

SO, WHAT DID WE DO THIS SUMMER?

No 'lazy days' of summer for CLT

Here at Capitol Land Trust we were busy! This summer we celebrated the protection of the Skookumchuck Forest Preserve near Tenino. This preserve builds on the success of the neighboring Mueller Conservation Easement. Together, the two conserved lands are the site of a major restoration project being led by Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife with assistance from Thurston Conservation District. The project includes planting thousands of native plants along the shoreline and constructing logjams in the river, using various types of large woody debris.

It's hard not to think about Lincoln Logs when viewing these "engineered logjams". The clean-cut tops of their piles are a dead giveaway that human hands (and machines) played a role in this woody creation. The careful weaving of collected logs, punctuated by a starburst of root-wad on one end, show that habitat enhancement is part science and part art.

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*Logjams
slow the flow
and create
hiding places
for juvenile
salmon on
their journey
to the sea.*

Photos: Logjam on Skookumchuck River and coho fry, Mike Melton.





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THE KIDS ARE BACK!

... Continued from front page

This stretch of river doesn't have much naturally occurring downed wood because an upstream dam prevents big logs from traveling downstream. Logs and branches create hiding places for young fish to rest and feed. Without it, they're more likely to be picked off by predators before they've had a chance to complete their life cycle.

VETERAN PARTNERS

Also this summer, Thurston Conservation District's Veterans Conservation Corps crew worked on the revegetation portion of this project, in addition to maintaining trails at Darlin Creek Preserve and removing fencing from Lower Eld West Preserve. "It was such a pleasure working with the VCC crew," remarked CLT's Conservation Director Laurence Reeves. "We were particularly grateful for the crew's efforts when we captured images of a herd of elk traveling through Lower Eld West Preserve. The absence of the fence definitely makes it easier for the calves to make their way."



"VCC crew members were friendly, resourceful, required very little oversight and got an incredible amount of work completed. We welcome the opportunity to work with them again!"

SUMMER CAMP AND NATURE WALKS!

Elk calves weren't the only little feet to visit a CLT preserve this summer, though. We also welcomed summer camp participants from Wa-Ya Outdoor School, Olympia Mountaineers, and Puget Sound Estuarium. After a year of virtual living, it felt so good to get kids back out on the land. They went on nature walks to learn about edible plants and practiced their observation skills while exploring the geology of Bayshore Preserve. Some campers put their new plant identification skills to use by removing invasive English ivy (and 13 golf balls!) at Bayshore Preserve.

As summer draws to an end, we turn our sights to salmon and rainy walks. Hope to see you out on the land!



All photos this page by Mary Birchem. Above: Getting acquainted with a harmless sowbug, which likes damp areas.

Below left: Swallow box built by TOGETHER!'s Summer Clubhouse kids.

Below right: Wendy Gerstel shares the geology of Bayshore Preserve with Wa-Ya Outdoor School.

Banner Photo: Kids on nature hike at Inspiring Kids Preserve.

Opposite page, upper: VCC workers remove fencing at Lower Eld West Preserve.

Lower: Elk cow with calves move freely across landscape without fences.





Conserved Lands Hold Surprises for the Patient Birder

What a thrill it is to stumble across a bird species uncommonly seen in our area. You may hear it and question your “birding by ear” skills. “Could that be what I think it is?” With patience and luck, you catch a glimpse and your suspicions are confirmed! Over the past year we have had unusual bird sightings at several preserves.

For starters, some keen-eared volunteers identified a yellow-breasted chat while at a stewardship work party along Stillman Creek in Lewis County. A few days later, a second yellow-breasted chat was seen singing from an exposed branch at a CLT preserve in Mason County!

The yellow-breasted chat is typically found in Washington east of the Cascades during the breeding season, April through August. Seeing it in western Washington is unusual. With an affinity for thick vegetation, especially

along streams and in abandoned farmland, the yellow-breasted chat is often overlooked. However, after it arrives from Mexico in the early breeding season, the bird’s expansive vocal repertoire—a mix of whistles, rattles, catcalls, and grunts—cannot be ignored.

Another unusual visitor to our area, a snow bunting, was spotted on a salt marsh at a CLT preserve by an eagle-eyed volunteer. Snow buntings are medium-sized songbirds that breed in the arctic tundra in rock cavities and are more commonly seen farther east and north. Breeding males have solid black backs and black and white wings, and white underparts. Females have less contrasting plumage, usually with rufous and gray tones.

The snow bunting displays incredible resilience for such a small bird. Males may return to their high arctic breeding grounds when



Scan the QR codes with your phone to listen to the yellow-breasted chat and the northern saw-whet owl.

temperatures are as cold as -22 degrees Fahrenheit to secure the best rock crevices for raising young. Salt marshes and open fields provide seeds the birds need to maintain a healthy weight before returning to their northern breeding grounds each year. Beginning around August, flocks of snow buntings form and start moving south to their wintering grounds.

The Virginia rail and northern saw-whet owl are two more birds spotted at land trust sites in the past year. While both are residents, they are rarely seen. The Virginia rail’s secretive wetland lifestyle and the northern saw-whet owl’s nocturnal behavior often keep them out of sight from curious humans.

While none of these species are considered rare, it’s a thrill to spot them and an important reminder that conserving their habitat is critical to their survival. As land development increases and climate changes, bird ranges will continue to shift. Bird populations everywhere are in decline, mostly due to habitat loss. Birds, like us, need safe places to find food and water and a sheltered spot to build a home to raise their young.

