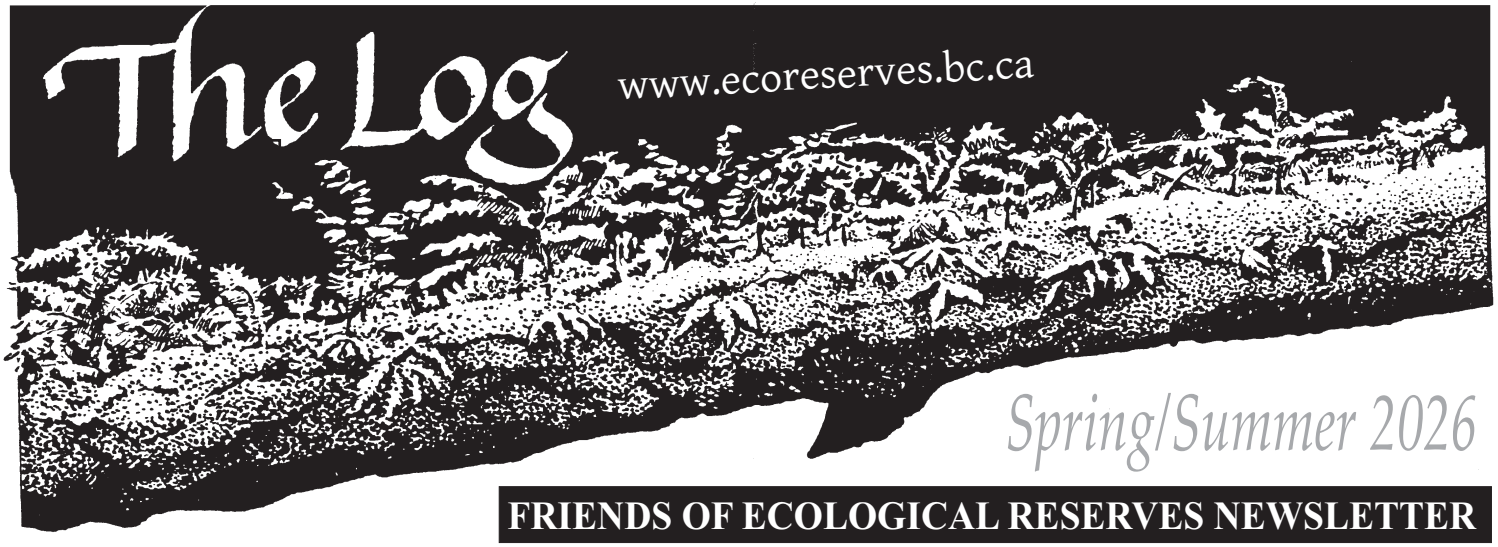
The Log
www.ecoreserves.bc.ca



Spring/Summer 2026

FRIENDS OF ECOLOGICAL RESERVES NEWSLETTER

Friends of Ecological Reserves President's Report

By Harry Crosby

More than 50 years ago the Government of British Columbia established the first Ecological Reserve System in Canada. The purpose of the system is to reserve tracts of Crown land for ecological purposes, including areas:

1) suitable for scientific research and educational purposes;
2) that are representative examples of natural ecosystems in British Columbia;
3) that serve as examples of ecosystems that have been modified by human beings and offer an opportunity to study the recovery of the ecosystem;
4) areas to support preservation of rare or endangered native plants and animals; and
5) areas that contain unique and rare examples of botanical, zoological or geological phenomena.

Friends of Ecological Reserves (FER) was formed to support the B.C. Ecological Reserves System.

In 2021 Friends of Ecological Reserves completed a Gap Analysis Report and submitted it to the Parks Department of the BC Government. The report identified gaps in the management of the Ecological Reserve System, gaps in the representation of geoclimatic zones within the reserve system, threats to specific Ecological Reserves and the need for monitoring of each reserve.

Threats to our Ecological Reserve System include:

1) internal threats - such as forest health, climate change, alien species;
2) external threats such as recreational use, damage from roads, transmission lines and pipelines, the impact of urban and industrial development;
3) boundary issues; and
4) fence maintenance issues.

FER is concerned about a number of problems, in addition to these threats. The Ecological Reserve System will not be expanded without support for any additional reserves from first nations. Approval for stewardship projects to address threats are difficult to obtain. Research permits are difficult to obtain on a timely basis. There are difficulties recruiting wardens and obtaining approval of volunteer applications to become wardens. When wardens are appointed, because of privacy issues, FER has problems making contact with the new wardens.

FER is working with the Parks Department to develop a new model for protecting and supporting the Ecological Reserve System. The model will include some of the following features:

1) Development of working relationships with BCN Clubs to support management of the Ecological Reserve System.
2) Development of working relationships with Community Liaison Officers in the BC Parks Department.

Continued on page 2

Inside ...

President's Report continued	2
Bristol Foster Receives the Order of BC	2
FER AGM Report	3
Canada's Endangered Species	4 & 5
Studying Stone Sheep in Gladys Lake ER	6 - 8
Wildlife Notes from Race Rocks ER	9 & 10
BC Parks Calls it "a luxuriously forested sanctuary"	11 - 14
Remembering Dave Polster	Back Cover

Visit our website at:
www.ecoreserves.bc.ca

The Log

Spring/Summer 2026

The LOG is published two times a year by the Friends of Ecological Reserves to promote the establishment, management and maintenance of Ecological Reserves in British Columbia. *The LOG* is distributed to members, volunteer wardens, affiliates, supporters, government, friends and the enquiring public.

We encourage you to submit articles for publication. The deadline for submissions for the Autumn/Winter 2026/27 issue of *The Log* is Nov. 30, 2026.

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President's Report cont'd. from p. 2

3) Meetings with wardens to discuss how to address identified problems related to specific reserves.

If you would like to work with FER to support the formation of new Ecological Reserves and protection of the Ecological Reserve System, please contact the President, Harry Crosby at harry_crosby@telus.net

Bristol Foster Receives the Order of British Columbia

By Mary Rannie

Fresh from Ontario and hoping to see west coast whales for the first time, I followed someone's advice to "Phone Bristol Foster..." The rest, as they say, is history, natural history!

