



# Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society Newsletter

January 2023

General Delivery, Hornby Island, B.C. V0R 1Z0  
heronrocksfcs@gmail.com

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www.heronrocks.ca

## *Wassail Party at Heron Rocks Orchard*

Sunday January 15  
1:00pm

*If the weather is awful we will  
Wassail the following Sunday,  
January 22.*

Join us in an age-old tradition  
to bless the fruit trees and wish  
them good health.

We will have a bonfire and  
mulled (hot) apple juice to keep  
us all warm.

Bring your mug and a noise-  
maker or musical instrument to  
toast the Orchard trees.

You're also welcome to bring  
your old Christmas tree to feed  
the fire.

Medieval dress-up costume  
encouraged!



Wassail Party 2019: toasting a fruit tree  
Photo by Gwynna MacCaskill

## President's 2022 AGM Report

My name is Leanne Letson. I became president of the Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society earlier this year when Margot Bushnell stepped down for personal reasons. Despite COVID, the Board has managed to meet regularly, a few times by Zoom, over the past year.

Last November we conducted a strategic review of our Society facilitated by Darren Bond. Darren distilled our roundtable discussions and came up with several initiatives that he presented to us in a comprehensive report. This spring, between coming out of the COVID haze and returning to our regular efforts, we found no time to work on these initiatives. We will work out an execution plan this fall and look forward to reporting the results to you at next year's AGM.

At the beginning of January we distributed our Newsletter island-wide and mailed it to our off-island members. We received many favourable comments and by mid-February had 30 memberships.

Due to poor weather in January, we had to cancel our Wassailing in the Heron Rocks Orchard but the rest of our events enjoyed sunny days. In February we hosted a successful pruning workshop with Renee Poisson and gained more members. March saw the return of Seedy Saturday and was well attended. Last, but not least, we had a great turn-out for the Plant Sale in May and received 27 more memberships.

So far this year the Society has 79 members up from 55 in 2021, 47 in 2020 and 59 in 2019. We may yet surpass 2018's member count of 87. It is my hope that by renewing Heron Rock's initiatives we will attract more members and stimulate meaningful community participation.

This year's Hilary Brown Memorial Bursary recipient is Arwen Joy. We are pleased for her and wish her the very best in her post-secondary school endeavours.

I really appreciate the volunteer work and the continued support of everyone who cares for the Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society – it's an honour to serve you all.

## Thank You To Retiring Gemma Colin

In 2009 long time Board member, Phyl Robinson, who made it her mission to annually recruit new Board members, persuaded Gemma to become one as Phyl was searching for a replacement for Pam Gordon.

Gemma's enthusiasm and energy went into maintaining the Peace Garden and grounds as

well as ensuring that all the plants for the Plant Sale were in excellent condition. Over the years Gemma donated generously to the Plant Sale. The number of healthy tomato plants, peppers and whatever other vegetables she felt like growing for the Sale is impossible to estimate.

Gemma didn't run again in 2022 after thirteen years on the Board because to quote her: "I am much older and my ability to look after more than my own farm critters, orchard, gardens and greenhouse was not there anymore. I wish the remaining Board members all the best."

On behalf of the Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society, the current Board members thank you Gemma for all your work and look forward to seeing you at some work parties.



Gemma at Wassail 2013  
Photo by Reina LeBaron

### HRFCS Membership Reminder

Memberships for 2023 are due in January. See last page for details. Tax receipts are given for all donations over \$25

Your membership and donations help us to provide educational grants and bursaries, support other Hornby organizations, offer workshops, maintain our buildings and grounds, sponsor speakers on critical issues, and more!

If you have already sent in your 2023 membership, we thank you.

## Hilary's Peace Garden

By Leanne Letson

Thanks to industrious volunteers, the Potting Area got a thorough cleaning up in preparation for this year's Plant Sale.

Charmaine Chartrand, our cheerful tenant, continues to be a wonderful help. She prepared the greenhouse for Gemma's tender peppers before the Plant Sale. She is caring for the plants leftover from the Plant Sale. And her veggie plots are a nice addition to Hilary's Peace Garden. David Mills continues to do a good job of maintaining the grounds around the house and Annex as well in Hilary's Peace Garden.

