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# South Okanagan-Similkameen



# Stewardship News



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Volume 14, Issue 1

Spring 2008

*Welcome to the spring issue! This year, the SOS Stewardship Program is celebrating its 15th Anniversary. We hope you enjoy reading about some of the dedicated landowners in the area and the many stewardship projects that are underway. In this issue you will find information on antelope-brush, butterflies, the Year of the Frog, invasive yellow iris, and a new Bat Stewardship Program. Happy reading!*

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## Stewards in Action...

Perched above Skaha Lake on the east side and close to Penticton, sit the strikingly white, Mediterranean style buildings that are surrounded by about 5 acres of organic vineyards and orchards. God's Mountain Estate is a romantic, rustic, and eclectic Bed & Breakfast and home to Sarah Allen and Richard Goodall.

Unknown to most people is the fact that Sarah and Richard are also responsible stewards of 110 acres of natural grasslands and cliffs located upslope of their Bed & Breakfast. They have engaged the SOS Stewardship Program to do an ecological assessment, in order to find out how to be better stewards of this unique habitat.

One of their challenges has been with irresponsible trespassers (motorbikes & campers) who enter through the power-line which transects their property. SOS Stewardship is assisting by providing educational signage.



*Sarah and Richard will be installing these signs where the power line transects their property.*

A nature trail winds up the slope where Sarah and Richard would like to install some interpretive signage. We'll be assisting with that too!

As one walks up their nature trail, one notices the scent of vanilla from the magnificent ponderosa pines and the bright yellow balsamroot flowers that colour the slopes. A healthy cover and variety of bunchgrasses protect the sensitive arid soils.



*Daughter Alex Goodall standing amongst large ponderosa pines*

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California Bighorn Sheep take shelter from predators on the rocky cliffs, along with a myriad of birds that nest and roost there. The not so popular but federally threatened rattlesnakes find a safe refuge amongst the rocks. It is indeed God's Mountain.

# Message from the Coordinator



*Alyson Skinner*  
*SOS Stewardship Coordinator and*  
*Area Manager TLC Okanagan Region*

On behalf of the SOS Stewardship Program, thank you to all participating landowners who have been making a difference with stewardship initiatives on your properties and in your communities. You are the ones who make this program a great success!

I would also like to extend a big thank you to each of you who took part in our stewardship survey. This spring, we are hoping to learn from your comments and make some changes to the program in order to serve you, your properties, and the critters better.

We are also undergoing some other changes at this time. We would like to extend our thanks to two wonderful team members who have moved on from the SOS Stewardship Program.

California Bighorn Sheep. We wish Anthea all the best in her much deserved 'time off'.

Lisa Scott has parted with the Program after nearly 10 years of working with local community groups and landowners. She is now directing her attention to the Okanagan-Similkameen Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program, Invasive Plant Society as well as other contract work. We look forward to working with her in her ongoing projects.

Both Anthea and Lisa have added a great deal to the SOS Stewardship Program and have accomplished much during their time with the Program and will be missed. On behalf of everyone who has had the pleasure of working with and learning from you both, THANK YOU!

Also, anyone who has seen me lately will know that I will soon be welcoming a small new person to the world. As I transfer my attention to my expanding family, Lucy Reiss will be taking on the challenge of filling the Stewardship Coordinator position during my maternity leave, working alongside Paula Rodriguez de la Vega. I am very confident that the program is in great hands.

Lucy worked for a small community land trust on Vancouver Island for five years, and for the past three years, has been working on species at risk recovery through Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service. She says, "I'm very excited about the prospect of melding those two worlds in the Okanagan, and very much looking forward to trading in the Vancouver commute for sunshine and gardening – I'll be looking for local advice on the latter though!" Being British born and Saskatchewan raised, and with fieldwork experiences in Panama and Namibia, Lucy has a real appreciation for damp and arid environmental extremes. She can often be found on a bicycle of one variety or another, and hopes to meet everyone soon.