It was the early 1980s. Dr. Bristol Foster, First Director of the BC Government's Ecological Reserve (ER) Division and tireless conservation biologist, was working to create BC's system of 150 Ecological Reserves.

I found myself on a short field trip he led to the Nimpkish Island ER #118 on Northern Vancouver Island. We walked among the tallest Douglas-fir trees in Canada, which this ER protected. In a solitary moment I spied a crested bird with a red tip on the wing feathers and a yellow tail band. I searched the colour photos in my *Peterson Guide to Western Birds* without success. When I described this bird excitedly to Bristol he remarked, "Gee, I don't know, Mary...maybe you've found a new species!" Later, on a closer look at the guide, I found a black and white sketch of the Cedar Waxwing. Bristol had simply left it up to me to "discover" its identity by my own efforts.

This experience defined him for me as the best kind of educator, one who nurtures curiosity. His efforts in "shaping environmental stewardship in B.C. through decades of research, storytelling and protection of vital ecosystems", were given formal recognition with the Order of British Columbia at Government House in Victoria on September 24th.



Bristol Foster at the OBC ceremony greeting Vicky Husband, fellow early Director of Friends of Ecological Reserves and herself a recipient of the OBC. Behind Bristol is his son Eric, and Robert Bateman.



Bristol Foster with his wife Libby and friends following the OBC ceremony at Government House, September 24th. Mary Rannie is second from the right and Jim Borrowman is on the right. (Photos provided by Alison Reid who is directly behind Foster. Reid is the Director/Producer of the recent documentary "The Art of Adventure", featuring Bristol Foster and Robert Bateman)

FER AGM Report

By Louise Beinhauer, LOG Editor

The Friends of Ecological Reserves held their Annual General Meeting on June 11, 2026.

The business portion of the meeting started at 7:00 pm. President Harry Crosby acknowledged the first nation's unceded Territory throughout B.C. A quorum was established and the agenda and the minutes were reviewed and approved.

Harry introduced the current board members and all agreed to continue on for another year.

The treasurer's report prepared by Michael Brinsmead was approved. The membership report was provided by Louise Beinhauer.

The annual report was read by Harry Crosby and the our speaker Garry Merkel was introduced.

Garry (nadi' denezā) is a member of the Tahltan Nation from northwest British Columbia. His presentation was entitled "Conservation in an Uncertain World".

Merkel is a Professional forester with a UBC Doctor of Science, honoris causa; U of Alberta Doctor of Law, honoris cusa; Co-Chair of the Provincial Forest Advisory Council; 2025 Co-Chair of the Old Growth Review Panel; 2020 appointed by the Government of B.C. He is the co-author of "A NEW FUTURE FOR OLD FORESTS: A Strategic Review of How British Columbia Manages for Old Forests Within its Ancient Ecosystems".

I have provided a sample of the slides from Garry's presentation. The full deck will be posted on the FER website.

The Board of the Friends of Ecological Reserves were very appreciative of Garry Merkel's in depth analysis. He gave a very generous amount of his time to be our presenter.

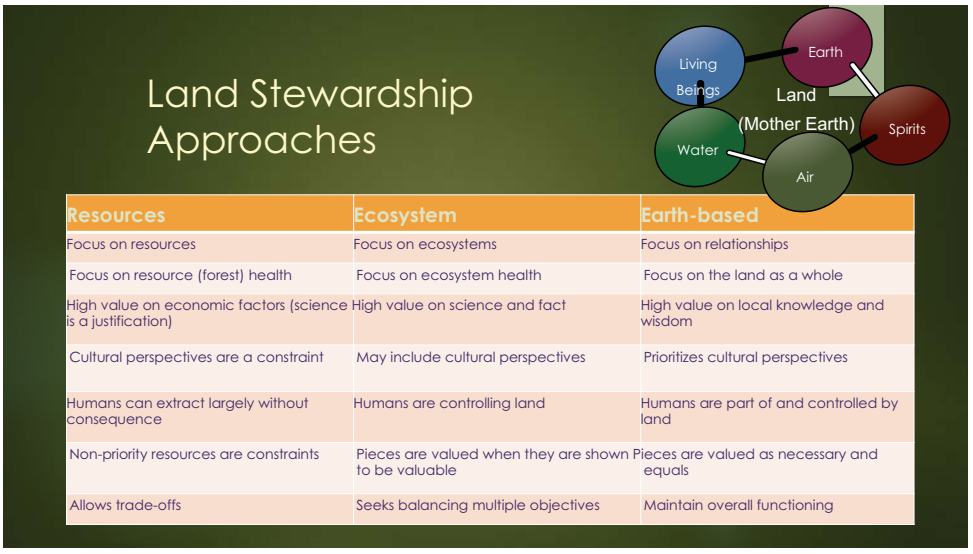
Thank you Garry!

FER Wardens – please send me (lbeinhau@telus.net) your Wardens' Reports. They will appear in the next LOG and on our website.

If you are interested in becoming a Warden, please click here: https://ecoreserves.bc.ca/get-involved/become-a-warden/







Resources	Ecosystem	Earth-based
Focus on resources	Focus on ecosystems	Focus on relationships
Focus on resource (forest) health	Focus on ecosystem health	Focus on the land as a whole
High value on economic factors (science is a justification)	High value on science and fact	High value on local knowledge and wisdom
Cultural perspectives are a constraint	May include cultural perspectives	Prioritizes cultural perspectives
Humans can extract largely without consequence	Humans are controlling land	Humans are part of and controlled by land
Non-priority resources are constraints	Pieces are valued when they are shown to be valuable	Pieces are valued as necessary and equals
Allows trade-offs	Seeks balancing multiple objectives	Maintain overall functioning

Canada's Endangered Species Watchdog Is Strapped for Cash

One commissioner said it's like 'providing a fire department with garden hoses for three-alarm fires.'

By Sarah Cox (excerpted with permission from *The Tyee* June 12, 2026)

Budget cuts have left the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada struggling to do its job even as the number of species at risk of extinction in the country steadily climbs.

The Tyee has learned that the committee of scientists is so strapped for funding that it was forced to cancel its biannual meeting last month to assess species as threatened or endangered — the first step for struggling wildlife to get help.

