



# OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP

Field Notes | July 2025

## Taking Nora on the Road Snake Safety for Vineyard Workers

This spring, our Sonoran Gophersnake ambassador, Nora, hit the road to help deliver snake safety workshops for farm workers across the Okanagan and Similkameen. These hands-on sessions teach workers how to identify local snake species, including the venomous Western Rattlesnake, and how to respond safely if they encounter one in the wild.

Workshops were offered in both English and Spanish, by request, to ensure all team members could participate and feel confident working safely around snakes. We were also excited to bring this training to staff at the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre in Summerland, supporting their commitment to safe and wildlife-aware field work.

Nora plays a special role in these workshops—her calm presence helps people overcome fear and recognize snakes as valuable members of the ecosystem. As a non-venomous species that is often mistaken for the venomous rattlesnake, the Sonoran Gophersnake is a perfect ambassador for teaching the difference between potentially dangerous and harmless species.

If your farm or workplace would like to host a snake safety training session for your staff, we'd love to hear from you at [info@osstewardship.ca](mailto:info@osstewardship.ca)! These free workshops are a great way to support both worker safety and wildlife stewardship.

Nora will also be making appearances at farmers' markets and community events throughout the valley this summer. Come say hello, learn more about local snakes, and maybe even see a rattlesnake shed up close! Stay in the loop about where we—and Nora—will be next by signing up for our newsletter: [www.osstewardship.ca/fieldnotes](http://www.osstewardship.ca/fieldnotes)



Visit [www.osstewardship.ca/snakes](http://www.osstewardship.ca/snakes) for more information on local snake species and links to snake training videos

# Naturally Beneficial

## Nature's Tiny Pest Management Team

Many pests that damage crops and plants can be controlled naturally by beneficial insects. Unlike chemical pesticides, which may offer a short-term fix but often disrupt the ecological balance, beneficial insects are precise, self-sustaining, and free. They evolve with their environment and adapt to shifting pest pressures, reducing the need for intervention.

Ground beetles, for example, patrol the soil and devour cutworms, slugs, and other soil-dwelling pests. Parasitic wasps seek out and destroy aphids hiding inside curled leaves—an area inaccessible to most sprays. Hoverflies, lacewings, and ladybugs help manage populations of thrips and mites, and unlike chemical inputs, they don't harm non-target species or leave residues behind.

### What They Need to Thrive

Supporting these natural helpers is not complicated. Beneficial insects require three main things: food, shelter, and protection from harm.

- Food: Nectar and pollen are critical energy sources, especially during times when pest populations are low. Even predatory species need floral resources to survive and reproduce.
- Shelter: Undisturbed natural habitat is the gold standard. Insect-friendly features like hollow stems, rock piles, brush, mulch, and leaf litter offer nesting and overwintering opportunities.
- Safety: Reducing or eliminating pesticide use is essential. Even organic-approved sprays can affect beneficial insect populations if used indiscriminately.

### Turning Margins into Habitat

If your farm doesn't have large tracts of natural land, don't worry. Even small, underused areas—such as fence lines, field margins, and spaces between vineyard or orchard rows—can be transformed into rich insect habitat.

Planting native shrubs, flowering hedgerows, or cover crops in these areas is one of the most effective strategies. In the Okanagan, some top-performing plants for attracting beneficials include:

- Rabbitbrush and Goldenrod: Late-season bloomers that support pollinators and parasitic wasps well into fall.
- Yarrow and Snow Buckwheat: Low-growing, mowable options for ground cover between rows.
- Oregon Grape, Wild Rose, and Saskatoon: Woody shrubs that offer structural complexity and attract a wide variety of beneficial insects.
- Sagebrush: A powerful attractant for parasitic wasps, especially important for late-season and overwintering resources.



Trevor Reeves



Justin Chan



Abbie Hyde



Robert Webster

Images from top to bottom: Parasitic Wasp, Ground Beetle, Mantis, Predatory thrips

*For local plant sources, nurseries such as Sagebrush Nursery and Xeriscape Endemic Nursery offer native species adapted to the region's climate and soil.*



## Natural Areas: More Than Just Pretty Spaces

Natural habitat on a property does more than support beneficial insects. It helps stabilize soil, regulate temperature, and serve as a windbreak. If there's a nearby water source, such as a pond or seepage area, it adds another layer of value by moderating temperature swings and providing hydration for wildlife.

These areas also support larger insect-eating allies like swallows, nighthawks, and hawks, which contribute to an integrated approach to pest management. Preserving the “wild” aspects of your land—brush piles, standing deadwood, or undisturbed corners—is critical. A tidy farm might look neat, but it doesn't always function well ecologically.

## Year-Round Support

One of the most overlooked aspects of beneficial insect support is seasonality. It's not enough to provide food in spring alone. Many beneficial species overwinter on the farm and need resources across the full growing season. Aim to maintain a progression of blooms from early spring to late fall. Mixed species plantings, with a combination of ground covers, mid-level shrubs, and tall flowering plants, will create continuous support. Water sources should be clean and accessible, with rocks, vegetation, shallow banks or other surfaces for insects to perch on while drinking.

## Simple steps for a lasting impact

Encouraging beneficial insects doesn't require major infrastructure or significant expense. What it does require is a shift in thinking—from pest control to ecosystem support. By embracing natural habitat and native plants, reducing chemical inputs, and treating every corner of the farm as potential habitat, landowners can tap into the powerful services of nature's pest managers.

At the end of the day, farming and land stewardship are partnerships—with the land, with the climate, and with the tiny, tireless insects. Investing in beneficial insects is investing in a more balanced, beautiful, and resilient future.

*For more tips on Integrated Pest Management or to get started with native plantings, visit our website at <https://www.farmstewards.ca/fruits-beneficials>*

# Birding and Bioblitz on Caravan Farms

## Citizen Science Extravaganza!

It was all smiles this June at the third annual bioblitz and beginner birding event with Caravan Farms. Caravan farms, in addition to hosting a selection of outdoor plays and land-based learning opportunities, is one of our dedicated stewards determined to continue conservation, land stewardship, and habitat enhancement on their land. Armed with field guides and binoculars, and fueled by Caravan Farm's famous lemonade, participants went to work documenting as many species as possible within a designated location on the farm.

Participants documented the species found through iNaturalist. iNaturalist makes it easy to document biodiversity of an area through uploading photos. Bioblitz's are a great example of citizen science! The collection of species data can contribute to scientific knowledge about an area's biodiversity, can help identify invasive species early before they spread, and are a great way to strengthen our connection to nature.

Our Beginner Birding workshop is a perfect introduction for those wanting to take their first steps into the birding world. We talk about the benefits of field guides and how to use them, basic bird identification tips, and how to keep birds safe while using bird feeders. Interested in the world of birding? Check out our tips on bird feeders and go to our website to stay up to date on future events: [www.osstewardship.ca](http://www.osstewardship.ca)

## Bird Feeders 101

- Use bird feeders that are easy to clean! Bird feeders should be cleaned every two weeks with a 10% chlorine bleach solution. Rinse and allowed to dry fully before refill
- If a bird appears sick or unwell, remove your feeders for two weeks to prevent the spread of disease.
- Discard seed that has become wet as harmful mold can grow on birdseed.
- Hulled sunflower seeds are nutritious and delicious for birds- but beware of attracting other critters as well! Remove bird feeders during bear season to prevent attracting the wrong kind of critters



We gratefully acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx and Secwépemc people.

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