Other SOS Stewardship team members include biologists Mike Sarell, Sara Ashpole, and Aaron Reid. They will continue to be available for stewardship projects. Sue Austen is assisting with internal program planning.



*Anthea Bryan*



*Lisa Scott*

All the best and see you in a year,

*A Skinner*

# Wanted: Antelope-Brush Stewards



*Antelope-brush or greasewood provide food and shelter for many kinds of wildlife.  
Photo by Shawn Black.*

Antelope-brush (*Purshia tridentata*, bitterbrush or greasewood) is a gnarly shrub with tiny three-lobed leaves. In spring, it is covered by thousands of fragrant yellow flowers that fill the desert air with perfume. The flowers provide nectar for many insects including the threatened Behr's Hairstreak butterfly. The leaves and stems are a nutritious source of food for deer and bighorn sheep. The seeds are eaten by chipmunks, ground squirrels, and birds.

Healthy grasslands where the antelope-brush grow are disappearing from the South Okanagan. Less than 40 percent of this habitat now remains in the South Okanagan; it is not found in the Similkameen and almost none occurs north of Skaha Lake.

Antelope-brush habitat is a refuge for beneficial insects that prey on agricultural pest species. Research has shown that crop damage from cutworms is highest on extensive areas of land that has been cleared of native vegetation. Whereas vineyards and fields bordered by antelope-brush habitat and other natural habitats have significantly less problems with insect pests.



So if you are fortunate enough to have antelope-brush habitat on your property, you can help by:

- Setting aside areas of antelope-brush habitat for conservation.
- Controlling invasive plants such as Dalmatian toadflax.
- Directing development away from antelope-brush grasslands and working to preserve existing antelope-brush in your area.
- If you are planting grapes, do so in existing agricultural land instead of in antelope-brush habitat.
- Where possible, restore and maintain natural habitat on your property.
- Adopt Best Management Practices for off-road vehicles. [www.grasslands.bc.ca](http://www.grasslands.bc.ca).
- Call the SOS Stewardship Program for more information or for a free site-visit from a biologist.

If you don't have antelope-brush on your property, you can help by planting a butterfly garden in your backyard. Include plants like antelope brush, parsnip-flowered buckwheat, native lupines, hollyhocks, mallows, and chokecherry. These native plants are available at Sagebrush Nursery (Oliver) and Grasslands Nursery (Summerland).

For further information on Behr's Hairstreak and other butterflies living in Okanagan grasslands and shrublands, check out our fact sheet "Butterflies of the Antelope-Brush Plant Community" on [www.conservancy.bc.ca/sosstewardship](http://www.conservancy.bc.ca/sosstewardship). If you would like a copy mailed to you, please call us or drop by the office (see last page).



Report Behr's  
Hairstreak sightings to:  
1 866 699 WILD

*The Behr's Hairstreak butterfly takes flight mid- to late-June. In Canada, this butterfly only occurs in the south Okanagan as it depends on antelope-brush.  
Photo by Bob Lincoln*

# Be Snake Smart !

Spring is here and snakes are on the move. Here are some things you can do to be Snake Smart:

- ☑ Be careful to avoid driving over snakes when they are crossing or basking on roads.
- ☑ Encourage other to use harmless and effective ways to cope with snake encounters, such as snake barrier fencing around yards.
- ☑ Avoid disturbing rock and woody debris in potential snake habitat.
- ☑ Confine pets that will harm snakes or try to train them to leave snakes alone.
- ☑ Report any den location to your local BC Ministry of Environment office.

Snakes are protected by law.  
It is an offence to harass or kill a snake.

## snake Tip: Stop. Hey. What's that Sound?



*Mike Sarell safely moving snake off the road.*

When you hear the buzzing of a rattlesnake, stop and determine where it is located. Slowly retreat from the snake. Remember, the rattle is a sign that the snake is aware of you and wishes to avoid confrontation.

Do not attempt to move the snake unless it is absolutely necessary. Even though they can sense heat, if you remain motionless, you will not appear threatening. If you suddenly find yourself in strike range (length of snake), remain motionless and have someone else use a stick to distract the snake away from you.