Dozens of imperilled species that the committee planned to examine in May — including pale evening primrose, a fragrant B.C. wildflower that feeds bees and butterflies — will now remain in a growing backlog of more than 1,000 at-risk species waiting for an assessment.

That backlog also includes more than 50 bird species that might become extinct or endangered before scientists can assess them, wildlife committee chair David Lee told a Senate committee in February.

Species can receive legal protection and a recovery plan only once they've been assessed and the federal cabinet approves.

The wildlife committee's funding constraints have caught the attention of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources.

On May 25, the Senate committee wrote to federal Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature Julie Dabrusin, expressing "serious concerns" about the "insufficient resources" the government has allocated for wildlife assessments, which are mandated by the *Species at Risk Act*.

Resources are 'completely inadequate'

The letter follows testimony to the Senate committee from Jerry DeMarco, Canada's commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, who told senators that resources for assessing species at risk of extinction don't fit the scale of the problem.

"It is like providing a fire department with garden hoses for three-alarm fires; it is just completely inadequate," DeMarco testified in late March.



Rough-skinned newts, yellow-listed in BC, are a priority species on the COSEWIC assessment list. Increasing threats mean they may now be at risk nationally. (Photo by Jared Hobbs).

He said it is "disappointing" that Canada would pass the *Species at Risk Act* and then fail to put in the necessary resources for the "crucial first step" in listing species under the act.

"It is cheaper in the long run to protect them and identify them before they get too endangered or their populations diminish," he said.

The Senate committee was looking into a 2024 report from Canada's auditor general that found the government is not meeting its obligations to provide adequate support to the endangered wildlife committee.

The report noted that at current rates it would take the wildlife committee more than a century to assess all the species on its list.

Testifying before the Senate committee in February, Lee, the chair of the endangered wildlife committee, told senators that the committee's budget was cut from $1.8 million in 2023-24 to $1.6 million the following year, despite inflationary pressures.

The 50 members and more than 125 species specialist subcommittee experts associated with the wildlife committee are compensated for time for meetings and reviewing documents, but "almost all of us provide voluntary time," Lee said. That in-kind support is estimated at between $10 million and $12 million annually, Lee added.

Lee said the committee has taken measures to reduce costs over the past three years, but those efforts remain insufficient to address the challenges highlighted in the auditor general's report.

Doubling the budget would allow a 33 per cent increase in assessments each year, Lee said.

Only one species takes part in elections

Endangered wildlife committee member Christina Davy, who also testified to the Senate committee, told *The Tyee* that while many meetings can be held virtually, the assessment meetings — which normally take a week — can't be held online. Davy is a research scientist and associate professor in the biology department at Carleton University.

The committee did shift to online meetings in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, "but the speed of that work and the quality of the discussions was really affected," Davy said.

"When the funding gets cut at the same time as travel costs are increasing, we're no longer able to meet because there simply isn't enough funding to get everybody into one place at the same time," Davy added.

She also said several species subcommittees, which make recommendations to the broader committee, were unable to meet last year due to funding constraints.

Even though Canada is home to more than 5,000 wild species at some

Continued on page 5

Endangered species cont'd. from p. 4

risk of extinction, Davy said some groups of species don't receive assessments because there are no subcommittees to review them.

There's no subcommittee for marine arthropods, for example, so crabs and lobsters aren't assessed. There's also no subcommittee to assess sea stars, which are known to be at risk of extinction due to sea star wasting disease. Nor is there a subcommittee for fungi, so they don't get assessed either.

"There are lots of species that we are responsible for already that we can't get to, but then there's also these very large groups that are going to have some species of conservation concern that we're not even able to look at."

DeMarco told the Senate committee that it's necessary to understand the scale of the problem if Canada is to meet a global commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 — and that includes assessing species before 2030.

Asked by the senators if the government's apparent lack of concern for at-risk species is because biodiversity loss is a less visible problem than global warming, DeMarco noted that "only one species takes part in elections." There are 80,000 other species in Canada "that are not so lucky," he said.

DeMarco also noted that a Government of Canada Policy Horizons report identified biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as one of the "most likely and high-impact events that could disrupt Canadian society in the next decade."

Human society can't exist without biodiversity, DeMarco said.

Senate committee chair Joan Kingston, who signed the letter to Dabrusin, told *The Tyee* that senators were struck by the amount of time scientists volunteer to assess species at risk of extinction.

"They know what they need in order to keep up with the work and meet the commitments that we have as a nation."

Kingston and other senators told Dabrusin that lack of support for the wildlife committee will likely lead to fewer assessments and fewer timely reassessments for at-risk species, a growing backlog of species on the waitlist, and slower implementation of Canada's biodiversity commitments.

Senators said the wildlife committee needs "sufficient, stable and long-term support," including adequate support for an Indigenous Traditional Knowledge subcommittee.



Bobolink (Dolichonyx oryzivorus). Under COSEWIC they are considered of Special Concern. Last Assessed 2022-05.

Declining funding has limited the committee's ability to work with Indigenous communities and adequately integrate their knowledge into the assessment process, senators noted.

Human health is tied to wildlife health

Keean Nembhard, Dabrusin's press secretary, told *The Tyee* that the minister's office has received the Senate committee's letter and "will respond in due course."

Nembhard said Canada is committed to meeting global conservation targets and to protecting and recovering at-risk species, adding that Ottawa works collaboratively with the provinces and territories to advance conservation and recovery actions, including through work undertaken by the endangered wildlife committee.

He pointed to the 2025 speech from the throne, which emphasized that the Mark Carney government sees nature as central to Canada's identity and is committed to protecting more of the country's nature than ever before.

The nature strategy recently announced by the government also committed $283 million over five years "to strengthen the protection and recovery of species at risk across Canada," Nembhard noted.

Just 14 Species Have 'Genuinely' Improved on BC's At-Risk Lists

Davy's assessment of the Carney government's wildlife conservation efforts was not as rosy. She told *The Tyee* that some of the recent policy changes proposed by the Carney government will further reduce protection for species at risk of extinction and, by extension, all wildlife in Canada.

Those changes would allow the federal cabinet to approve a project, such as a pipeline or new mine, even if it results in the extinction of a species, a proposition Davy called — speaking from her personal point of view — "horrific."

