



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

NOVEMBER 2020

Riparian Habitat Restoration

Over 1500 new trees and shrubs planted!

What does "riparian habitat" mean? Riparian habitat refers to the plants that grow along rivers, lakes, creeks, and wetlands. This community of plants make up a wide fringe of habitat around water sources and are vitally needed for approximately three-quarters of Okanagan wildlife.

85% of historical riparian habitats have been lost to urban and agricultural development in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys and one plant community- the waterbirch-red osier dogwood has been developed at an alarming rate, with only 11% of its original historical area remaining.

In addition to providing critical wildlife habitat for the species that depend on them, riparian areas also function to stabilize stream banks, reduce erosion, and filter out pollutants and bacteria from surface runoff before it enters our drinking water sources. Riparian areas are also beautiful places for outdoor recreation and relaxing!

This fall, OSS worked with 7 private landowners and land managers to enhance existing habitat and/or create new habitat along local creeks, ponds and rivers throughout the valley. Some of these projects were new, like the ones featured on the next page, but others built on the success of previous plantings. The second phases of planting were completed for three wetland and riparian forest restoration projects in the Garnet Valley, Faulder, and Penticton.



OSS is a local charity that supports conservation, stewardship, and enhancement of important wildlife habitats

75% of local shorelines have been lost to development

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Planting with the Purtons

Over five hundred plants at Farleigh Lake

Chris and Sandra Purton had a pasture that was looking for a new purpose. It had once been grazed by horses and later held a large market garden, but had most recently been sitting fallow, waiting for a new lease on life.

This fall, the Purtons helped OSS plant the first 500 native trees and shrubs into what will one day become a towering riparian forest. We were entertained while planting by many praying mantis. The large green or tan praying mantids that you often see in the Okanagan in the summer and fall were in fact introduced back in 1937 to control grasshoppers. There is a native species of mantid in the Okanagan but it is very rare and hard to spot! Other highlights from the day included hairy and downy woodpeckers feasting on mullein seedheads, a kingfisher calling from surrounding trees, and a sharp-shinned hawk chasing the woodpeckers.



Coldstream Creek

Restoring a bench above spawning salmon

While planting up on a high bank along Coldstream Creek before Thanksgiving, OSS staff and volunteers received visits from some quail, several spawning Kokanee salmon, and a curious, salmon-hungry young black bear!

More than 200 native trees and shrubs like red-osier dogwood and trembling aspen were put in the unused fallow hay field in order to improve the riparian forest along the creek for local wildlife.

In addition to all the plants, two nest boxes were also installed in old cottonwood trees by the creek to help increase nesting opportunities for endangered Western Screech-owls in the area.



Joe Rich Pond Enhancement

Improving wetland habitat for wildlife

Back when the Artiss' bought their property in the Joe Rich area above Kelowna, they noticed the previous owners had dug a large pond to enjoy. Aside from a few old pines and a small patch of forest along one side, though, there was very little vegetation around the pond edge. In September, OSS planted nearly 150 trees and shrubs around the pond to help stabilise the banks and create a more functional habitat for the wildlife that use it.



Spotlight on Bats

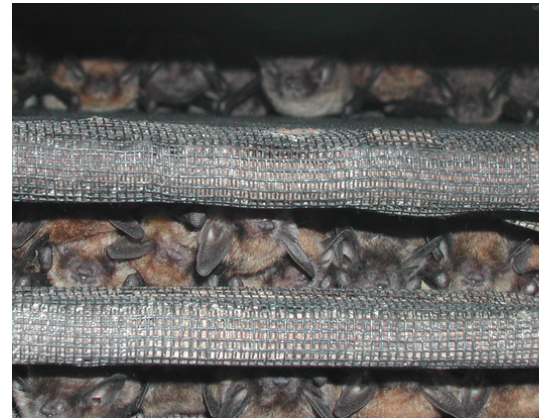
Where do bats spend the winter?

Did you know that while most bats hibernate for the winter, some migrate south like birds? A few, like the Silver-haired bat are migratory hibernators, which means they will migrate a little bit south before starting hibernation. Bats generally use different locations for summer roosts and winter hibernacula. They can use many different types of habitat to overwinter; depending on species, caves, crevasses in rock faces, mines, rock piles or even buildings can be used.

Bats that hibernate during the winter are more likely to be very severely impacted by White-nose Syndrome. White-nose syndrome is a fungal infection that uses up energy reserves of hibernating bats too quickly, which can result in 90-100% fatality in some places. White-nose Syndrome isn't known in BC yet but if you find a dead bat or see one flying during the day in winter, please report it to the BC Community Bat Program.

You can help!

- Retain areas of natural habitat on your property. Although bats will roost in houses and sometimes boxes, natural areas will often provide all the shelter they need
- Avoid pesticides whenever possible; bats need those insects for food, especially in the summer when they have babies.
- Be a citizen scientist! Many organisations conduct bat counts during the summer to evaluate bat populations. Try searching online to see if there are any being done in your community!
- Leave dead or dying trees if it's safe to do so, as the crevices and holes left from decaying wood are perfect roosts for bats with young



More Bat Facts!

Did you know that bats are more closely related to rhinoceroses than to rats and mice? Unlike rodents, but similar to larger mammals, bats are long lived (up to 40 years!!) and usually have one pup per year.

All of the bat species in BC only eat insects! There are no bats here that eat fruit or blood. One bat can eat up to 1200 insects per hour and nursing females can even consume their body weight in insects in a single night.

Even though humans can't hear high-frequency bat echolocation, it doesn't mean bats are quiet! Some bats make echolocation noises at over 100 decibels - louder than a rock concert!

Also seen
in our
#funfactfridays!



Are there bats in your belfry?

The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) states that "some bats live in buildings, and there's no reason to evict them if there is little chance for contact with people.

If you do think you need to remove a bat colony from a building on your property, this is the time of year when it can be done. For more information, check out the BC Community Bat program: www.bcbats.com

Stewardship Tips for Fall & Winter



Leave tall grasses and flower stems standing up in as many areas as possible, and keep dead fallen leaves and other plant bits on the ground until spring clean-up. Many native pollinator species like bees and butterflies overwinter in these types of plant material.

Keep shrubs un-pruned if possible, and leave branches from any necessary pruning in a large pile to help shelter over-wintering songbirds. Many shrubs, like wild roses, keep their seeds in the winter and will feed hungry birds.

Stay on trails when enjoying the outdoors. Though there may be snow on the ground, excessive recreation in an area can damage fragile habitats and disturb local wildlife.

Avoid rodenticides (rat poisons) at all costs. Pests like mice and rats do not die immediately after eating poison, and are slow and sick for several days. This makes them easy prey for owls, hawks, and bobcats, who can become sick and die from ingesting the poison inside the rodent.



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Join the Club!



Do you have natural areas on your property and want to care for them to help local wildlife? To become a Wildlife Habitat Steward, contact us at info@osstewardship.ca or 250-770-1467 to arrange a site visit. You will receive a visit by a biologist, free of charge, to introduce the program, answer questions and do a preliminary assessment. If interested, we enter into a voluntary stewardship agreement- a signed document describing the natural areas on your property and your intent to steward them for local wildlife. You can be provided with a gate post sign and/or promotion on our website and in media if you wish.

Littlest Steward is on the way!

A big congratulations to our Central and North Okanagan technician Michelle (and her husband Dixon) as they are expecting any day now! All North & Central projects will be coordinated through our Penticton office while Michelle is on leave.



For more information, please contact OSS at:
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Please note that our office is only open by pre-arranged appointment at this time.

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