The ecosystems CLT has prioritized for protection—forests, wetlands, prairies, and shorelines—offer these essentials. Conserving habitats in south Puget Sound, the Chehalis River Basin, and beyond, will continue to be important for their survival.

Come see for yourself by grabbing your binoculars and visiting one of CLT’s public-access preserves!



Photos, opposite page, top: The diminutive northern saw-whet owl has a large head, a mottled brown back and light underparts. Its dark bill contrasts with the white “Y” between the eyes. Its name alludes to its call that sounds like a saw being sharpened, Mike Melton.

Opposite page, bottom: The yellow-breasted chat is a bulky songbird with a long tail, big head, and yellow breast, Mike Melton.

Photos, this page, top: Snow bunting feathers acquire a rusty color, and their beaks turn from black to yellow during the nonbreeding season, Mary Birchem.

Lower: The secretive Virginia rail is best recognized by its curved red-brown bill and orange-brown legs. It has a black and white barred belly and mottled brown-black back, Mike Melton.

Left: Wilson’s warbler, Mary Birchem.

Volunteer Spotlight: Barb Morson

*Around me the trees stir
in their leaves
And call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from
their branches.
And they call again,
"It's simple," they say,
"and you have come into the
world to do this, to go easy, to
be filled with light,
and to shine."*

From Devotions, The selected Poems of Mary Oliver, Penguin Press, New York, 2017



Later, her work consulting on toxics and hazardous waste cleanup helped her understand the need to conserve these ecologically rich places and made her want to immerse herself in a great organization that was doing just that.

There are many things that keep her involved with CLT, but foremost is her heart's connection with the land itself—the wild places and the denizens that inhabit them. She enjoys knowing she's part of a team that works every day to ensure there will be wild places long into the future. She also loves the opportunity to be out in nature with others who share her love of the land.

As the organization moves forward, Barb is hopeful about connecting our broader community with the environment and that kids, newly exposed to the natural world around them, will gain a sense of wonder and love for the outdoors. That they too, will be driven to help ensure that wildlife and people will continue to have safe places to roam.



What does it take to run a successful organization? In a word: people. People who share the mission, and a vision of where the organization is going and how to get there. It takes a multitude of people who care enough to give their time, money and wisdom.

Barb Morson knows what it takes because she's done many of the jobs that keep CLT running. Her experience volunteering on a variety of committees plus her service on the board as Secretary showed her how conserving and stewarding land relies on the interconnected work of staff and volunteers. Sometimes Barb contributes by attending a meeting and asking great questions. Other times, she shows up, gloves on, ready to plant trees or bushwhack through heavy brush to flag a new trail. Always, her infectious laugh and penchant for finding just the right poem for the occasion has endeared her to those she works with and energizes other volunteers.

And where does that drive to see CLT be successful come from? A lifetime of caring about the environment starting with a childhood exploring islands off the coast of Maine.

Letting (Helping) Nature Heal

Sometimes the best thing we can do to restore damaged ecosystems is to get out of Nature's way. That is what CLT has done for Cranberry Creek at Twin Rivers Ranch Preserve. The old bridge, pictured below, had deteriorated and partially fallen into the creek. By removing the bridge structure and the stream-bank armoring under it, the creek was free once more to do what creeks do—create new meanders and edges using fresh gravel and sand washed from upstream, that add habitat enhancing eddies and pools. We also planted native vegetation, like willow and dogwood, to help with the recovery. We'll let Nature take it from here.

A little boost

In 2015, Bayshore Preserve began its transformation from golf course to nature preserve. A tidal dike was removed, new channels along Oakland Bay and Johns Creek were created, and thousands of plants were planted.

Today, a community-based science project, using four photo points to monitor changes in the landscape, is underway. Each photo point focuses on a different aspect of the restoration project: riparian (stream side), salt marsh, Garry oak, and nurse log.

How you can help

Explore the trails at Bayshore Preserve and look for the photo monitoring stations. Place your camera or phone in the bracket at the top of the station in a landscape orientation. Snap a photo and send it to us using the form at CapitolLandTrust.org/photo.

Images will be compiled into time-lapse videos of each area. Over time, the collection of photos will tell the amazing story of ecological restoration and ecosystem changes at the preserve!



Photos opposite page, top: Forest at Stewart Conservation Easement, Bonnie Liberty. Inset: Barb Morson at Darlin Creek Preserve, Mike Melton.

Bottom: Barb touring Inspiring Kids Preserve with CLT Board in 2019, Jane Chavey.

Photos above, clockwise from left: Cranberry Creek bridge, before removal. Bridge site after removal and restoration work, and bridge site 18 months later, with streamside plantings growing strong.

Left: Visitor at Bayshore Preserve photographs restored channel at photo monitoring station.

SAVE THE DATE: Experience the chum salmon run at Bayshore Preserve this November. Keep an eye on our social media for real-time updates.



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Photo: Northern saw-whet owl up close, Mike Melton.



JOIN US VIRTUALLY THIS FALL!

For Conservation Conversations

- ▶ CLT's Outreach & Education Coordinator Mary Bircham and local wildlife photographer Mike Melton will explore the diversity of birds that call our region home. As we watch, listen, and learn about the birds, we will also learn about the habitats they need to thrive.

Wednesday, November 10, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

- ▶ Local geologist Wendy Gerstel will take us for a geologic journey of Darlin Creek Preserve within the broader setting of Puget Sound glaciation, highlighting the exceptional landform features that influence the ecology of the area.

Wednesday, December 8, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

To register, visit CapitolLandTrust.org/events.