else who has participated in activities or contributed time or funds to the project so far!

COMING EVENTS

Aug 8 – Visit our Biodiversity Project table at the Wednesday night market at Waterwheel Park in Chemainus.

Honour the River – A celebration of the Chemainus River being planned by Halalt First Nation. Stay tuned!

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