

Interest in biodiversity education growing locally

An idea originally seeded in a casual conversation at Kin Park in Chemainus on a sunny day in early April is coming into full bloom.

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project was born when a small group of locals found they shared a common desire for fun, educational and unifying activities that could inspire diverse people to come together to learn about biological diversity.

Biological diversity (or biodiversity) means the variety of life on Earth. Biodiversity forms the living web that helps to sustain humans and ecosystems. Maintaining local biodiversity helps to guard against impacts of global climate change.

The project is a pilot collaboration between UVic's POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and a growing number of community members, organisations, schools and businesses in Chemainus and adjacent areas. The broad goal is to make biodiversity meaningful to every-day life, taking an "in our backyard approach" to learning.

The Chemainus branch of the Vancouver Island library created an extensive biodiversity display for the launch of the project on "International Biodiversity Day" May 22. Many volunteers and more than 20 performers were involved in an initial fund-raising event on May 25 – the Spring Tune Up! variety show at St. Joseph's School.

"The project is grass-roots in its approach. It continues to grow and evolve in response to interest and needs of community members who want to be involved," said Dr. Kelly Bannister of POLIS who is one of the project leads. "We knew there would be local interest, but we had no idea it would be this great. We are blown away by the expressions

of interest, commitments of funds, and support of biodiversity experts who have agreed to share their knowledge with the community."

Some of the experts include internationally-acclaimed ethnobotanist Dr. Nancy Turner of UVic who will devote a whole day to the project in mid-June. Professor Turner has worked extensively with First Nations on documenting traditional uses of plants and has authored many books and field guides on the topic. Andy Lamb, author of "Marine Life of the Pacific Northwest" will lead a shoreline marine life walk in July. Lamb runs a small marine-oriented ecotourism business on Thetis Island with his wife and previously worked on educational outreach for the Vancouver Aquarium.

The project may have been born in Chemainus, but interest is quickly expanding up-island, with commitments of support and expertise as far away as Tofino from the Clayoquot Field Station and the Tofino Botanical Gardens. Instructors from Malaspina University-College have expressed interest in bringing classes to Chemainus for educational field trips.

Volunteer Karla Ryan of Saltair is leading outreach with local schools and youth. "The interest from all walks of life is huge. One of our goals is to support and enhance scheduled activities by trying to provide expertise in environmental education to local school groups who are interested in partnering with the project," she said.

Ryan is using the project and its resources to enhance Survivor Saltair – an educational team building field trip for grades 5/6. She is also linking the project's resource people with the Davis Road School Teachers (Ladysmith) to explore close-to-home opportunities for



Kelly Bannister and Marg Fisher with the biodiversity display at the Chemainus library. Biodiversity day was held on May 22.

learning about biodiversity on their final professional development day of the school year in June.

With support, funds and resources growing, and an increasing number of activities in the works, the project seems to have successfully risen above the apparent petty politics raised by some members of the North Council municipal council last month.

"It's pretty hard to argue against creating educational opportunities and resources for our community," says project volunteer and Chemainus resident Mark Kiemele who recently designed a logo for the project.

The logo includes the project mascot – a common green tree frog to represent biodiversity in our backyards. The frog is creatively placed on top of the word "biodiversity" in a way that playfully reminds us of interconnections between all living things. The project website indicates logo T-shirts and bumper stickers are just around the corner and

purchases will support ongoing project activities.

For more information or to get involved email bio-variety@shaw.ca or see <http://www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation>