She said she can't think of a development project that is more important than maintaining a healthy environment for both wildlife and people, adding that "they're not separate pieces."

If the environment is too polluted for "some amazing snail" to survive in, it's also not an environment with clean water for children, she said.

"So, in many ways, our endangered wildlife are a canary in a coal mine for us."

Studying Stone Sheep at Gladys Lake ER

By Julien Gullo, Boyce-Merrill and St. Clair Lab, University of Alberta

In the summer of 1961, a young wildlife biologist, Valerius "Val" Geist, built himself a little cabin beside a nameless creek which flowed a short distance downslope into a small lake. A hunting guide outfitter, who ran a camp just 10 km north of Geist's cabin called it "Gladys" Lake, so he called it "Gladys" Lake too. It was from here, in the remote Cassiar mountains of northwestern British Columbia, that Geist would study the local Stone's sheep that lived on the high mountain slopes adjacent to and beyond the lake- he was then only 23 years old.

For over a year and a half, Geist spent his time at Gladys Lake compiling detailed notes on numerous aspects of Stone's sheep behaviour which would later form part of his doctoral dissertation, and eventually be put into the pages of a very foundational book on North American mountain sheep ecology. The tools he would have used for this work would have been simple: note taking materials, binoculars, and perhaps some film equipment. His methods would have also been simple too, consisting largely of visual observations, counts of discrete behaviours, and the calculation of simple statistics which could have been done by hand back in his cabin.

The special element of his work, however, was his imagination – it was one of the things that Geist was most well known for and which showed up in many of his works. Much of what he produced from his studies at Gladys Lake could be called "qualitative" science, meaning that his data was a product of his perception and cognitive faculties. Without possessing a great imagination, Geist could not have turned his qualitative work into such a compelling and enduring account of sheep behaviour- it necessitated a free ranging mind.



Here, marshy flats separate Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve (right) from the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Provincial Park (left). Created in late 1975, both grant protection to massive extents of wilderness and contain significant populations of wildlife such as mountain goat, Stone's sheep, caribou, wolverine, and grizzly bears.

Fast forward to the present day, and similar examples of "greenfield" studies in ecology – where western science-styled exposés are delivered from embedded positions in the field – have become more rare. Likewise, foundational works like Geist's book *Mountain Sheep* have also grown rare. Since the days of his Stone's sheep research and the subsequent creation of both the Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve and its vast, protective envelope, the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Provincial Park, only a handful of field studies have been carried out there – and yet arguably none have matched the depth of focus and personal commitment that went into the creation of that work.

The relative scarcity of this type of research could simply reflect a major constraint of working in this part of the world – it is expensive and time consuming to access the remote park and reserve and growing fiscal restraint and busy schedules have posed challenges to researchers trying to get out into the field. But this pattern also mirrors a greater trend in ecology too: labour intensive field-based data collection is increasingly passed up for newer technology-based methods – especially those that manage to deliver reliable performance at a fraction of the cost and effort.

Trail cameras, satellite-based sensors, GPS-collars, drones, and various other set-it-and-forget-it type devices grant the contemporary ecologist a painless and "bootless" way to gain insight into their study system and, in many cases, have become the *de facto* tools for securing data to answer their questions. The economics of these tools make their adoption even more compelling when one considers the sheer volume of data that can be produced, and the complex, yet increasingly accessible, computer modelling programs which can handle it – many of which are now available free-of-cost. The result is that field-based science has become harder to justify and seemingly unnecessary

Continued on page 7

Stone Sheep Study cont'd. from p. 6

to those focused on producing science from high volumes of hard data.

I thought a lot about these things as I've worked through my own Stone's sheep research in the Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve and Spatsizi Park. Each time I reached for Geist's book, I was confronted by the differences in our respective studies and saw that, at least on the surface, we were worlds apart. My entire Master's thesis was focused on a single question that Geist had simply mused upon – *what do these sheep do during the hunting season?* Geist answered this question the best way that he could, which was through reflection on a personal observation and anecdote.



A young Stone's sheep ram being sampled and prepared for collaring, shortly after being captured by a net-gun deployed from a helicopter. Blind folds are used to keep animals calm while blood, hair, and DNA samples are collected for health assessments. Prior to being released, a GPS-collar (upper right) will be fixed to this ram giving the research team frequent updates on its location, movement, and even the temperature of its environment for the next 3 years.

My approach, however, would be quite different and so were the resources available to me: GPS-collars granted me an omniscience of my study animals' whereabouts, relaying their location to me each hour of the day, earth-observing satellites measured the greenness of vegetation and forage in giant swathes of the landscape that I could not have possibly traversed by foot, and topographical maps drawn in digital space gave me three-dimensional renditions of sheep habitats that I would have struggled to sketch on to paper. Thus, most of the observations I used in my study were of a *representation* of a world, one created through the sense organs of technology. Despite the impressive scale of these data, they lacked the nuance and rich detail that would have been observable through having my own eyes, ears, and feet right there in sheep habitat.



Aided by fellow sheep researcher and current director of the Tahltan Central Government's wildlife department, Westin Creyke, helps out with a pilot field study aimed at reconciling the differences between ground cover estimates made by overhead satellites and those we could make with our eyes.

Considering their remoteness, I was lucky enough to have visited Gladys and the Spatsizi a handful of times during the course of my study; GPS collars still need to be put on animals and trail cameras need placing on trees. I was grateful for these visits, and during them, I gained a sense of scale and complexity of that landscape as well as an appreciation of the grit and endurance possessed by the creatures who live there.

I was also lucky enough to have had my perspective shaped by some crucial life experiences before heading into my research, namely summers of tree planting, technical field work, and backcountry travels throughout western Canada, as well as having, in recent years, begun a consuming, self-guided journey into the world of hunting. Each of these had given me some critical bit of pretext for the work I would undertake in my research and prepare me for the many conversations I would go on to have

Continued on page 8

Stone Sheep Study cont'd. from p. 8

with friends, colleagues, and locals about sheep and sheep hunting. In a way, the last decade of my life had been a type of "field work" that helped me close the distance between me and my remote study area in the Spatsizi; it allowed me to *imagine* the things I sought to understand, when that place, and those *sheep*, were so often out of reach.

