



# OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

June 2021

## Spotlight on Stewards: Tantalus

### Expanding a natural area in the vineyard

This past spring, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship (OSS) and Tantalus Vineyards and Winery planted over 300 native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers to increase habitat at the vineyard and winery for wildlife and pollinators. This planting is a win-win with the new plants providing a windbreak for grapes and staff as well as important habitat for birds and pollinators. This is only the latest in a variety of activities that Tantalus does in their efforts as Wildlife Habitat Stewards and sustainability leaders.

Tantalus stewards a 10 acre forest among their vines which is habitat to a variety of wildlife such as owls, nighthawks, deer, weasels, and coyotes. Their trail cameras have even captured a female bobcat and her kittens living in the gully. Tantalus Vineyard and Winery was the very first Wildlife Habitat Steward to sign on with OSS in the Central Okanagan and they are very committed to sustainability, with no herbicide or pesticide use anywhere in their vineyards, BC's first LEED-certified winery, and 53 honeybee hives living on the property! Since joining the Wildlife Habitat Steward program. They have also installed numerous bird and bat boxes, which not only gives the birds and bats space to live but also offers natural pest control.

Many of the wildflowers planted at Tantalus this spring, like Common Yarrow, Parsnip-flowered Buckwheat, and Arrowleaf Balsamroot are very important for local butterflies. Some of the flowers are host plants, for caterpillars, and others are critical nectar and food sources for adult butterflies.



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# Stewardship in the Community

## Schoolyard re-wilding

Ecole Entre Lac grew an instant forest after their Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and OSS planted some native Ponderosa Pines and Trembling Aspen that were already well over 10 feet tall! These trees were also supplemented by a variety of native shrubs and wildflowers that will not only create habitat for native pollinators but also provide educational opportunities for the students at the school. The PAC is also hoping that the one day the trees, shrubs and large boulders will become an inviting playground for students and encourage active outdoor play. Some big Tiger Swallowtail butterflies came over to check on our work before the group was even finished planting; we hope they are the first of many!



## Getting Snake Smart

### Training for agricultural workers

OSS, along with snake ambassador Nora, hit the road this spring to work with some of our Wildlife Habitat Steward's vineyard managers and staff- teaching them about snakes and how to identify them, training them in snake safety around the farm, helping them become more comfortable around snakes, and training them on how to move them if needed using tongs.

With grants from Community Foundation of South Okanagan | Similkameen and Central Okanagan Foundation, we were able to update and translate a true multi-lingual training packages for local farms. For more information, please visit [www.osstewardship.ca/snakes](http://www.osstewardship.ca/snakes)



*There was always the uncertainty and irrational fear of what snakes I would come across and how potentially threatening they could be. After this training session, those fears were gone. Myself and my crew have since handled and moved more snakes to safety in the following weeks than my entire career previously.*

*- Brett Theissen, Vineyard Manager  
Mount Boucherie Estate Winery*



# Low Elevation Forests

Up above the valley-bottom shrublands, the mountains of the Okanagan and Similkameen are covered in open Ponderosa Pine forests. This forest habitat is critical in supporting hundreds of different species of plants, animals, and insects. In addition to their beauty, these forests provide us with food, renewable timber, and places for recreation. It is important we treat our forests with respect to ensure these benefits can continue for years to come.



## Stewardship Tips

 **Keep dead standing trees** if it is safe to do so. They can remain standing for decades and are critical resources for dozens of local wildlife species.

 **Protect known nesting sites**, and avoid human disturbance at these sites during the breeding season (May-August).

 **Eliminate pesticide use** when possible in order to maintain insect populations. Insects are a vital food source for many species.

 **Practice responsible recreation when enjoying the outdoors.** Never leave a campfire unattended and avoid creating new tent sites, which destroys understory vegetation. Pack out all garbage and stay on trails when hiking, biking, and ATViing.

 **Help control the spread of invasive species.** Check your boots, pets, clothes, and gear before and after you go. Remove any seeds or bits of vegetation and throw them in the garbage.

## Forest Superpowers



 Large trees like Ponderosa pines have extensive root systems which can prevent soil erosion and stabilize slopes

 Forests suck up tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and pollutants from the air each year and give us oxygen in return.

 Ponderosa Pine tree bark contains *vanillin*, the compound found in vanilla flavouring. Smell the bark of a big Ponderosa on a hot day and you'll see!



More than 50 local wildlife species depend on Ponderosa Pine forests!



## Fire Ecology

Fire is essential to the health and functioning of Ponderosa Pine forests. Large Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir have thick, fire resistant bark which helps them to survive the regular low-intensity fires that help to keep forests open and productive. However, decades of fire suppression in BC have led to thicker vegetation, loss of open meadows, and a build-up of highly flammable dead woody debris – all of which leads to more intense fires that spread up into trees. Restoration activities like tree thinning and controlled burns can open up the forest, reduce the risk of severe wildfires and create more food for wildlife.



# Wild About Woodpeckers

## They don't just peck wood!

Woodpeckers are part of the bird family Picidae, whose members can be found nearly everywhere on Earth. They have distinctive large, heavy beaks for pecking and drilling into trees. Some common woodpeckers in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, are Northern Flickers or Pileated Woodpeckers, but there are many other local woodpecker species that are endangered or becoming endangered from habitat loss and degradation.

### How do woodpeckers avoid concussions when pecking trees?



Woodpeckers have special skulls that have a channel of bone where their very long tongue resides. This channel of bone (and thus their tongue), wraps around their brain and acts as a shock absorber like bubble wrap when the bird's beak hits the tree!