# Volunteer Opportunity with Habitat Restoration



*Planting native vegetation which will provide food and shelter for many wildlife species. Photo by L. Plaskett.*

The South Okanagan-Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program is a dynamic program that helps landowners with restoring wildlife habitats on their properties. Volunteers are needed to help in restoration projects.

- ☺ Learn about the values of a riparian area while you help with the planting of native shrubs and trees.
- ☺ Get a workout while you spend a few hours pulling invasive weeds.

- ☺ Be part of restoring the grasslands while planting antelope brush and other plants adapted to these arid environments.
- ☺ Help salamanders and spadefoots while cleaning up a pond or a wetland.
- ☺ Experience some unforgettable nature moments.

We invite you to volunteer with the SOS Stewardship Program and experience giving back to the environment and to landowners, who might be your neighbours.

Interested? Please contact;  
Paula Rodriguez de la Vega  
Tel. 250-492-0173  
Email: [prvega@conservancy.bc.ca](mailto:prvega@conservancy.bc.ca)



*Pulling purple invasive loosestrife.*

# Celebrating the Year of the Frog - Landowner Tips

By Sara Ashpole, Puddles for Peepers Researcher

After more than 360 million years, almost half of the world's 6000 known amphibians (that's frogs, toads, and salamanders) have in the last hundred years become extinct. To raise awareness, 2008 has been named *Year of the Frog* around the world.

Over the past two years, biologist Sara Ashpole has been coordinating the Puddles for Peepers project in the South Okanagan. The Peepers project built twelve new ponds on private lands, doubling the number of known Great Basin Spadefoot breeding sites in the South Okanagan.

Spadefoots are dependent on both wetlands and dry upland habitats for their long-term survival. Spadefoots are facing landscapes with highly modified habitats on all fronts: including the lack of breeding ponds and a changing landscape. Much effort has focused on increasing the number and quality of breeding sites. However, the Spadefoot is highly dependent on dry upland spaces living most of its life in the grasslands, including sagebrush and antelope brush habitat. Spadefoots spend the majority of their life burrowing and are adapted and generally limited to areas with loose sandy soil.

These little diggers use their hind spades (where the name 'spade'foot comes from) to excavate burrows for rapid escape from predators, short-term dwelling, and for summer and over-wintering homes. The intensive

agricultural and urban development of the lowland valley and upland grasslands has split the habitat into many pieces and permanently changed sandy soils, isolating Spadefoot populations and reducing their ability to travel between habitats.



*Great Basin Spadefoot.  
Photo by Sara Ashpole.*

In developed areas well-drained sandy soils are being replaced with solid asphalt, grass sod, ornamental plants, and other materials unable to provide suitable homes for burrowing species, like the spadefoot. Experiments have found that adult spadefoots cannot successfully burrow into sod, and less so in gravel. Young Spadefoots are even more sensitive to ground/soil changes.

When restoring Spadefoot habitats and corridors, it is critical to use sandy soils and to plant native vegetation. Spadefoots may make use of artificial or constructed burrows by other species. These burrows may allow for movement across a greater range of soils or ground. As such, artificially constructed and strategically placed burrowing sites should be explored as a feature for restoration sites with modified soils or ground.

This spring the Puddles for Peepers project will be planting native grasses around the ponds that were built last fall. Come out and help!

Contact Sara Ashpole at 250-498-1924.

## Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program seeks Volunteers



*Admiring a wildlife tree.  
Photo by Lisa Scott.*

Are you interested in birding and looking for an opportunity to assist local bird species at risk? Or maybe you are a landowner with property that supports a significant number of wildlife trees and you are willing to have a monitor survey for cavity nesting birds? If yes, then come join us!

The Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program for the Okanagan-Similkameen – more commonly

referred to as WiTS – will be underway in May - July, for a second year of monitoring cavity-nesting birds. The program extends from Osoyoos north to Kelowna and west to Keremeos. We are seeking volunteers to commit anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, monitoring four cavity-nesting bird species at risk: Western Screech-owl, Williamson's Sapsucker, Lewis's Woodpecker and Flammulated Owl. A fifth species,

*(continued from page 5)* White-headed Woodpecker, has proven rather elusive, however we are also on the lookout for this endangered woodpecker.

WiTS will be offering training workshops so surveyors become familiar with record forms, using GPS units and other equipment. While basic birding skills are required, all

equipment will be provided by SONC. You will also be compensated for mileage.

If you want to participate in a rewarding experience this year while enjoying the outdoors and learning some new things, this is the program for you! For more information or to join the WiTS Team, contact the Regional Coordinator, Lisa Scott at

(250) 404-0115 or email [witsos@shaw.ca](mailto:witsos@shaw.ca)

This program is sponsored by BC Nature and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund.

A wildlife tree is any standing dead or live tree with special characteristics that provide valuable habitat for the conservation or enhancement of wildlife.

## Got Bats? *By Aaron Reid, South Okanagan-Similkameen Community Bat Project Coordinator*



*Townsend's big-eared bats. Photo by Aaron Reid.*

"Got Bats?" posters will be a common site on bulletin boards across the South Okanagan-Similkameen area this summer. The posters will be promoting the South Okanagan-Similkameen Community Bat Project. This project will provide landowners opportunity to get involved with bat conservation.

Did you know that the South Okanagan-Similkameen is home to the richest bat diversity in all of Canada? Fourteen different bat species live in our region, six of which are considered species at risk. These at risk species include the spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, pallid bat, fringed myotis, western small-footed myotis, and the western red bat. The region's warm, arid climate and grassland dominated ecosystems are perfect habitats for some of the rarest bats

in the province.

The objective of the project is to identify bats roosting on private property. The South Okanagan-Similkameen has been the focus of many

bat research projects but no project, until now, has focused on identifying bat roosts located on private property. Many bats roosting on private property go unreported, so now is your chance as landowners to help researchers collect valuable scientific data to conserve these amazing animals.

Your attic or barn may be home to an important colony of vulnerable or threatened species of bats. As part of the South Okanagan-Similkameen Community Bat Project, biologists will be visiting reported bat roosting sites to identify the species present in order to develop a roost conservation plan.

Report your bat colony so biologists can visit your property this summer to identify which bat species is present, discuss issues that the bats

are causing (eg. health or safety issues), and assist you with ideas for maintaining your bat colony, like reducing problems of smell and/or noise, or providing you with ideas for removing your bats in a sensitive way.

You can contact us by phoning (250)-485-4321 or Toll Free at 1-866-678-BATS. For more information check out the website at [www.bcbats.ca](http://www.bcbats.ca).

The South Okanagan-Similkameen Community Bat Project is funded by the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and Bat Conservation International.



*Installing a bat box. Photo by Juliet Craig*

# What Every Iris Enthusiast Needs to Know

By Lisa Scott, Coordinator, South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society



Although yellow flag iris is a beautiful garden ornamental, in recent decades it has covertly moved beyond the boundaries of our backyard plantings into our natural water habitats. Yellow flag iris prefers saturated soils, invading wetlands, creeks and shallow lake margins. It fills a similar niche to that of cattails and often grows alongside this native plant, though usually in less deep water. Yellow flag iris is a European perennial plant that is most readily identified by its bright yellow flowers, which appear mid-spring. Its flat upright leaves are sword-shaped and surround the flower stalks. When mature, its fruit capsules resemble hanging bunches of short green bananas. Seeds are caught in the wind and blown into the water, where they are then carried further downstream. Broken pieces of the stout rhizome are also transported downstream where they take root and establish new plants.

*Iris pseudacorus* is a fast-growing and fast-spreading invasive plant that can outcompete other riparian (water loving) plants, forming almost impenetrable thickets. In doing so, it alters wildlife habitat, impacting many riparian dependent species, particularly amphibians and birds. This yellow iris may also clog waterways and interrupt the natural water filtration services provided by native riparian or aquatic plants. In this manner it joins other wetland invaders such purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).

