

Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

Fall 2021 Newsletter



The new bridge over the creek in Mount Douglas Park is ready for foot traffic.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society is typically held in the Spring. This year it will held in person on

October 27.

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society **Annual General Meeting** will be held Wednesday October 27, 2021 7:00 p.m. at the Gordon Head Recreation Centre. This meeting will be short with only required agenda items as mandated by Societies Act; namely, approval of financial plan and election of officers. Send nominations to Graham Shorthill shorthill@shaw.ca prior to Oct 25. Unfortunately there will not be a featured speaker this time.

Saanich requires all attending the meeting to show proof of double vaccination at the door, to sign in at the meeting by providing first and last name, phone number or e-mail for contact tracing purposes. We will not have the usual membership table so membership must be updated prior to the meeting. Members must wear a mask while at the meeting and be familiar with the Saanich "Addendum to Facility Use Agreement/License".

<https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Parks~Recreation~and~Community~Services/Documents/COVID-19-Addendum-to-Facility-Use-Agreement.pdf>

We acknowledge and respect the ɫək^wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory Mount Douglas Park rests.

This newsletter is available online in colour at <http://mounddouglaspark.ca/>

Join online: <https://mounddouglaspark.square.site/>

Upcoming and Recent events

22-September is National Tree Day when 25 big leaf maples were planted along the creek around the new bridge. Most of the planting locations required working along the steep creek banks so was done by Saanich crews, but some other areas suitable for the rest of us were planted.

Official Bridge Opening: November 4, 10:00 AM.

Mid-fall community planting: Later in the year, after the ground is fully saturated by fall rains, there will be a community planting of the riparian area with ferns and other plants.

Fall 2021 Interpretive signs: There will be four interpretive signs installed on the bridge, two on each side and one larger interpretive sign overlooking the creek and bridge.

Carcass Transplant and Interpretive Area Opening: Our annual salmon carcass transplant, held in conjunction with the Goldstream Hatchery and Saanich Parks will be January 2022. This will be in conjunction with the official opening of the Interpretive Area, again by the Mayor. The interpretive area provides safe access to the creek and will be used for events like the schools salmon fry release and the carcass transplant.

Guess Who

- Is born in the park.
- Leaves home to wander for a few years.
- Knows its home address.
- Returns in the autumn.

Find the answer on the last page of this newsletter.

Invasives

Invasives work in the Park has continued in the past few months but has been limited by a number of factors, especially restrictions placed on volunteers due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We consider this work to be extremely

important to the long-term stability of the park and the different environments and eco-systems included in its boundaries. If you'd like to volunteer to do invasives work consider joining Pulling Together. Information is provided below but may fall out of date as web links change.

Volunteer with Pulling Together in Saanich

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html>

What is a Natural Areas Park?

Mount Douglas Park in Saanich is designated as a Natural Area Park. The Friends believe the term confers special status. Our September 1998 newsletter provided this definition:

A natural park is dedicated to the preservation of indigenous wilderness while allowing access for the enjoyment of the natural conditions therein without appreciably detracting from them.

A natural area is one that is principally left undisturbed. A place where natural processes, plants and animals, and natural forces together determine its character. A natural area is a place where human activities leave no trace. As always in parks like this one there's a tension between the use of the park for public recreation and as a place of preservation. Please let us know what a Natural Park means to you.

Why Mount Douglas Park is Special

The view from the summit: wonderful views in all directions. Sunrise views over Georgia Strait, the American Gulf Islands, and the coast mountains in Washington State, including a stunning shield volcano, Mt Baker. Figuring out the streets in Gordon Head. Shelbourne Avenue, its plane trees marking out a kinked line. Juan de Fuca Strait in blues and whites with all of its busy shipping, bounded by the Olympic mountains rising high and snow capped. On an especially fine day Mt Rainier, 218 km to the south can be spotted. UVic and Oak Bay. Discovery and Trial Islands. Keen eyes can spot Craigdarroch Castle

and the Legislature. The Sooke hills in the west are perfect for sunset contemplation. In fact, we're pretty sure that all 13 municipal divisions in Greater Victoria are visible.

The Natural Setting: for many visitors the park's character, a natural wild woodland, so close to urban and suburban areas, is its greatest attribute. Visit the different eco-zones such as, fir and garry oak forests, cedar groves, the summit with its rocky outcrops and dry summer grass, the beach, and the creek.

Birds: spend a few minutes in the park and you will see and hear many different bird species. The birders' site *ebird* lists 164 species spotted in the park throughout the year. Especially prized among park visitors is the sight and sound of some of the larger species, an eagle, owl, or a pileated woodpecker. Lately, herons have been nesting near the beach and a families of ravens and bald eagles have returned for several years. There are many transient bird visitors who only pass through in the spring and fall. And don't forget the many small birds, sometimes only detected by the sound of their calls.