I suspect that for many professional ecologists and biologists, high pressure deadlines, budget constraints, and geographic distances all contribute challenges to developing intimate familiarity with site and subject.

I imagine this is especially the case for professionals who must jump from one diverse project to the next- where "sinking into the details" quickly becomes "going down the rabbit hole"- something which is to be prudently avoided. As I contemplate the next steps in my own career, I am cautious, but optimistic, about being able to strike a balance between the apparently conflicting worlds of field- and office- based research. It is comforting to know that this perspective is not unique to me, since the many aspiring researchers I have come to know have chosen the field of ecology or biology based on their love of nature.

In the end, I think the solution to the growing problem of "office creep" or "field estrangement" in our practice isn't straightforward, but *at minimum* it requires our awareness of it as well as a desire to strike out and seek connections with the real objects of our studies. There is a balance to be had, and there is still joy in this science.



My own solo journeys into the world of deer hunting gave me *food for thought* that was helpful for completing my research; Many quiet, cold, and groggy mornings ended in me pondering "*where are all of the deer right now?*".



Hoping to see rams, but finding caribou instead: a welcome surprise in Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve. "*We'll take it!*".

Wildlife Notes from Race Rocks Ecological Reserve

In 1997 Pearson College UWC volunteered to take over a long term lease from BC Parks in order to solve the problem of protecting the Ecological Reserve and Heritage Lighthouse island. Along with this lease Pearson College provided the staff position of an Ecoguardian to act as a constant human presence on the island. The role of Ecoguardian is not necessarily an easy one and we have found that a job-sharing arrangement works best. The job description for the last hiring gives an idea of the wide variety of skills needed for such a job. The following are Wildlife Notes from Christine Chourmouzis whose Ecoguardianship is coming to an end soon.



Red-footed booby, Race Rocks Ecological Reserve, Sept 6 2026. Photos by Nathan Hentze, Rocky Point Bird Observatory/Eagle Wing Tours birding trip.

Posted on Wednesday, July 29, 2026 by Christine Chourmouzis

I have observed two gull chicks with only one eye. For one chick the eye socket appears almost closed over. The other chick looks much worse off with obvious signs of infection and it is hard to look at. The two chicks seem to move about slower than their nest mates. If they survive, their lack of depth perception will make life more difficult.

With much patience and luck, I was also able to get some pictures of the Keeper's House black oystercatcher parents eyes. I had recently learned they can be sexed by the presence of black flecks in eyes of the females. The Keeper's House pair did indeed have different eyes!!!





One-eyed gull chicks near Energy Building

By Christine Chourmouzis, Eco-guardian, September 6, 2026

The super El Nino is bringing some rare birds to coastal BC. A red-footed booby was seen in Race Rocks Ecological Reserve on the outer rock islets hanging out with the cormorants and sea lions. This was the second sighting in BC, first for the Victoria area! It was first spotted at 3 pm but was not relocated later.

Other rare birds that twitchers have been lucky to see this summer are the Nazca booby, Cocos booby, elegant tern, Hawaiian petrel and the short-tailed albatross. These opportunities to see unusual birds are exciting but the events driving them are not always good for local birds and other wildlife



The eyes of the Keeper's House black oystercatcher parents. The female is likely (93%) the one in the top row with the black fleck on the iris.

Continued on page 10

Notes from Race Rocks ER cont'd. from p. 9

or sea creatures.

The other highlights of the day were the first views through the windows I passed this morning. Through the first window I discovered the Jetty was held over night – the California sea lions did not break through the electric fence and this was the first time in the past week it held for 24 hours without repairs! The delight out the second window was a humpback whale tail sinking into the sea. In the third window I watched a fish leaping out of the sea pursued by a sea lion. There were many sea lions and whales out feeding. I am already thinking how hard it will be to say goodbye to this place in a few days.

So much food!
Posted on Monday,September 21, 2026 by Christine Chourmouzis

The marine life are getting their fill of food. There are too many humpback whales to count and today I watched a sea lion slap a salmon on the water to break it apart. After he ate the front end he slowly swallowed the remaining 18 inches whole.

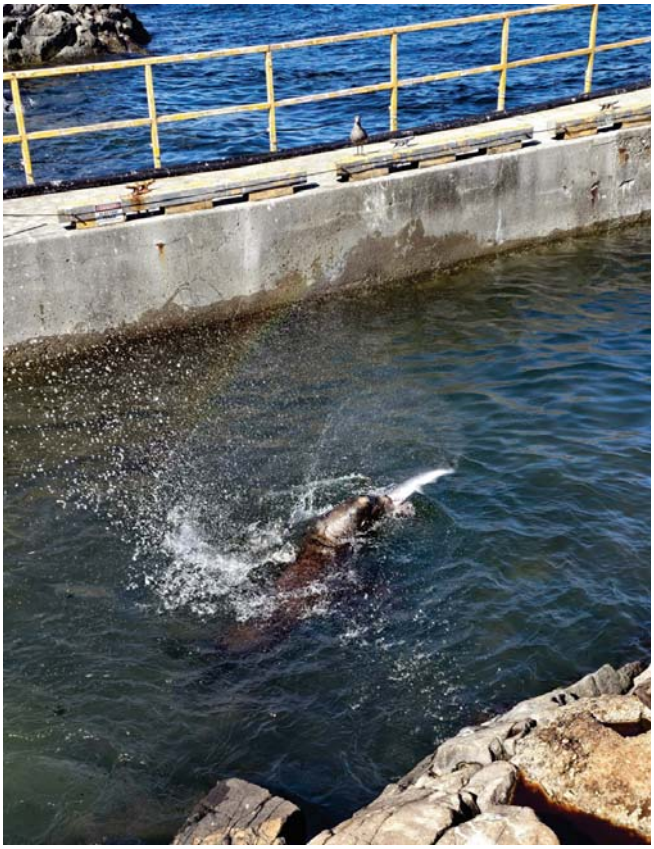


Above: Surfbirds and black turnstones on the Energy Building beach.

