



STEWARDSHIP NEWS



Welcome to our winter issue! Inside, you will find updates on the Wildlife Tree Program, Okanagan River Restoration Initiative, and an invitation to become a Wildlife Habitat Steward. We hope you enjoy reading our articles about rare plants, Western Screech Owls, Great Basin Spadefoots, Sandhill Cranes, and invasive plants in bird seed.

Accommodation Industry Partners Receive Recognition

By Paula Rodriguez de la Vega
TLC's SOS Stewardship Program



This year, the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) recognized a number of individuals from the accommodation business community for caring for the land in partnership with The Land Conservancy's SOS Stewardship and/or Conservation Partners Program. The following five businesses received awards for their efforts stewarding their private land in balance with their business.

Award Recipients:

O'Reilly's Organic Farm Bed & Breakfast

David O'Reilly and Allison Cran
37617 97th St., Oliver, BC V0H 1T0
250-498-6044 www.oreillyfarmstay.ca/oreillyfarminfo.html

Habitat Stewarded: Conservation covenant protects 600 meters of riparian area along Park Rill creek – as well as a one-acre bog.



God's Mountain Estate – Bed & Breakfast

Sarah Allen and Richard Goodall
4898 Lakeside Road, Penticton, BC V2A 8W6
250-490-4800 www.godsmountain.com

Habitat Stewarded: Stewardship agreement protects 105 acres of grassland, open forest, and cliffs.

Ciliegia Villa / Kambo Farm

Ranbir and Shinder Kambo
12795 87th St, Osoyoos, BC
250-495-7155 www.ciliegiavilla.ca

Habitat Stewarded: Stewardship agreement on half an acre of wetland.



Photos left to right: David O'Reilly and Allison Cran at O'Reilly's Organic Farm; Sarah Allen and Richard Goodall at God's Mountain Estate; Ranbir, Sheena, and Shinder Kambo at Ciliegia Villa/Kambo Farm

In the Okanagan-Similkameen, up to 85% of the low elevation wetlands have disappeared since the early 1800's, and up to 70% of the grasslands. You can make a difference... and TLC's SOS Stewardship Program can help.

Bighorn Ridge Guest House

Carla Leinweber and Roger Hawthorne
2357 Rolling Hills Road, Okanagan Falls, BC V0H 1R0
250-497-8981 Toll free: 1-866-339-8139
www.bighornridge.com

Habitat Stewarded: Stewardship agreement covers nine acres of antelope-brush grassland.



Roger Hawthorne and Carla Leinweber

High Chaparral Guest House

Bruce Brownstein and Linda Sheehy
13990 Fairview-Patten Road, Oliver, BC
250-485-2797
www.highchaparralguesthouse.com

Habitat Stewarded: Stewardship Agreement for 78 acres of grassland, cliffs, and open ponderosa pine forest.



Bruce Brownstein and Linda Sheehy

The SOSCP was founded in 2000 by various groups concerned with the special environment and habitat of the South Okanagan-Similkameen area. The SOSCP is a partnership of 47 non-governmental, government, and First Nations organizations working together to conserve biodiversity. The SOSCP vision is to maintain a healthy environment that sustains the diversity of indigenous plants and animals while enriching peoples lives. For more information, please visit: www.soscp.org

A Second Summer Working at TLC

*By Matt Godfrey, Summer Student in Communications and Graphic Design
TLC's SOS Stewardship Program*

“Since I grew up in Penticton, I have always felt a close tie to the natural areas of the Okanagan. To get the chance to come home and be part of land stewardship was an opportunity I couldn’t miss.



Photo: Lucy Reiss

I loved having a job where I could try to change the world (even if in very small ways), interact with so many amazing people, use the skills I’ve developed in school, and add to my knowledge every day.

From butterfly surveys, to designing newsletters, to pulling weeds, to door-to-door contacting, this was a well-rounded summer. Many thanks to TLC for letting me come back and to all of the landowners who cooperated so kindly and kept us so busy!”

Introducing Bianka!

Bianka Sawicz has joined us in the role of Stewardship Officer for the South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program in the Okanagan Region. She was born in Poland, studied at the University of British Columbia (BSc.) and has spent her life working abroad and in Canada in the environment field. Some highlights include publishing an environmental place based education curriculum in Japan, assisting with the “Sustainable Living Leadership Program” that required rafting/canoeing the whole length of the Fraser River, working on Species at Risk projects province wide for the Ministry of Environment, and helping with Ecosystem Based Management on the Central Coast of British Columbia. Having worked province wide for over three years, the Okanagan Valley stole Bianka’s heart. Bianka looks forward to working with and learning from the landowners across the valley.



