



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

Stream to Sea: Salmon Eggs

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*Down by the Bay
Where the eelgrass grows
Back to my home,
I dare not go
For if I do
My mother would say
Have you ever seen a salmon playing Backgammon?
Down by the Bay!*

Spring has sprung! Well, at least in the natural world it has. There are tiny signs of spring everywhere if you look closely enough.

Among the many subtle signs of spring are the hatching of salmon eggs. In nature, we don't get to see these precious eggs hatch because they're buried in sandy river bottoms. Lucky for us, for the past 30+ years the Dept. of Fisheries & Oceans has been running a program called Stream to Sea. It's a strategy developed to help students become aquatic stewards. This program includes sending 'eyed' salmon eggs (the egg is developed enough that you can see the eyes in them) to participating classrooms to finish hatching the eggs and raising them to just past the Alevin stage (Alevin is when they have yolk sacs still attached), then releasing them in a local stream in the spring.

For the past five years, the Nature Centre has been raising salmon Fry (the stage after Alevin) as part of the Stream to Sea Program. This has given the general public a chance to watch the fry grow and develop over the summer, and then be released into a local stream in late fall. This year, we are able to participate in the egg hatching part of the program. We will be receiving Coho eggs in late January / early February to hatch, then raise the babies through the summer to release locally in the fall. We are very egg-cited to be part of this aspect of the Stream to Sea program this year!

Once released into a stream, young coho spend between 1-2 years in fresh water before migrating out to sea. After spending 18 months in the ocean, they will migrate back to their home stream to spawn and die.

The life-cycle of salmon is an incredible journey, and it's one that we should all pay more attention to protecting & supporting as our climate changes. Come and visit us at the Nature Centre to see these beautiful creatures.