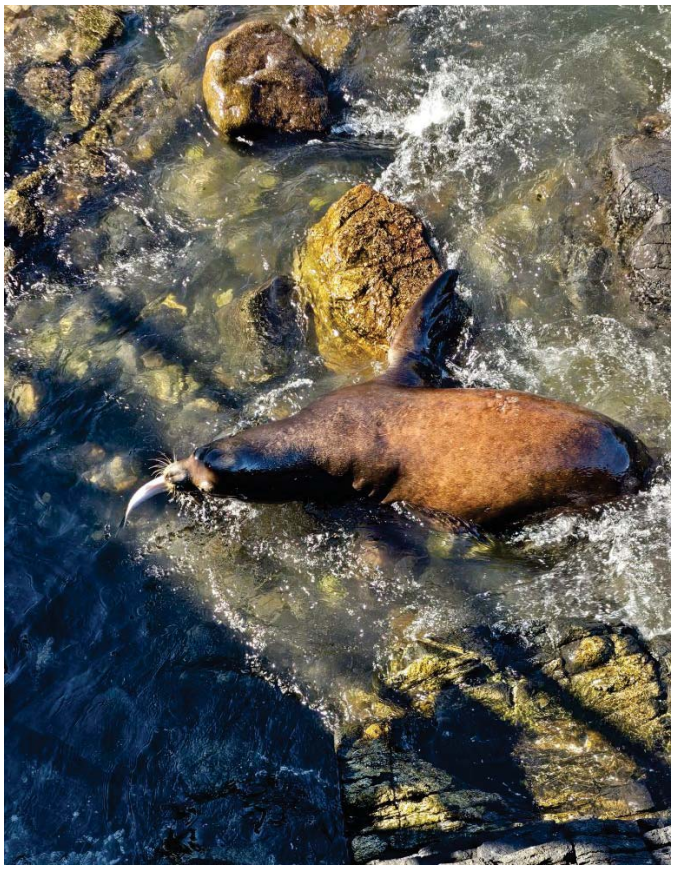
Below left: Semipalmated plover. Below right:: Killdeer.







California sea lion slapping his salmon from side to side.



Above: Swallowing the tail end.

BC Parks calls it 'a luxuriously forested sanctuary'. Just don't try to visit

By Cameron Fenton, July 28, 2026 (Reprinted from *The Narwhal* with permissions)





In 2025, a blockade was staged in the Walbran valley to protest logging of old-growth forest. (Photos: Mike Graeme / The Narwhal)

Peter Cressey has been visiting the Carmanah and Walbran valleys for decades. Nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the sprawling spider-web of cutblocks and logging roads that mark the island's interior, these two valleys form one of southern Vancouver Island's largest remaining intact old-growth ecosystems. They're home to centuries-old spruce trees, gnarled cedars and plants and animals that live in few other places.

"It's not just the trees," Cressey, who volunteers with Friends of Carmanah Walbran, says. "There's a whole bunch of threatened species, the marbled murrelet, the screech owl, the specklebelly lichen and the dromedary jumping slug. There's a whole list of very unique species that are facing some serious threats."

In the early 1990s, Cressey was arrested at a logging blockade in the region, part of a campaign that convinced the province to expand what was then called Carmanah Pacific Provincial Park to include parts of the Walbran in 1995.

Today, the park is known as Carmanah Walbran. BC Parks describes it as "a luxuriously forested sanctuary that is without a doubt one of the most remarkable wild places on Vancouver Island." But right now, they also say it's "inaccessible by vehicle" and that "the day-use areas, campground, and trails are currently unmaintained."

That's because it's blocked by landslides on one side and locked metal gates on the other. BC Parks didn't provide a timeline for restoring park access. Instead, they directed questions to Tsawak-qin Forestry, the company responsible for both the metal gates and, they say, for clearing the landslides.

In an emailed statement, Tsawak-qin told *The Narwhal* that they are "working with government and others to open access to the western, public access point of the park," but didn't offer a timeline. They promised to "provide more information when it becomes available."

Carmanah Walbran is one of many outdoor recreation areas in B.C. accessed by resource roads. Cressey and others say its ongoing closure raises questions about public access to public lands, and the province's management of thousands of kilometres of resource roads that connect British Columbians to some of the province's most spectacular back country regions.

Ministry approves gates to close park to recreational users, citing 'safety concerns

When Cressey talks about the logging protests of the 1990s, a period sometimes called the War in the Woods when activists and First Nations fought old-growth logging in Clayoquot Sound and up into the Carmanah Walbran region, there's a hint of pride in his voice. But he's also learned a lot since then, and though his passion for protecting old-growth forests remains, his tactics have changed.

Today, Cressey's with the Friends of Carmanah Walbran, which is focused on protecting ancient forests through education and community building. Much of their work centres on the central Walbran Valley, a stand of old-growth forest just outside the southeastern edge of Carmanah Walbran Park. On a map, it looks like someone took an ice cream scoop to the park boundary. Torrance Coste,

Continued on p. 12



Carmanah Walbran Park has a distinctive "bite" taken out of the boundary. Activists remember it was excluded from the park at the request of logging companies. (Screen shot: DataBC / Government of British Columbia)

Forested Sanctuary cont'd. from p. 11

associate director of the Wilderness Committee, calls it "the bite."

That bite is not part of the park itself. According to Coste, activists remember it was left out at the request of logging companies. But decades of activism have kept the saws at bay, and the area is currently covered by a provincial old-growth deferral. Within it lies a network of trails and campsites built and maintained by Cressey and the Friends of Carmanah Walbran. Some of these trails, like the Anderson Lake and Marble Canyon trails, cross into the provincial park, while others sit outside the boundary entirely. All of them are maintained by volunteers.

For years, Friends of Carmanah Walbran have used trail maintenance trips and educational gatherings to bring people into the region to advocate for protecting the old growth forests that still lie outside the park boundary. But this spring, something changed.

In March, Cressey learned that the province approved Tsawak-qin Forestry's request to put locked gates on roads east of Carmanah Walbran Park. These gates blocked access to both the bite and the trails from it that cross into the park.

Cressey reached out to Tsawak-qin to request permission to pass through the gates for a birding event in early July. Initially, he says, the company seemed open to letting the birders through. He even offered to give them the names of everyone participating — a group of birders, artists and scientists. But eventually, Tsawak-qin told him they couldn't allow the group through the gates. Cressey says they told him it was due to "public and worker safety issues."