Bianka in Bella Coola doing Tailed Frog surveys.

Why Care About Rare Plants?

By Paula Rodriguez de la Vega
TLC's SOS Stewardship Program

As a landowner, you have likely noticed many of the wildlife species that share your property. You probably enjoy walking through open forest and grasslands, or perhaps by a wetland or a cliff area. Some of you may be familiar with the plants that surround you,



Photo: Terry McIntosh

Dwarf Woolly-Heads

such as trees or the large shrubs such as the Big Sagebrush or Saskatoon. Some of you might even have a plant book and have learned about plants in more detail. But few people know the art and science of finding, identifying, or knowing those plants that are listed as rare under the Species at Risk Act.

Being arid valleys, the south Okanagan and lower Similkameen areas have unique environments giving habitats to plants that occur nowhere else in Canada. Botanists are finding that because the majority of the land at low elevations in the Okanagan and Similkameen are privately owned, it is landowners that are the stewards/keepers of many of these rare plants.

All plants are of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, or scientific value to Canada and its people, including First Nations.



Photo: Ornlle Dyer

Grand Coulee Owl Clover

Plants have been some of the main contributors to the fields of medicine and agriculture. The loss of any plant, including rare plants, may mean the loss of future benefits to the ecosystem or to our society.

What can you do?

- **The SOS Stewardship Program is contacting landowners with appropriate habitat where some rare plants are likely to be found. If you are contacted, take advantage of this opportunity and learn as much as possible from the botanical expert.**
- **Get familiar with the plants on your property. This will open up a fascinating new world. A good guide book is the Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia by Parish, Coupé, and Lloyd.**
- **Keep your natural areas free of invasive weeds.**
- **Avoid driving over plants by keeping off-road vehicles in designated areas.**
- **Avoid trampling rare plants and the surrounding habitat.**
- **If you have livestock, install protective fencing around rare plants. The SOS Stewardship Program may have funding available to cover some of the costs.**
- **If you are planning a development, employ Best Management Practices (www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/BMP/bmpintro.html).**
- **For more information, please contact the SOS Stewardship Program at 250-492-0173.**

Endangered Plants in the SOS Area include:

- Branched Phacelia (*Phacelia ramosissima*)
- Dwarf Woolly-Heads (*Psilocarphus brevissimus*)
- Grand Coulee Owl Clover (*Orthocarpus barbatus*)
- Slender Collomia (*Collomia tenella*)
- Stoloniferous Pussytoes (*Antennaria flagellaris*)
- Scarlet Ammannia (*Ammannia robusta*)
- Toothcup (*Rotala ramosior*)
- All are **endangered** which means that they are facing imminent extinction in Canada. To learn more, please visit www.eflora.bc.ca.

Note: Plant communities in the Okanagan that contain antelope-brush are also globally and provincially imperilled. This does not mean the antelope-brush itself is at risk. It is the unique combination of all the plants that grow together that is at risk.

Who? Who?

The Western Screech-Owl

By *Bianka Sawicz*

TLC's SOS Stewardship Program

Provincially and federally listed as an endangered species, the Western Screech-Owl is a small, nocturnal owl that lives in deciduous riparian woodlands in the South Okanagan-Similkameen. This owl prefers to nest in natural tree cavities especially in mature black cottonwood trees along streams, creeks, rivers, ponds, or lakes below 1000 m elevation. As a result of the loss and degradation of riparian habitat and the removal of mature cottonwood stands, the Western Screech-Owl population has substantially declined in our area over the years.

The SOS Stewardship Program will be contacting landowners in February and March who might have suitable Western Screech-Owl habitat. Take advantage of this opportunity to ask the experts all your questions about owls!



Photo: Steve Cannings

Western Screech-Owls inhabit moist woodlands along streams and lakes.

Landowner Tips:

What can you do to help the Western Screech-Owl?

- Learn more about the Western Screech-Owl and its habitat.
- Restore their habitat by allowing live and dead (wildlife trees) black cottonwood trees larger than 36 cm in diameter to stand.
- Plant a cottonwood! Native cottonwood forests stabilize the banks of waterways, they provide homes to many species including species at risk, lower the water temperatures for aquatic species by providing shade, and provide movement corridors for wildlife.
- Install fencing to prevent livestock, development, and recreational activities from accessing riparian areas.
- Plant native deciduous trees and shrubs in riparian areas.
- Allow natural flooding of riparian woodlands to occur as it encourages regeneration.
- Install a Screech-Owl nest box as a temporary nesting site while restoring their habitat.