Yana Pethick has volunteered to widen and install steps at the top of the beach path – his work is progressing slowly. Several signs will be posted shortly on the trail to the beach warning hikers of the rough path and not to smoke.

Darien Chase did some corrective pruning to the arbutus tree overhanging the house as well as removing some maple trees near the house that would otherwise have become danger trees.

The work on the septic system is finally complete. We will wait for the fall to do some xeriscaping in the Peace Garden.

## Keeping A Wild Garden

By Pat Marshall

The Peace Garden in November this year is quite different from a year ago. Rain finally arrived, but not as much as usual. Leaves are lingering on the shrubs and trees and cold temperatures have come early. There are fat buds on the camellias but none on the *choisya* this year. The prolonged drought has made many plants suffer and some have perished. The *romneya*, however, merrily romps about where it pleases, having come from California.

Miraculously, several plants resurfaced after being driven over and compacted by the excavator a year ago (septic tank renovations). We shall have to see if they resurface again, having died back prematurely. One of those is purple Monkshood, quite poisonous, but offering beautiful deep blue hooded flowers at the end of

September. They usually last a month at a time when there is little else flowering in the garden. I have gathered several bags of maple leaves to mulch next year after partial decomposition.

We are making plans to install a cistern in order to water the garden and stave off the slow death most plants are experiencing. It will need to be installed by early spring if we are to fill it in time for next summer. We cannot say if it will be dry or wet in the coming spring. Climate change has made our weather quite unpredictable. This November is proving to be much drier than normal.

Rosemary Verey, a great English plants-woman, once said that keeping a wild garden is more challenging than a conventional one. With benign neglect, some of the more weedy plants, such as periwinkle, globe thistles, and lemon balm proliferate and crowd out their more delicate neighbours. Shrubs that have not been thinned out become weedy and non-productive.

At the beginning of last summer it was too wet and then too dry to get much work done but some things have been accomplished. The huge *kolkwitzia*, or beauty bush, has been chopped back and two thirds of it covered in black plastic to promote new, healthy growth. Some trunks have been removed from the viburnum "Pink Dawn". Pink Dawn is a remarkable shrub, with fragrant flowers for more than a month in March. The scent is sweet but not overpowering and wafts throughout the garden. It can begin flowering in November, offering tantalizing sprigs of blossom throughout mild periods in the winter until its main flush of bloom.

We have begun clearing small sections in the Peace Garden of the more rampant, weedy plants. There are plans to put in more drought tolerant species such as sedums and Char has planted five lavenders recently. Hopefully work can proceed throughout the winter, weather permitting. The wonder of a garden is that there is always next year to plan for.



Garden shed  
By Leanne Letson

## The Plant Sale Report 2022

*By Leanne Letson*

All our efforts culminated in a successful Plant Sale on the sunny Sunday of the Victoria Day weekend May 22, 2022.

Advertising began with the Hornby Tribune's February front page ad promoting Heron Rocks' events with dates for the Pruning Workshop, Seedy Saturday and the Plant Sale.

With Sheila Macpherson's help, a schedule of work parties was prepared and emailed to past volunteers. From the end of March and into May we held several work parties. They were well attended and everyone worked well together.

Continuing to use the Tribune, we ran a month long classified in April and in the week before the Sale we placed a "colour splash" insert giving particulars of the Sale. A couple articles were placed in the First Edition, including June's – the editor kindly reserved a space for our thank you note as cut-off for submissions was before the Sale.

Plant donations were very good and plentiful. The tomatoes, as always, were popular. The tomato growers, Muggs Sigurgeirson and Sarah Davidson, did an excellent job. They plan to meet in late fall to discuss varieties and numbers to grow for next year. Gemma Colin's peppers were popular too, as were most of the veggies starts.