#### White-headed Woodpecker

These woodpeckers excavate new nesting sites every year in the trunks of trees. They are very picky, and may start several holes before deciding on the perfect one. Their favorite meals are seeds found in pine cones. For these reasons, among others, the White-headed Woodpecker relies on old, mature open Ponderosa Pine forests as habitat, especially forests that contain large dead snags which are perfect for nesting and perching. The White-headed Woodpecker is extremely endangered in the Okanagan and has not been seen here since 2010.



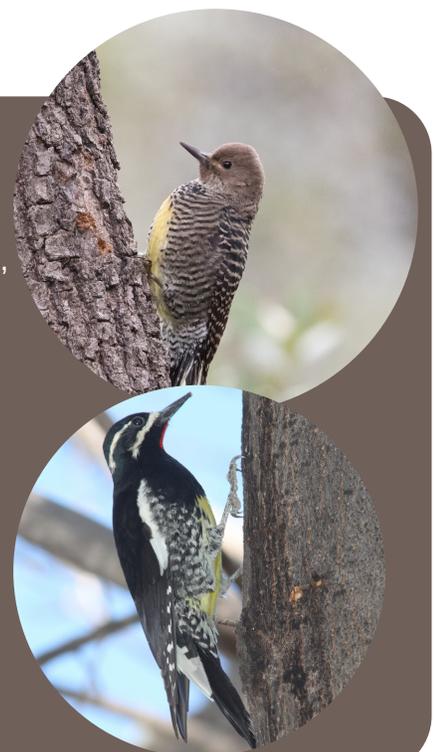
#### Lewis' Woodpecker

These woodpeckers are the odd ones of the bunch. Unlike other woodpeckers, Lewis' Woodpeckers don't actually peck wood! Instead, they swoop down and catch insects in-flight, the way songbirds do. Because they don't peck wood, they also don't excavate (carve) their own nesting holes into trees. This makes them secondary cavity nesters, which means they live in sites that were excavated and then subsequently abandoned by other birds.

## Williamson's Sapsucker

Sapsuckers are a sub-group of woodpeckers that peck or drill into trees in search for a different food source than other woodpecker species. Sapsuckers, as the name suggests, eat the sap out of the trees they peck into! Typically, they will drill rows of densely packed small puncture holes, called wells, into the bark of a tree on which they are feeding. They peck right into the "arteries" of the tree that carry the sugary sap to its branches and leaves and lick it up with their long tongue. Besides sap, sapsuckers also feed on insects.

In the higher elevations around the Okanagan and Similkameen, you can find Williamson's Sapsuckers. The males and females of this species (right), look so incredibly different that for decades, European colonists believed they were two completely different species! The male was called the Williamson's Sapsucker and the female was called the Black-breasted Sapsucker.



# North Vernon Park Community Project

Stewardship can be a walk in the park

Several years ago, two wetlands were created in a natural park along BX Creek in the North Vernon area. This spring, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship approached the City of Vernon, looking for a site for a demonstration project in the region and they suggested some followup work. Our hope is to further restore and steward these wetlands while also engaging the community around it to learn about the wildlife species that live there, which include amphibians, reptiles, and birds, while also providing opportunities to participate in ongoing stewardship activities such as invasive species management and native plant re-vegetation.

With support from the Okanagan Basin Water Bard and RDNO Greater Vernon Natural Areas and Trails grant, we will host several volunteer opportunities here. Want to get involved? Sign up for our volunteer list at: [www.osstewardship.ca/get-involved](http://www.osstewardship.ca/get-involved).

Stay up to date on opportunities to get involved through our dedicated webpage:

[www.osstewardship.ca/vernon](http://www.osstewardship.ca/vernon)



## Meet Our Team

Learn more about our team members at [www.osstewardship.ca/team](http://www.osstewardship.ca/team)



Alyson Skinner  
Executive Director  
2005



Lia McKinnon  
Stewardship Biologist  
2014



Valerie Blow  
Stewardship Officer  
2016



Amy Wagner  
Field Technician  
2020



Kaylee Lesmeister  
Field Technician  
2021

## Get Involved

**JOIN OUR TEAM**  
Field Technician  
8 week fall term

[www.osstewardship.ca/work-with-us](http://www.osstewardship.ca/work-with-us)

### VOLUNTEER

[www.osstewardship.ca/volunteer](http://www.osstewardship.ca/volunteer)

### BECOME A MEMBER

[www.osstewardship.ca/membership](http://www.osstewardship.ca/membership)

# New on our website [www.osstewardship.ca](http://www.osstewardship.ca)

Visit our website for a series of online workshops and web pages that break down common topics or issues around wildlife or habitat. Topics range from beginner birding to snake smarts to preventing pet and wildlife conflict. The workshops have been broken down into shorter manageable chunks so that it is easier to fit into any spare moments you may have, and the webpages are succinct and easy-to-read.

Have ideas for stewardship topics you would like to see next? Send them along to [info@osstewardship.ca](mailto:info@osstewardship.ca)

## ***Beginner Birding workshop***



## ***Owls of the Okanagan and Similkameen workshop***



## ***Snake Smart workshop***



## ***Pets and Wildlife page***



## ***Secondary Poisoning page***

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

## **Partners in stewardship and conservation**

### **For more information please contact OSS at:**

E: [info@osstewardship.ca](mailto:info@osstewardship.ca)  
P: 250.770.1467  
W: [www.osstewardship.ca](http://www.osstewardship.ca)

   
[@osstewardship](https://www.instagram.com/osstewardship)

Environment and Climate Change Canada  
Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation  
Okanagan Basin Water Board  
Greater Vernon Natural Areas and Trails Grant  
RDNO | North Okanagan Conservation Fund  
Central Okanagan Foundation  
BC Community Gaming Grant  
Highstreet Ventures

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