Listen for screech-owl calls at night from February until April and report sightings to:

Bird Studies Canada: 250-496-4049

Partners in Flight BC/Yukon: 250-490-8286

For wildlife tree information contact:

Lisa Scott, Regional Coordinator of Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program 250-404-0115 Email: witsos@shaw.ca

Did you know?

Every year Western Screech-Owls are killed by vehicles on our local roads. Some of these kills occur when screech-owls are hunting emerging earthworms on rainy nights. If you find a dead or injured bird, please contact the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls 250-498-4251.

Wildlife Tree Program Completes Successful Third Season

By Lisa Scott & Allison Black
Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program

The 2009 field season was the third year for the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program (WiTS) Okanagan-Similkameen. We had a very successful season, expanding our survey area into the Central Okanagan and the Upper Similkameen Valley. Twenty-one volunteers, many of them belonging to local naturalist clubs, helped us to survey 158 known nest trees and eight owling areas.

The focal species was Lewis's Woodpecker, with most of the nest trees being located in the South Okanagan on Anarchist Mountain, West Chopaka and Vaseux Lake area. Several new trees were located along the Similkameen River between Hedley and Keremeos. Lewis's Woodpeckers are present at a lesser extent in the Central Okanagan and Princeton area. Of the 105 nest trees that were surveyed, approximately 49% were Ponderosa Pine, while 24% were Black Cottonwood. Douglas fir, Paper Birch and utility poles also provided nest sites. Four trees that had previously supported nesting pairs had blown over and six had been cut down.

A total of 53 previously known Williamson's Sapsucker nests were surveyed. Ten of the nests were re-occupied and there were 10 visual sightings of Williamson's Sapsucker in the nest tree area. The surveys determined that two trees had blown over and two trees had been cut down, including a tree that was 383



Photo: Bob McKay

The Lewis's Woodpecker is considered a species of special concern by the federal government, and is one of the program's target species.

years old (as determined from the tree rings).

The surveys for Western Screech-Owl proved challenging although one of our monitors was rewarded for his efforts through the discovery of a nesting pair; the nest was successful and at least three young fledged.

In the fall, efforts shifted to surveying for the elusive White-headed Woodpecker, which had been regularly spotted by private landowners in rural Oliver. Surveying will continue throughout the winter months in the hopes of detecting this species and learning more about its habitat requirements.

WiTS could not have accomplished all the surveying this year without the contributions of many private landowners and the help of numerous volunteers.

For more information on the WiTS Program or to learn more about wildlife trees, check out our website: wildlifetree.org or contact Lisa Scott, WiTS Regional Coordinator, at witsos@shaw.ca or 250-404-0115.

Quiz ...Great Basin Spadefoot

(...answers on page 7)

Spadefoots have vertical pupils like cats.

- a. true
- b. false

The characteristic black, keratinous "spade" on the sole of each hind foot helps them to:

- a. dig into soil
- b. run
- c. hold on to slippery plants
- d. jump

Spadefoots live in

- a. temporary ponds
- b. marshes
- c. dry uplands
- d. all of the above

Tadpoles can speed up their growth rate if their breeding pond is drying up.

- a. true
- b. false

Spadefoots are listed under the Federal Species at Risk Act as:

- a. Endangered
- b. Threatened
- c. Special Concern
- d. Not listed

Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (ORRI)

By Steve Matthews
Ministry of Environment

During the 1950s much of the Okanagan River was straightened, narrowed and dyked to control flooding. This, along with subsequent development adjacent to the river has resulted in the loss of approximately 90% of important aquatic and riparian habitats.

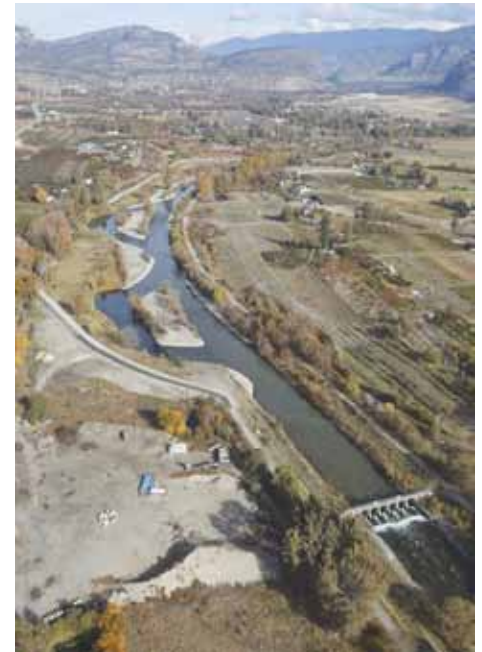
In August 2009, the Ministry of Environment, the Okanagan Nation Alliance and the many partners involved in the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative directed the completion of Phase 1 of this important project. It involved the reconnection to the historic



Photo: WildEarth Photography

floodplain and re-establishment of a meandering channel along 600 meters of Okanagan River located north of Oliver. This will provide huge benefits for a wide range of aquatic and riparian species, including Sockeye and Chinook Salmon, Rainbow Trout, and several endangered wildlife species.

