

Report to the community

Hello Everyone,

And warm seasons greetings! It's been awhile since we've had a chance to put together a project newsletter. That means both good news and not-so-good news. The not-so-good part is that we sadly bid a fond farewell and huge thanks to **Mark Kiemele** in his role as one of the project coordinators.

Mark's incredible contributions of ideas, time, donations and skills have been integral to our success and we will miss him. Mark was also the keystone person in publishing this newsletter (thus the delay as one of us had to figure out how the heck to use InDesign!).

But like natural systems upon which biodiversity depends, we must make room in our project for cycles of ebb and flow, decay and renewal, old growth and new growth. So we welcome and look forward to others joining in, bringing fresh ideas, energies and skills.

One such person is UVic Biology student **Bernette Laliberté** of Nanaimo, who we warmly welcomed to the project team in October! We are privileged to have Bernette join us as a research assistant through March 2008 as part of her Research Apprenticeship through the **LE,NONET Project** at UVic (see page 2 for more).

We also are excited to link up with eelgrass specialist **Nikki Wright** of Brentwood Bay who shared her extensive knowledge and a dazzling slide show in October (more about Nikki's presentation at right). Discussions are under way to explore working with Nikki on a **community eelgrass mapping project** for Chemainus, Saltair, and our neighbouring Thetis and Kuper Islands.

We thank **Cowichan Neighbourhood House** for their generous donation of facilities for the eelgrass talk.

We narrowly missed the perfect opportunity this Fall to tromp around local woods with mushroom expert **Dr. Ingeborg Woodsworth** of Lake Cowichan. While Ingeborg was very enthusiastic about leading a local mushroom safari in November, she had the best reason to decline – a scheduled trip to meet her new born grandson. The cold and wet claimed most of our fungal friends before we were could identify another expert.

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Local eelgrass is as important as tropical rainforests

Marine conservationist Nikki Wright shared invaluable information on our native eelgrass meadows (*Zostera marina*) in Oct. Eelgrass sustains a highly complex food web, providing food and protection to all five species of juvenile salmon, young herring, nudibranchs, anemones, jellyfish, clams, scallops, cockles, shrimp, several species of crabs, sea stars, moon snails and sand dollars. These species are all important prey for fish and birds.

Pacific herring roe is spawned directly on eelgrass in the spring and is central to the marine food web. It is an important part of the diets of migrating seabirds, grey whales, and invertebrates.

The root systems of the plants help stabilize sediments and prevent erosion while the rhizomes (underground stems) are highly nutritious and used for food and ceremonial purposes by many First Nations.

Damage to eelgrass (e.g., by pollution, contamination, oil spills, logging, dredging, goosander aquaculture) can affect entire ecosystems as well as the stability of our shorelines.

But there is hope! Eelgrass is protected by law, under the Federal Fisheries Act. Any loss of eelgrass, such as could happen in developments like the

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Nikki Wright



Nikki Wright (second from right) receives an original sea-grass metal carving at her eelgrass talk in October.

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However, several biodiversity project enthusiasts participated in Ingeborg's incredible annual **Salmon and Mushroom Festival** (Lake Cowichan) and built up our local expertise substantially. We hope Ingeborg will agree to share her knowledge with us in early Spring. Visit Ingeborg at <http://www.mayocreekgardens.ca/>



Ingeborg Woodsworth (second from right) shares her expertise at the Salmon and Mushroom Festival in November.

Other good news includes a recent **grant by Shell Environmental Fund** to support the publication costs of local biodiversity handbooks, field sheets, and a project poster display. Hooray! (more info next issue).

The project also looks forward to supporting biologist **Dr. Peter Nix** and others who have started up a North Cowichan **climate change action team** to help us understand what we can and must do to limit human-caused erosion of our natural systems, which clearly degrades our social and economic systems. **Kathy Wachs** is coordinating a **climate change subcommittee** of the Chemainus Residents Association, which will be gathering information for, and disseminating information from, the North Cowichan group.

With Solstice celebrations now behind us, we look forward to the lengthening of days, re-awakening of our local flora and fauna, and re-energizing our efforts to get together in the spirit of respectful sharing and learning about biodiversity in our backyards.

Stay tuned for next month's issue of *Biodiversity Matters* with upcoming opportunities. Be sure to send us an email if you have idea or want to lead an activity!

Sincerely,

Project Coordinators *Kelly Bannister,*
Kathy Wachs and *Karla Ryan*

– Eelgrass story continued –

Chemainus Marina/Quay, must be compensated for by transplanting at a 2:1 ratio.

Nikki also described her extensive work in support of **community mapping projects** to locate and protect eelgrass habitats – an idea that stimulated keen interest by participants and project coordinators alike!



Bev Vreeswijk examines an eelgrass specimen.

Nikki Wright is co-chair of the BC-wide **Seagrass Conservation Working Group** (www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca/eelgrass/index.html) and head of the **Seachange Marine Conservation Society** (<http://www.seachangelife.net/>).

A special THANK YOU to Warren Goulding (formerly of the Chemainus Courier) for your project support and media coverage!

Introducing Bernette Laliberté

Bernette Laliberté is a Métis person from Saskatchewan, who has come to Victoria to pursue a degree in Biology. Bernette is undertaking a research apprenticeship with Dr. Kelly Bannister through the innovative LE, NONET (pronounced le-non-git) program (see <http://web.uvic.ca/lenonet/>) at UVic.

Bernette is collating local biodiversity information to help create **user-friendly educational resources** that the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project plans to develop for community use over the next year.



"I'm very excited to learn more about biodiversity in the Chemainus area and to help make it easier for the community to open the doors to nature and its need for protection."

Bernette feels it is important to get outside and educate ourselves about the environment and that it is up to the people to preserve it. Hear hear!

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project is a pilot collaboration between the community and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (UVic).

<http://www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation>

biodiversitymatters@gmail.com