When it was decided not to host the Berry Tea this year, Vicki Bale mentioned all the

blackberries from David Wiseman in her freezer. One thought led to another and Margot Bushnell and I volunteered to make blackberry jam to sell at the Plant Sale.

The day before the sale we had an excellent crew help set up the tents and tables. Peter Mills used his truck to pick up and deliver back the tents we borrowed from the Fall Fair. Anna Zielinski lent us her dairy crates – they are ideal support for the planks we use to display plants. Judi Stansman worked magic getting plants organized as everyone pitched in to carry all the plants out to the tables from the Potting Area.

Sarah and Muggs had help getting all their tomatoes safely to Heron Rocks and then stashed in the Peace Garden away from the deer. The morning of the Sale everyone was busy getting them all set out.

Many thanks to Karen Doucette, Vicki Bale and Bob Bell who organized the cashiers and parking folk. The take-down went smoothly and everything was stowed away in no time flat thanks to our amazing volunteer crew.

The day of the sale we made \$3,731.50 from selling plants. In total we took in just over \$5,000 including donations, jam sales, memberships and selling our plants – with permission and thanks – at the Community Garden's roadside stand.

It was a high spirited day – everyone was glad of the good weather and the opportunity to get together. The Berry Tea was missed by many and we all look forward to its return next year.



Plant Sale 2022 *Photo by Leanne Letson*

## Ford Orchard And Leaf House

By Wendy Burton

We have surveyed all the fruit trees in the orchard. We have drone-level photographs of the Orchard, and we have created a map we can label and add details about tree restoration. We continue to count between 70 and 80 viable fruit trees.

In June 2022, we received \$1,500 from BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund. Most of this money goes to the mowing program. Most of the work in the Orchard is done by volunteers. In January 2022 we reported our volunteer numbers and hours to BC Parks: 16 volunteers contributed 576 volunteer hours.

The plum crop of both varieties was a failure this year. The cool wet spring led to very little fruit. The apples are not ready to harvest until late fall, and the yield was smaller than last year. We have signs up in the orchard prohibiting commercial picking.

Paula Courteau conducted an “apple tasting” workshop in the Orchard, to sample the apple varieties and begin the process of documenting the variety and the quality. We are continuing our archival sleuthing to discover what was planted in the 1880s by George and Mary Ford.

As a result of yet another “We didn’t know it was a park” group of campers this summer, Parks has put up a sign at the barricaded entrance to the orchard off Central Road. The sign bans camping and fires.

Paula Courteau offered “un-workshops” for pruning in November and January to March. Rob Zielinski did chain saw work on five apple trees in February.

At the North End of the Orchard, we left four trees partly covered by blackberry. Two of the trees are wild plum and two are orchard trees. We do some modest blackberry control once a year but otherwise this section will remain as is. If you go down there in the spring, the trees and bushes are positively busting with bird activity, including many nests.

The Leaf House is looking good. We check on the building, the ant population seems to have decamped, and the building waits for better days.

Paula’s guidance and the efforts of many volunteers are really showing. We continue to appreciate Rob Zielinski’s work with equipment and chain saws. In the “Someday Soon” category comes our efforts now to connect with other heritage orchards in BC and with groups as committed as we are to revitalizing heritage orchards for historical purposes and food security.

We are considering a multi-year program of propagating from our fruit trees, and connecting with orchards in BC that may have similar stock. Who knows? Maybe five years from now, we will have a great-grandchild orchard in a corner of the Ford Orchard.

The working group: Wendy Burton, Paula Courteau, Don Peterson, and Rob Zielinski.

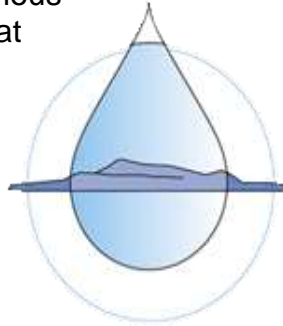


Ford Orchard fruit tree *Photo by Don Peterson*

## Hornby Water Stewardship Project

By Darren Bond

HWS is progressing along various fronts, with initiatives looking at both *quantity* and *quality* issues, thinking about both the short-term and long-term for Hornby Island.