Restoration of disturbed and newly created riparian areas created by this project has begun with the planting of



The ORRI site in 2009, post-construction

native vegetation. The plants will make a significant contribution to the long-term success of the project in terms of restoring aquatic and riparian habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species. Restoration of riparian vegetation also provides benefits to the many residents and visitors who utilize the new hiking/biking path.

Cycle of the Sandhill

By Pat and Jim Linton
Quail's Run Farm

We purchased Quail's Run Farm, on Island Way Road, Oliver, in August 2005.



Photo: Jim Linton

We knew we had a special gem, however, we never anticipated the magnitude of the "SPECIAL".

The land backs up against the Okanagan River and encompasses two landlocked oxbows. Over the past years

we have watched hatches of Mallards and Wood Ducks mature. It has become a rest stop for several visitors on their annual migrations. Tiger Salamanders, Spadefoots, Spotted Frogs and Painted Turtles make their home here. Owls, herons, hawks and eagles frequent the trees and oxbows and of course the bird feeders provide many hours of interesting viewing. **The visit from the Sandhill Cranes topped the list.** These majestic birds are normally viewed from 2000 feet after finally matching their unique shrill call with a small wedge of specks in the sky.

The land is a functioning farm. There are six acres of hay and three acres of sweet corn. It takes a lot of energy and sweat to keep the weeds down and bring the plants along to maturity. In the fall the land is worked and seeded with field peas or fall rye providing green manure for the next seasons crops. Our first corn crop was harvested in 2006.

It was the fall of 2008 that a flock of Sandhills (26 birds), landed during their southern migration, to glean the corn

Cycle of the Sandhill Con't...

kernels worked into the soil. It was wonderful to watch these huge birds at close range appreciating the spoils of our labours. We thoroughly enjoyed them.



Photo: Jim Linton

The corn was seeded the following spring. By early June it was doing

well, we looked forward to a good harvest. One morning a large shadow floated by and came to rest in the newly germinated corn field. At first I didn't realize what was taking place. By the time I walked out into the field the visitor, the "Majestic Sandhill", was walking down the row of corn, picking the new corn plants out and eating the kernels. I persuaded it to finally move on, but not before a row and a half of corn had been eaten. Oh well, that's not so bad as it was nice to see the big guy again. However, the "majesty" was wearing thin.

This fall we again had our visitors. Several flocks stayed an average of three days before moving on. Interesting to watch, but not as thrilling as the prior fall.

One of the birds (probably the singleton from the previous spring) decided the digs were pretty sweet so it stayed behind when the rest of the flock left. After the first week we became concerned and emailed Lisa Scott and Dick Cannings to see if this was normal behaviour. Mr. Cannings replied that periodically a weak bird will stay behind to rest up and regain it's strength before continuing on the flight. It would leave when it was ready. He suggested that we feed it to help it along. The suggested food was CORN.

"I DON'T THINK SO!"

The bird remained for another week, we had a very cold spell and I weakened, purchased field corn and put the feeder out. A week later it continued south.

I can hardly wait for this spring to see if that irritating bird returns to raid the cornfield again.

Sandhill Crane Facts

- **Amongst the largest of North American birds (stand over 1m (4ft) tall, wingspan about 2m (7 ft))**
- **A crane fossil approximately ten million years old was found in Nebraska and is structurally identical to the modern Sandhill Crane, making it the oldest known bird species still surviving.**
- **Thousands migrate thru B.C. each spring and fall travelling between their wintering ground in Southern USA and their Arctic nesting sites. Few of them stay and breed in the Okanagan.**
- **Stopover sites during migration include swampy fields, edges of wetlands, dry rangelands, grain fields and estuarine meadows.**
- **In B.C., there is a need to protect key habitats used by nesting Sandhill Cranes. It is also important to care for staging or stopover habitats used by migrating cranes. A special thanks to Jim and Pat and the many other landowners whose fields fall victims to these hungry giants of flight.**

The answers from quiz on page 5.

True! Vertical eye pupils helps them see better at night when they are most active. All other amphibians of the Okanagan have horizontal pupils.

In order to escape danger and environmental conditions such as extreme heat or cold, Spadefoots **dig** themselves into loose soil and sand for extended periods of time (months at a time).