Unfortunately, yellow flag iris continues to be sold through some plant nurseries across BC, as well as over the Internet. While some plant enthusiasts may argue that sterile hybrids of this particular iris species are a good alternative, several nursery owners or managers will disagree. It is not unknown for supposedly sterile plants to produce a certain amount of viable seed. Also, one must remember that this iris additionally spreads via rhizomes so even complete elimination of seed production will not prevent its spread.

Yellow flag iris is a relatively new invader to BC's Southern Interior. In recent years it has quickly spread throughout the Okanagan valley, lower Similkameen valley, Christina Lake and other isolated sites in the West Kootenays. It is listed as a noxious or invasive weed in six US States including Washington State. Three invasive plant committees in BC have classified this invasive iris

as a high priority species and are doing extensive education to discourage its sale in garden centers and encourage its removal from private and public gardens. These same regional groups are spending countless hours trying to manually control this weed. And the South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society is contemplating a request to the provincial government to add this invasive plant to the noxious weed list so there would be legal tools to control this plant.

Plant enthusiasts can unintentionally spread potentially harmful plants when they share specimens among friends, neighbors and gardening clubs, or dispose of aquatic plants by releasing them into a natural waterway. Invasive plants are also spread when gardeners moving to warmer climates take plants with them that would otherwise have been controlled in colder climates (i.e. killed during winter). Instead, these plants thrive and become invasive in their new warmer habitat.

Not transplanting or purchasing this aggressive import can help to reduce spread. Consider planting other wetland emergent plants such as native cattail (*Typha latifolia*) or a non-invasive iris species (*Iris ensata*, *laevigata*, *versicolor*, *robusta*). There are all kinds of other flora to decorate backyard ponds with that provide attractive cover and colour. You can also help to prevent the further spread of *Iris pseudacorus* by reporting new infestations to your regional invasive plant program coordinator, Lisa Scott at 404-0115 or email her at [sosips@shaw.ca](mailto:sosips@shaw.ca).



*Invasive yellow flag iris.*  
Photo by Lisa Scott.

# Stewardship Options 101: Federal EcoGift Program



*In 2003, Dale and Anita Lehman donated their 60 acre old-growth forest to TLC under the Federal EcoGift Program. The forest is home to 600 year-old trees, including the second tallest Western Larch on record in Canada. It is now held as a conservation area, open only for educational tours arranged by TLC.*

'Stewardship Options 101' is a series featured in *Stewardship News* to provide you with information about the many options available to landowners in BC to conserve natural areas on their property. This issue's topic is the Federal EcoGift Program.

An ecogift is a donation of land or a partial interest in land (eg. conservation covenant) that has been certified as "ecologically sensitive" according to specific national and provincial criteria.

The EcoGift Program provides special income tax benefits to private and corporate landowners who donate through the program to an eligible recipient. Recipients ensure that the land's biodiversity and natural heritage are protected in perpetuity.

Donors receive a tax receipt for the full appraised value of their ecogift that can be applied against 100 percent of their net annual income. This tax receipt may be applied against annual income for the year of the gift and five years afterwards.

If you are interested in more information about the Federal EcoGift Program, please contact the TLC Office at 492-0173 or visit [www.scf-cws.ec.gc.ca/ecogifts](http://www.scf-cws.ec.gc.ca/ecogifts).

## Workshops/Events:



**Community Stewardship Events Near You** - Kilpoola Estates, Kitley Lake/Marron Valley, Ginty's Pond, Anarchist Mountain. Landowners in those communities will receive a postcard with more information. Be sure to check your mailbox!

For more information please contact  
South Okanagan-Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program  
201-262 Main Street, Penticton, BC, V2A 5B2  
Phone: (250) 492-0173  
[www.conservancy.bc.ca/sosstewardship](http://www.conservancy.bc.ca/sosstewardship)

If you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please email: [prvega@conservancy.bc.ca](mailto:prvega@conservancy.bc.ca)

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