Animals: The most visible of these are the squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, river otters, and deer but mice and voles, frogs and toads, lizards, snakes, and more also may be spotted. Then there are the occasional visitors to be wary of, cougars and black bears. Near the beach you may find a variety of crabs, small fish, mollusks, and other near-shore creatures. In the fall we typically see small returns of salmon to the creek.

Insects and others: this list is too long already, and we're not entomologists, but trust us, there are enough tiny little forest friends working in the woods to keep you busy for a lifetime.

Plants and Fungi: Various flowering plants, the spring blooming fawn lilies and camas, osoberry, sea-foam, salal, ghost pipes, and so many more. The fungus, dozens of varieties, taking many shapes and colours.

Humans: Don't forget the wide variety of people who visit! Park visitors come mostly from the Greater Victoria region but visitors from all over the world stop in to spend some time in this special park. Please help keep the park a beautiful natural destination for everyone.

Send us your additions!

Shhh... Herons are Nesting

Rare Nesting Birds

- The Pacific Great Blue Heron, our coastal subspecies, is currently considered to be of Special Concern in British Columbia. Its population has shown a general decline, and it is particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events, especially around nesting colonies.
- Herons gather in colonies at the start of each year to court, nest, and raise young. Four eggs are typically laid in Marsh/Ami in a large, very high stick nest, and two chicks might reach the fledging stage and leave the nest by the end of summer. They forage mainly for small fish along the seacoast in large meadows.
- Herons need safe and undisturbed areas for feeding, nesting and roosting habitat.
- Please keep your dogs away from the nesting area and off the beach.

Saanich Parks: 250-479-0022
www.saanich.ca/parks
Armed Control Officer in charge: 250-475-4321










Clockwise from top left: Saanich's information about the heron zone; a juvenile heron on the ground below their nest; The exclusion zone map; A heron nest in a tree top looks like a snarled ball of sticks and twigs.

Heron Zone

The presence of nesting blue herons in the area of the Beach prompted Saanich to impose a protected area this past summer. During nesting season we encourage park visitors to honour this exclusion zone and give the birds a bit more space as they raise their families. Blue herons as a population are a species

of Special Concern in British Columbia. This means they are “vulnerable to extirpation or extinction”¹. Mount Douglas Park is a place where we must all strive to blend the sometimes contrary purposes outlined in the Park Charter: “inspiration, use, and enjoyment of the public” and “the protection and preservation of the natural environment”.



A cluster of fruits from an Arbutus tree in the park. Historically, First Peoples used these for food, decoration, and other purposes.



At our request Saanich has installed an information board on the wall of the washroom building at the beach parking lot.

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/conservation-data-centre/explore-cdc-data/status-ranks>

From the Archives

On 11 March, 1864, the Speaker of the House read the following communication from the then Governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island. This established the Reserve at Mount Douglas as an official “Public Park”.

“I beg to acquaint you that the Reserve in question was originally made by me for the express purpose of providing a place of recreation and amusement for the Inhabitants of Victoria; and that I have since caused it to be marked “Public Park” upon the official Map of the Colony.”

Mr. Speaker then read the following communication from His Excellency the Governor.

Vancouver Island.
Victoria, 11 March 1864

To the Speaker and Gentlemen of the Legislative Assembly
Gentlemen,

I have had the honor to receive Your Address dated the 5th Instant, requesting that I will take such steps as may be necessary to secure for the use of the Public “The Reserve at Mount Douglas.”

In reply thereto I beg to acquaint you that the Reserve in question was originally made by me for the express purpose of providing a place of recreation and amusement for the Inhabitants of Victoria; and that I have since caused it to be marked “Public Park” upon the official Map of the Colony.

I forward herewith to be placed amongst the Records of the Assembly a Map upon which the Limits and Boundaries of this Park are distinctly defined.

I have the honor to be,
Gentlemen,

Your Most obedient Servant,

(signed) James Douglas

A lot has changed since 1864. We have just honoured Canada’s first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We are now more aware than ever of the historical treatment of the people living here on Southern Vancouver Island, on whose traditional territories the Park was established, when European colonists arrived. It is our understanding that at this time Saanich and the W̱SÁNEĆ leadership council, comprised of the Tsartlip, Tseycum, and Tsawout First Nations, are working on a shared document, a so-called Memorandum of Understanding.



Looking down and southeast from the summit of Mount Douglas Park in the fall. Shelbourne's memorial avenue of plane trees is a prominent landmark.



Three tiny mushrooms spotted in early October.



A barred owl spotted near the weir pond in the park.