All spadefoots require (**all of the above**) temporary ponds and marshes to breed, but they also spend up to eight months at a time buried in dry upland areas waiting for the right combination of warm weather and wet soil from rainfall or snowmelt in order to survive above ground. They like to forage in the dry grasslands upslope of

ponds. These habitats must be connected so that the Great Basin Spadefoots can move among them as the seasons progress.

True! As the temporary ponds where they breed dry up, the temperature of the water increases. This speeds up the growth process. They can metamorphose from egg to tadpole to young adult in as little as five weeks (but if there is water, they take eight-nine weeks).

Threatened. The Great Basin Spadefoot is restricted to dry, southern grasslands of south-central British Columbia. Recent (2005-2007) inventory in the Cariboo has increased its known range slightly, however the population is concentrated in low elevation grasslands of the Okanagan which are increasingly threatened. Conservation of both aquatic and terrestrial habitats is needed.

Photo: Sara Ashpole

Wild Bird Seed Can Contribute to Spread of Invasive Plants

By Lisa Scott, Invasive Plant Program
Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District



Photo: Bob McKay

The Black-capped Chickadee is a common winter resident and readily visits bird feeders.

As temperatures drop, many landowners are filling bird feeders to provide a helping hand to those species that reside in our region during winter. Mixed seed is commonly marketed as “wild bird seed”, “wild bird mix”, “finch mix” and so on. There are

no regulations about any of these mixes. Seed houses and retailers mix their own and they may not declare the contents on the package. Buying the components separately and mixing them yourself is the only way of being absolutely sure of what you are scooping into your feeders.

Throughout the year, I visit many private properties and help to identify invasive plants and provide management advice. While I cannot always be certain of the original source of invasive plants, some of the more unusual species are commonly discovered either under a bird feeder or in the vicinity of garden plants commonly used by seed feeding birds. This has led me to believe that the source of some invasive plants is indeed birdseed, and the birds then become vectors and assist the spread of these invaders. This conclusion is supported by two studies from the U.S.

In the past five years, two separate U.S. studies found a surprising variety of invasive plant seeds in bird seed mixes, including: buffalobur, bull thistle, Canada thistle, common ragweed, cuscuta species, field bindweed, jointed goatgrass, kochia, puncturevine, velvetleaf and hoary cress. The majority of these invaders are problematic in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys.

Considering the results of these two studies, it is not surprising that “strange plants” are appearing in gardens and other places. So if you do chose to feed the birds during the cooler months, please follow these simple precautions. Carefully select the seed mix, or better yet, create the mix yourself. Consider putting the seed mix on cookie sheets and baking in the oven on the top shelf at 325 degrees for about 15 minutes.

The seed still tastes good to the birds, but the heat prevents germination. In the spring, remove any unusual plants growing under or near your bird feeder, before the plant goes to seed. Prevention is the least expensive and often the most practical method for reducing the spread of invasive plants.

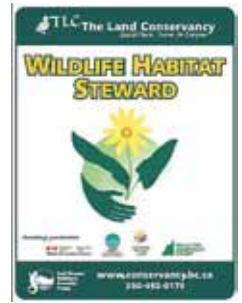
For more information on invasive plants, visit the RDOS website at www.rdos.bc.ca, call 250-492-0237, or email info@rdos.bc.ca.



Photo: Lisa Scott

Canada thistle was determined to be a contaminant of bird seed in two separate US studies.

Become a Wildlife Habitat Steward!



The South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program of TLC The Land Conservancy recognizes

private landowners that are making efforts to be responsible stewards of their land. Stewardship is the voluntary conservation of biodiversity, fish and wildlife habitat.

If you are a landowner who has wildlife habitat, then we invite you to join us and become official ‘Wildlife Habitat Stewards’. Examples of wildlife habitat are grasslands, wetlands, water bodies with riparian areas, rocky bluffs, and open forests.

Becoming a Wildlife Habitat Steward is simple! It involves entering into a voluntary Stewardship Agreement with TLC’s SOS Stewardship Program. This agreement specifies the area on the property that is being managed for the benefit of wildlife and how it is being stewarded.

In recognition, the landowner receives a ‘Wildlife Habitat Steward’ gate or entrance sign, and is promoted as being one of our partners. Stewards also receive extra assistance with wildlife surveys, and habitat assessments and enhancement projects.

For more information, call us at 250-492-0173 or go to the South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program at conservancy.bc.ca.

For more information please contact:

South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program/TLC The Land Conservancy,
201-262 Main Street,
Penticton, BC, V2A 5B2
Phone: 250-492-0173
Web: conservancy.bc.ca

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