### Communication and Education

As we started doing last year, we publish on our Facebook page regular statistics and stories on precipitation and groundwater level, along with temperature trends, and ferry volume. All of these potentially have an impact on access to fresh water.

This summer, we installed a new Drought Level sign at the entrance to the Gas Bar. It is tied to the six-point methodology published by the provincial government.

On a quarterly basis, we send a quick summary report of our activities to our Islands Trust and CVRD representatives, helping to ensure water issues are kept front-of-mind.

### Water Testing

Over the past year, we sampled twenty-nine sites around the island, and used our new water testing equipment at the Spark to measure levels of *E. coli* in surface level water sources: ditches, creeks, wetlands, and shallow wells. We are analyzing the results, and finalizing a report both to present the results, and to recommend activities to prevent the sources of contamination.

We are moving closer to offering an on-island water testing service for residents. Based on the skills developed in the surface-water project described above, a pilot should proceed in the new year.

### Incentives and Rebates

One key area we believe would help reduce harmful bacteria from entering the groundwater is to provide ways for homeowners to upgrade or replace inadequate septic systems. We began

last year by making a presentation to the CVRD Board, requesting a joint pilot program to offer incentives/rebates to low-income residents. They launched a Watershed Stewardship Service scoping study, which we monitor regularly for progress.

### Research

*Management by fact* is something we value. Hornby has three provincial observation wells for measuring groundwater levels, but only one (Sandpiper) is active (i.e., transmitting data). We have sent a note to Josie Osborne, Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship, asking for consideration to reactivate the other two, providing Hornby with better information on water conservation and planning issues.

Recently, concern was expressed over the introduction of a “maximum allowable concentration” guideline for *manganese*, and what it might mean for Hornby residents with amounts above that. Studies have indicated potential neurotoxicity impacts. We are producing a short paper of the situation for publication, and gathering up as many test results as possible to get a rough indication of the prevalence (ensuring confidentiality), and possible link to certain areas.

### More information

For more information, or to get involved, feel free to send us a note at [info@hornbywater.org](mailto:info@hornbywater.org). Submitted by the team: Ellen Leslie, Dr. John Cox, Lisa Dayan, Ondrea Rogers, Faroe des Roches, Katy Helliwell, Darren Bond

## Spartina Beach Grass Update

From Leanne Letson

On Hornby this past fall, 102 *S. densiflora* seedlings were removed: 1 at Heron Rocks, 3 at Sandpiper Beach, 12 between Collishaw and Grassy Points, and 86 between Tralee Point and Grassy Point.

Twenty patches of *S. patens* between 10cm to over 5 metres wide were documented – all located between Grassy and Tralee Points.

## Why Hasn't Broom Swept Hornby?

By Leanne Letson

Short answer: strong backs. There are quite a few of us on Hornby who keep their patch clear of Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*). By keeping an eagle eye out for those dark green spears and giving them a tug out of the ground, we have kept our roadsides and properties pretty well clear of this prolific pest.

You might be asking why bother? What's the harm of having that lovely bright yellow bush adorn our roadsides? For one, it catches fire easily. Live broom burns intensely and the buildup of dead leaves and branches is a tinderbox. For another, it crowds out Hornby's native plants which in turn affects the insects and animals.

Before I moved here I had a home in Metchosin outside of Victoria. When I bought "the little house that was" (another story for another time), the one acre property was overrun with broom. A lot of the plants had trunks as thick as my forearm and stood taller than my 5'6". I had hired a landscaper to correct some drainage problems and got him to use his Bobcat to root out one of the stands of broom on the hillside above the house. After he was done I had a lovely view up into the mature Douglas firs of Metchosin's woods and a bonus - 2 dwarf apple trees and a clump of ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) that had been hidden in the broom. I broadcast winter rye and let nature take its course.