Invasive Lizards

In recent years it has become evident to everyone in the Greater Victoria region that a new species is now making itself very much at home here. The new animal is *Podarcis muralis*, the common wall lizard. This small reptile arrived in the region in 1970, (probably) released from a small private zoo. For many years they remained relatively isolated to a small region around Brentwood Bay. However, in the past decade or so they have spread rapidly around the region. Now, they are very easy to find in Mount Douglas Park and the surrounding area.



A common wall lizard found near the summit in Mount Douglas Park. This individual has lost and regrown its tail. This is a survival adaptation. The dropped tail wriggles and distracts predators long enough for the lizard to escape. This is likely a male, they are more colourful than females. The digital edition of this newsletter is reproduced in colour.

Wall lizards prefer open and semi-open habitat such as rocky meadows, open woodlands, Garry Oak ecosystems. They are common at the summit. They are active hunters and eat small insects like flies, beetles, and spiders but apparently

also like small fruits and berries. The females carry eggs and can lay several small clutches each summer. The eggs are left to incubate and the juveniles fend for themselves when they hatch.

One reason for concern is that little is known about the relationship these invaders have with the native alligator lizard, *Elgaria coerulea*, and with the endangered sharp-tailed snake (*Contia tenuis*). There is concern that the invaders may prey on juvenile snakes. At present evidence suggests that the alligator lizards, similar in size and sharing similar environments, are not directly threatened. The alligator lizard bears live young, which may help it resist the invaders. There is some evidence that alligator lizards avoid areas used by the wall lizards. At present alligator lizards are widespread on Vancouver Island and so aren't immediately threatened overall by the newcomers.



This is the native alligator lizard. They are very similar in size to the wall lizard, but are a bit more drab in appearance. Both species live in similar environments and eco-systems and share some of the same prey. Both lizards are small and very delicate and will drop their tails if pursued. Please don't attempt to capture them in the park.

Bridge Trail and Bridge: Update

In brief, the bridge is installed 🥳, the cover photo shows the setting. The approaches, a new trail connecting Douglas and Churchill have been built. The creek in the area of the bridge has been widened to slow storm water and its banks have been reinforced with wood debris and boulders. Finally, the interpretive area on the west bank is ready for visitors. We look forward to the next salmon carcass transplant and fry release. Still to come are some interpretive signs that will educate visitors on the salmon life cycle, its importance to streams, rivers, and natural woodlands, and riparian (stream side) area. Though long in the making this project has been a great success.

Casual observation and conversation reveals that many visitors are crossing the bridge daily and no longer splashing through the creek. Please remember to keep your dogs under control in the area and out of the creek as well. So far, feedback has been positive. We believe this project will have a be a strong and lasting legacy of the Society in the park.



New marker post on Churchill Trail indicating the new path to the bridge across the creek.

Special thanks are due to Saanich which deployed teams from many different departments to procure the bridge, to build the footings, the connecting trails, the interpretive area, new signs and information displays, and to restore the disturbed area and plant new trees and other restoration work. And of course thanks to the Pacific Salmon Foundation who provided a grant to support this project. We'll be presenting Saanich with \$15 000 of the \$25 000 we've committed to this project at the opening ceremony on November 4 at 10 AM.

Salmon Fry Release

On Friday, 17 May, 2021, 35 000 chum salmon fry were released into the weir pond at the head of Douglas Creek. This work is part of a decades-long collaboration between The Friends of Mount Douglas Park, the Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association, & Saanich. At this event we presented a cheque for \$2500 to the Goldstream volunteers to support their ongoing efforts to rear salmon for local rivers and streams.

Learn about the Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association at <http://gvsea.com>.



During this release the drains from the weir pond were blocked with mesh. The mesh keeps the fry in the pond for a few days to give them a bit of time to

acclimatize to the environment. After the mesh was removed the fish made their way quickly out of the pond and down the creek to the ocean. After three or four years in the North Pacific, where they grow into mature adults, they'll try to return.



The fry are carried to the pond in buckets and poured into the water.

Answer to Guess Who

This park visitor is salmon. Unfortunately, they still not as common as we'd like to see. However, we continue to work to restore the creek to something closer to suitable salmon habitat and thanks to the work of groups like the Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association, and local elementary school students and their teachers, we release salmon fry every year, to build up a small population of fish imprinted on this creek.



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Membership, Renewal, Gift Membership Still just \$5/year

Becoming a member helps us advocate for the park.

Join online: <https://mountdouglaspark.square.site/>

Providing information via this newsletter about the Park is an important Society function. We want to reach more Park users and Park neighbours. Why not **give someone you know a gift subscription and include it with your renewal**? A one-year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift, we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year. Do this online (above) or with this form.

Gift From: _____

New Member (or renewal): _____

Name: _____

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Postal Code: _____ **Telephone Number:** _____

Membership **4 years \$20** 3 years \$15 2 years \$10 1 year \$5

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