Tsawak-qin didn't directly address questions about the birders, but noted in an emailed statement to *The Narwhal* that the gates were put in place due to "several incidents [that] have occurred recently in the Walbran area that endangered people and caused damage to property," citing a burnt bridge deck, damaged bridge cables and blocked drainage structures.

This "created unsafe road conditions," Tsawak-qin Forestry said. "In addition, there is evidence of members of the public entering active work sites," it added, though they did not give specific examples.



In August 2025, a blockade was established in B.C.'s Walbran valley to protest logging of old-growth forest before and lasted months before being removed by injunction. Tsawak-qin Forestry didn't specifically cite the blockade in its statements to The Narwhal, but said 'several incidents' had caused damage to property and endangered people. (Photo: Mike Graeme / *The Narwhal*)

There was a blockade in the Walbran between August and December 2025, which led to 13 arrests. The company didn't reference this blockade directly, but Cressey thinks that it, and the continued presence of a nearby protest encampment, contributed to the company wanting to shut down access.

On July 16, social media accounts from this camp posted a video of two people locked to one of the Tsawak-qin gates. In the video, one masked figure explained the action as a response to the company cutting off public access to "public land."

British Columbia's *Forest and Range Practices Act* allows resource companies to request permission to install and lock gates to prevent public access on back country resource roads. According to the province, these approvals are granted when "use of the road would likely endanger property, public health or public safety."

In the case of the eastern Carmanah Walbran gates, Coste says it's unclear what the justification is, or what threat a birding event might pose to property or safety.

He worries that approvals for these kinds of gates have been increasing since the Fairy Creek blockades where more than 1,100 people were arrested opposing old-growth logging in the Fairy Creek watershed near Port Renfrew in 2020 and 2021.

When asked whether this was true, the Ministry of Forests declined to comment, explaining that finding the answer was "a complex ask during the middle of field season when resources for data gathering are limited."

Coste thinks logging companies could be trying to solve that problem by "closing access to vast swaths of the island [and] the province to any and all other user groups." Tsawak-qin did not comment when asked about any direct connections between logging protests and their request to gate these roads.

"If logging companies have a problem with blockaders, that's a political issue that they should take to the province, not deal with it with gates out on the back roads," Coste says. "If companies can't log without fear of people getting in the way of their operations, they have a social licence problem."

Why aren't public land access groups talking about the Carmanah Walbran?

For Cressey, part of the problem is that BC Parks isn't clear about what qualifies as access points to Carmanah Walbran. The park's website lists directions to access the park's western side and the Ministry of Environment and Parks says that "there are no developed BC Parks facilities or designated BC Parks trails within the [eastern] portion of the park." But the

Continued on p. 13

Forested Sanctuary cont'd. from p. 12

Ministry of Forests recommended park access routes on both the eastern and western sides of the park, adding that the public could still pass the eastern gates on foot.

Investigating problems. Exploring solutions

For Cressey, using the western side of the park might have been the easiest solution to his locked gate problem. But the road on that side, called Rosander Main, was also blocked, not by gates, but by landslides that had come down in the fall of 2025.

Neither BC Parks nor the Ministry of Forests have plans to clear the landslides. The responsibility for clearing that road, they say, lies with the logging companies that use it.

Coste says that's a problem, calling it "anti-democratic" that a private company can control public access to the park. "It's a huge concern that access to an iconic provincial park like Carmanah depends on whether or not a private company is logging next to the park."

As short-term closures at Joffre Lakes Park near Pemberton and Botanical Beach, a popular section of Juan de Fuca Park on Vancouver Island, both of which have instated reconnection periods for rights-holding First Nations members, have prompted an outcry, Coste says it's notable the ongoing access issues at Carmanah Walbran Park haven't gotten more attention.

"[Carmanah Walbran] has been closed for 10 times longer than Joffre Lakes will be closed this year," Coste says. "And not a peep from the folks that are up in arms about the Joffre closure."

Among the groups concerned about the Joffre Lakes closures is the Public Land Use Society, an organization whose directors have close ties to the mining and mineral exploration industries, which was founded in 2025 to advocate for public land access. Its former director Caroline Elliott, who joined the society in May 2025 and left in January to run as a leadership candidate for the BC Conservative Party, has been a leading voice in opposing British Columbia's decision to work with the Líl'wat and N'Quatqua Nations on annual, short-term closures at Joffre Lakes, calling them an "ancestry-based park closure."



Since 2023, the popular Pipi7íyekw/Joffre Lakes Park has been temporarily closed for "reconnection periods" to give the busy park a break and permit members of the Líl̓wat and N'Quatqua First Nations to spend time on their traditional territory. These closures have prompted backlash among groups like the Public Land Use Society, though the organization has not commented on the closure of Carmanah Walbran Park. (Photo: Paige Taylor White / *The Narwhal*)

When The Narwhal reached out to the Public Land Use Society, its executive director, Warren Mirko, wasn't aware that Carmanah Walbran Park was closed.

"[The Public Land Use Society] has not yet heard from the public regarding this site and was unaware of the access issues," Mirko wrote in an email. But while he agreed it was a concern, he differentiated it from Joffre Lakes, describing the latter as "a deliberate government-supported closure of a popular provincial park."

For Coste, the lack of attention to the Carmanah Walbran issue "underscores that it's not really about access to the land and access to provincial protected areas" for groups like Mirko's, but about opposing the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which was passed with unanimous consent in B.C. in 2019 but has since become a locus of controversy.

In his emailed statement, Mirko wrote that the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and "other issues surrounding government's reconciliation initiatives and agreements are central matters in respect of public access and provincial governance over Crown land."

Access to parks is a province-wide problem in B.C.

While Mirko and Coste don't agree on much when it comes to reconciliation and parks, both have concerns about how British Columbia manages resource roads. While Coste is worried about the road leading to Carmanah Walbran, Mirko is focused on an access road to the Incomappleux Valley near Revelstoke in the B.C. Interior. In June, his organization joined the Quad Riders Association of British Columbia in questioning the province's decision to decommission the Incomappleux Forest Service Road.