A couple winters later I noticed lush dark green patches among the dead beige grass on the hillside. I investigated and discovered the green was thousands of broom sprouts standing side by side straight as toothpicks. Horror of horrors! It was then I learned that one mature plant produces thousands of seeds every year, ejecting them widely when the seed pods pop and that the seeds can survive upwards of 30 years. A broom seed just needs light and water to grow \*. The soil disturbance caused by the Bobcat had exposed a significant accumulation of broom seed.

I took to cutting or sawing the broom below ground level. I ruined a couple loppers and pruning saws but it was well worth it. I pulled the immature plants by hand. Easy to do when their roots are tiny. Nature helped too. The yearly die down of the grass mulched the ground and slowed germination. Thirteen years later when I left Metchosin the amount of broom on the property was minor and easy to manage. On the hillside the camas were beginning to flourish and the grasses left uncut were beautiful to watch undulate in the breeze.

With practice one can become good at spotting broom from a distance. Walking between our house and Phipps Point I find seedlings every year. More than one of us with a strong back walks along our roads and pulls broom sprouts out. Eventually we will get them all!

\*\*[How Scotch Broom Has Flourished in BC](#) Invasive Species Council of BC

## Heron Rocks Orchard Report

By Ceridwen Joy

This year started off with a well-attended pruning workshop with Renee Poisson. We didn't get any more pruning sessions done but we had several successful blackberry clearing sessions and got most of the trees limed.

This was a very odd year for pollination with only about a third of the trees having apples on them. There was still a good harvest and we got them all picked and shared out in good time before the winds knocked them down.

We are hoping to do some more blackberry clearing and tree pruning in early spring. It feels really good to reclaim some of the space back from the blackberries and make the trees more accessible for picking and pruning. Also, there were actually quinces on the young quince tree and hazelnuts on the trees by the fence!

Don't forget to come join in the Wassail this month, see you there!

### Pruning Workshop

Renee Poisson will be giving a pruning workshop in February at the Heron Rocks Orchard.

Watch for details in February's First Edition and in the Tribune.

## A Note of Gratefulness to our Hornby Island community

Over the past year many of you have given a hand with the upkeep of the Society's property and buildings. To you, and those of you who do so year after year, we offer heartfelt thanks. Things would be in poor shape without your expertise and assistance.

With deeply felt appreciation from the Board of Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society.

## Hilary Brown Memorial Bursary

HRFCS works to maintain Hilary Brown's vision that includes support for Hornby Island youth pursuing further education. To that end the Society offers the Hilary Brown Memorial (HBM) Bursary.

To receive the HBM Bursary a student must attend an accredited post-secondary program at a public university or college (vocational or academic). They must live on Hornby Island now, or have taken a significant portion of their earlier schooling on Hornby. The awarded HBM Bursary is available for two years allowing for a gap year. The bursary may be paid when registration for the program is complete or directly to the post-secondary institution.

Bursary applications are available from George P. Vanier Secondary School and home-school students can contact [heronrocksfcs@gmail.com](mailto:heronrocksfcs@gmail.com) to apply.

## Board Members for 2022-23

(Area code 250)

Leanne Letson	334-7877
Margot Bushnell	335-3235
Sarah Davidson	335-1912
Vicki Bale	335-1539
Rudy Rogalsky	335-0623
Pat Marshall	335-1847

## HRFCS Membership Dues

HRFCS is a registered non-profit charitable organization #121336580.

- \$10 youth
- \$15 individual
- \$25 family (two or more people)
- Friend of Centre: membership + \$100

Tax receipts are issued for donations over \$25.

### Please include your contact info:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Direct my donation toward

- HRFCS
- Water Stewardship Project
- Ford Orchard Project

Consider leaving a legacy donation in your will.

**By e-transfer:** It is important for our records to have your contact information. Please include your email and/or phone number in the comment section of the e-transfer or send it to us by email: [heronrocksfcs@gmail.com](mailto:heronrocksfcs@gmail.com)

**By cheque mailed to:** Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society, General Delivery, Hornby Is. V0R 1Z0, or dropped off at the Co-op **Free Post**.

**Written contributions and photos relevant to Heron Rocks activities are welcome.**

*Newsletter produced by Reina LeBaron.*  
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