



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

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The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society's Purposes: To advance education by providing programs and classes to children, youth, and the public on the subjects of the Cowichan Estuary, its marine and bird life, its natural and cultural history, the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds, and other natural ecosystems; and to protect, restore and enhance the quality of the natural environment in the Cowichan Estuary and its adjacent watersheds

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

WINTER

The year began with a Strategic Planning exercise for board members, staff and volunteers on January 12th and 13th. The day after the planning session the thermometer dropped to -10C leading to frozen pipes at the centre (thankfully no pipes burst) followed by a dump of snow.

SPRING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

With warmer weather in the spring, we welcomed students into the centre.

Under the experienced guidance of Madeline Southern many school groups came through the centre in the spring of 2024. Students ranged in age from kindergarten through grade twelve. They experienced hands-on-nature conservation and science-oriented school programs on the shores of Hecate Park linked with the Province of BC's curriculum outcomes.



The popular **Sea Squirts** stories and activities program ran every Wednesday in March hosted by VIU practicum students and again in May hosted by Nicky MacDonald.

SPRING EVENTS

April 7th - Scully the Sculpin who was loved by many but was getting too big for the touch tank was released back to the sea.

April 13th We held a goodbye tea for Anna Scouten, who was the restoration coordinator but now has a full time position with the School Board and Louisa Varco, who was the aquarist keeping the critters in the tank healthy and fed but now is working full time with DFO.

April 20th We had a booth at the City of Duncan's Earth Day celebrations

April 21st was our 14th birthday so we held a B'EarthDay Party attended by over 70 people. Jack Connelly provided live music, Genevieve Singleton and Philomena Williams talked with visitors about native plants.



Throughout the month of June volunteers were involved with **Dungeness Crab Larval monitoring** in conjunction with CERCA and the Hakai Institute. Monitoring the trap which was installed at the Maritime Centre

SUMMER

Summer is always a busy time at the Centre with **summer camps** running Monday to Friday throughout July and August. Pheobe and Paisley were our excellent camp leaders this summer.

Volunteers with summer camp included:

- Jim and Lyn Wisnia bringing the joy of music,
- Barbara Sobon bringing art and colour.





Campers in the July 22 and August 19 camps were able to talk with scientists aboard the Exploration Vessel (E/V) Nautilus —a 68-meter research vessel equipped with remotely-operated vehicles (ROVs). The crew was in the South Pacific.

SUMMER SPECIAL EVENTS

July 6 – Unveiling of **mural by Shawn Johnny Seymour**



August 25 – **Lower Cowichan River Clean-up** – satellite event at the Nature Centre



FALL

Barnacle Buddies, a new program requiring pre-registration for parents and tots (ages 3-6) was launched. The program was a sell out success.

Sea Squirts, drop in program for parents/guardians and tots from 0-6 saw 3-7 families every week in the fall.

Home School Enrichment Program offered in the fall of 2024 for the first time.

One of many special times for the home school learners was on Friday October 25 when the junior home learners attended an “Estuary at Night,” learning session, where they learned about owls, and bats.



In the blue-twilight picture below, a Great Blue Heron had just swooped down and landed right in front of everyone. The evening ended with a lantern parade.



Sept 7 – **Living Gently – Local Maker Showcase** a fundraiser held in the centre.

Sept 23 – **Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul – Cowichan River Day**



We had a booth at this special event held on the banks of the Cowichan River hosted by Cowichan Tribes and Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable. The picture to the left shows the public unrolling of the fish prints that were collected during the public art project called **Project 84,000**. The Nature Centre was one of several public locations where people could add to the art rubbings honouring the estimated 84,000 juvenile steelhead trout, lake trout, cutthroat trout, and other species that died in the Cowichan River in July 2023 due to environmental stress.



October 21, we hosted a **volunteer tea and orientation** attended by 15 new and old volunteers.

November 7- **Hecate Park Native Plant Garden Restoration** Volunteer Opportunity with CVRD Parks and students from Cowichan Highschool. Ken Elliot and Genevieve Singleton shared their knowledge.



November 15 – **Salmon Release Field Trip** – Several classes joined volunteers and staff from the Nature Centre on the banks of the river in MacAdam Park for the release of coho fry that had been reared at centre from their arrival as eggs in February.



November 18 – Board member Sean Hacker-Teper was a guest speaker at the **Cowichan Watershed Board Speaker Series** night on the theme of Brackish Biodiversity. He brought along ocean critters collected by the scuba dive team from Brentwood College.

Kim Lagimodiere, the program coordinator for Cowichan Tribes' S-hwuhwaus Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa (Thunderbird Protecting the Ocean), spoke about the importance of the estuary to Quw'utsun Mustimuhw.

**Brackish Biodiversity:**
Come "Sea" What We See at the CENC!
An Up-Close Look at Estuary Life through an Observation Tub, featuring Speakers from Cowichan Tribes & Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre.

 **Monday, Nov 18th**
 **7-8:30pm**

 **Always free**
 **VIU, Cowichan Campus**


Learn more: cowichanwatershedboard.ca/speakers-series

Bethany Coultard, Cowichan Tribes' Marine Projects Supervisor, shared a glimpse into the Marine Team's work in the Estuary and beyond.

Two young ecologists and a Mom from the Nature Centre's home learner's program, wrapped up the evening with thoughts on the importance of science spaces for kids.

VISITORS TO THE CENTRE

Despite frozen pipes, shortage of volunteers and other challenges during the year 1885 people visited the centre. They met the fish and other intertidal creatures in our aquariums and touch tank, used our wildlife viewing scopes and microscopes and explored our interactive exhibits.

CHANGES

There were changes to the composition of the board of directors. We are grateful for the contributions made by Madi Mayfield, Dorothy Marshall and Jim Wisnia and wish them well. And we welcomed to the board Nick Gallant and Stacey Slager in July of 2024, Sean Hacker-Tepper and Brandi Drew in August of 2024.

2024 also saw staffing changes. We thank:

Alison Adamson, the Office Manager, for her work in keeping our doors open and programs running smoothly and wish her well in her future plans; and

Madeline Southern, educator extraordinaire who cheerfully and skillfully lead many students through nature based activities and assumed duties of the Office Manager until the end of August.

We welcomed:

Pheobe and Paisley. They enthusiastically lead the summer camps;

Paula McPhee to the Aquarist position. She brings with her a wealth of knowledge from working at the Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea in Sidney

Jenn Baird as Executive Director in July

Kristen Banasch as part time educator in the fall

GRATITUDE

We give a shout out to Sarah Mullock for her expertise and help with our website

We appreciate all volunteers and give a special mention to Tiffany Farkas, Kate Reynolds, Alison Russell, Judy Wilson and Kathryn Currie. Thanks to the Van Veenendaal family for their ongoing support

Gratitude to Kristi Koons and Dwight Milford of Kroffat Brake & Wheel and Auto Repairs for adopting us as one of their charity partners for the year.



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

Red Cross Community Services Recovery Fund

CVRD Grants in Aid

Country Grocer Save a Tape Program