According to the province, the deactivation is due to road damage and plans to establish a conservancy, a type of park in which human access and natural resource development is limited to preserve ecological, recreational or cultural values, in the upper valley. But Mirko and the Quad Riders argue this closure would unfairly cut off property and trail access, questioning the province's "authority to proceed" in a press release.

The province outlined its authority in a document released in April 2025, citing the *Forest and Range Practices Act* — the same rationale used to

Continued on p. 14

Forested Sanctuary cont'd. from p. 13

approve the gates east of Carmanah Walbran Park.

Issues with resource roads are nothing new for Louise Pedersen, executive director of the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia.

"Outdoor recreation in British Columbia has co-evolved with forestry and other types of resource extraction," Pedersen says. "So a lot of our access uses resource roads."

But those roads, Pedersen explains, aren't managed for recreation. When the logging or mining operations pull out, they decommission the roads and leave them unmaintained, often cutting off access to recreation areas in Crown lands. And with an estimated more than 600,000 kilometres of resource roads criss-crossing the province, it's a big deal — one that Pedersen says is getting worse.

"In the last decades, things really have been accelerating," she says. "With these big climate and weather events that we've been having, we are seeing a lot more kinds of disastrous outcomes like flooding and wildfires closing down these resource roads."

On top of that, Pedersen says, there are increasing numbers of "logging companies getting out of areas where they've been operating for a long time," leaving roads unmaintained. In some places this is simply the result of logging operations finishing. In others, it's being blamed on downturns in the forestry sector and sawmill closures. But whatever the reason, when the companies pull out, the roads revert to the care of the province.

"When not being actively used for industrial purpose[s] the roads are classified as a 'wilderness road' and only maintained to address environmental concerns," a statement from the Ministry of Forests explained.

The problem, Pedersen explains, is "the province is not required to facilitate access or maintain these resource roads to support outdoor recreation." So when you get a case like Carmanah Walbran, where the road was blocked by landslides, and no logging companies are working beyond them, no one is obligated to clear them.

It's something she hopes British Columbia's new outdoor recreation strategy will change. Launched in May, the province plans to create "a modernized framework for high-value recreation access and resource roads." Pedersen isn't sure yet what that means. But while she's waiting, the Outdoor Recreation Council has launched a survey to gather information about priority roads where access to trailheads, campsites and parks is currently cut-off or at risk.



Access to parts of the Incomappleux Valley, near Revelstoke, B.C., also relies on resource roads. The provincial government's plans to decommission a forest service road rely on the same rationale used to put gates on the road into Carmanah Walbran Park. (Photo: Paul Zizka / Nature Conservancy of Canada)

"I'm sure we'll find that there are going to be many thousands of kilometres that are of very limited interest, but there are some that will just kind of float to the top as priority resource roads," she says.

In the meantime, the Carmanah and Walbran valleys remain nearly inaccessible to the public. Coste worries about the long-term implications of cutting off public access to parks, especially ones with threatened ecosystems.

"When people can't visit these forests, can't walk through them and see what's at stake for themselves, it becomes much easier for old-growth logging to continue out of public view," Coste says. "Access is a critical part of building public understanding and support for protecting what little remains."

Updated on July 29, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. PT: This story has been updated to correct the connections between the directors of the Public Land Use Society and the mining and mineral exploration industries. Additionally, Caroline Elliott was previously referred to as a "first slate" director of the society, but joined nearly three months after its incorporation in March 2025.





In 2025, the government's decision to unilaterally shorten the temporary closure of Pipi7íyekw/Joffre Lakes Park for the Líl̓wat and N'Quatqua First Nations' reconnection period triggered protests along the highway. (Photos: Paige Taylor White / *The Narwhal*)

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Remembering David Franklin Polster

(1952–2026)

By Rick Page & Genevieve Singleton



Dave Polster was the second ER Warden of Mount Tzuhalem Ecological Reserve, located on the unceded lands of Quw'utsun Mustinuhw (Hul'q'umi'num' words for Cowichan People, Hul'q'umi'num' is the dialect spoken in the Quw'utsun Valley.)

Dave was mentored by Syd Watt; Syd and his wife Emily were the ones to bring the ER area to the government's attention to preserve for its spectacular Garry oak meadows. Syd, Dave and Jenny worked closely with Quw'utsun knowledge keepers over the years.

Dave was well known as a prominent proponent of ecological restoration throughout western and northern Canada. Dave was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2020 and Parkinsons a few years thereafter. He passed away on May 11, 2026 at the age of 74.

Dave's wife, Genevieve (Jenny) Singleton, shared his duties on Mt. Tzuhalem. Jenny is also the ER warden at Honeymoon Bay Ecological Reserve. Together they played a pivotal role in the conservation of the Cowichan Valley and beyond by volunteering and their business, Polster Environmental Services, now run by their son Nathan.

Dave was born in Philadelphia and moved to Argenta, BC in 1967 because of the politics of the Vietnam War. He and his family are Quakers and are lifelong peace activists.

Dave received his Master's degree in Ecology from the University of Victoria, also where he met the love of his life, Jenny in Marc Bell's classes. Dave taught at UVic's Restoration of Natural Systems program and Vancouver Island University's Natural Resources Extension Program.

Dave was very active in his professional organizations, The College of Applied Biology of BC, the Association of Professional Biologists of BC, the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), the Invasive Plant Council, the Canadian Land Reclamation Association, the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team and others. He received many awards for his pioneering work in ecosystem restoration and his unflagging support for the environment. In 2020, after his diagnosis with Alzheimer's, he still presented an SER webinar on the restoration of disturbed sites.

Dave's legacy will live on in the ecosystems he restored and the many professionals and students he mentored. FER extends our deepest condolences to Jenny, children, Ben, Amy Jean, Nathan and Rachel and family and friends. He loved Mt. Tzuhalem ER, his favourite place he would say.

Mukw'stem 'l' utunu tumuhw 'o' slhiihukw'tul

Everything on the earth is interconnected



Camas (*Camassia quamash*) with a sample of a paler colour variant, on Mt. Tzuhalem.

Photo taken from the Spring/Summer 2015 edition of the LOG. Click here to read the whole article https://ecoreserves.bc.ca/2015/07/08/mount-tzuhalem-breath-taking-vista-of-wildflowers/

The Log

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