Volunteers in Parks

Blue-Grey Taildroppers: Small But Mighty

by Nadine Collison

Sometimes small creatures can play big roles in our environment, and elusive and rare blue-grey taildroppers may be small but mighty in that respect. The wee slugs, that measures between to 20-40mm as an adult (and a mere 5mm as a juvenile) are found only in Douglas-fir forests and Garry oak meadows. They thrive in lower elevations (under 250m above sea level) and in damper conditions, like under the leaf litter, in decaying logs or within moss. In Canada, they are only found on Southern Vancouver Island which is why at a federal level, they are considered "threatened" through the *Species at Risk Act*, and at a provincial level they are considered "critically imperilled".

Blue-grey taildroppers *(Prophysaon coeruleum)* vary in colour from blue to light grey with parallel grooves and ridges on their backs and sides. As the name suggests, they will self-amputate their tails if threatened by predators which include birds, bats, small mammals, carnivorous snails and ground beetles. *continued on page 2*

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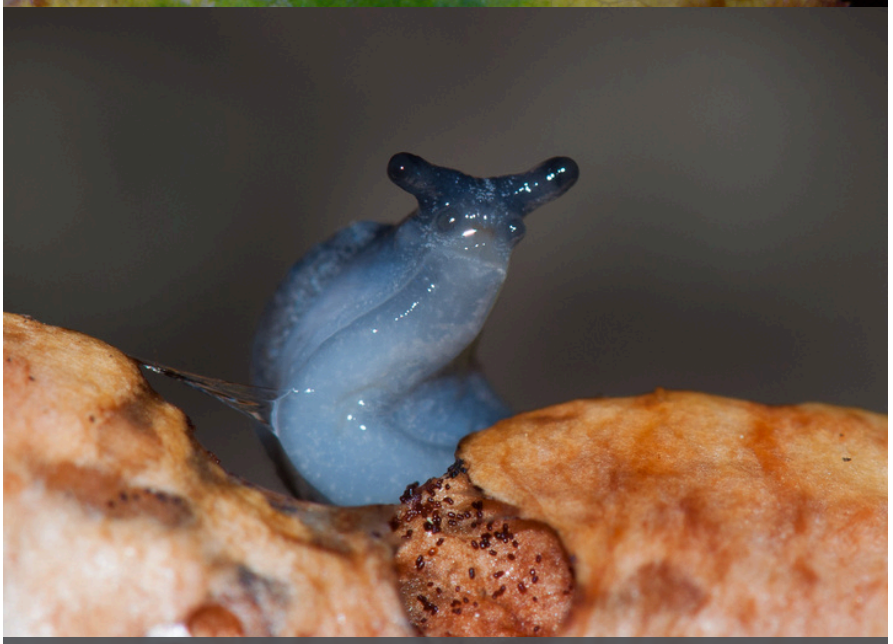
Not everything is known about their diet, but they do seem to like mycorrhizal fungal spores, which means they have an important job in the forest. As the blue-grey taildroppers eat the fungal spores, they move the spores around the forest, contributing to the success and spread of the mycorrhizal fungi, which is essential for moving nutrients through the forest and the growth and survival of trees.

Regional Parks staff has been monitoring the population of blue-grey taildroppers in its parks for many years. These surveys are conducted using an artificial cover object – in this case a 1' square of corrugated cardboard. The cardboard becomes moist from rain and the forest floor, creating an appealing and safe spot for the slug (and other invertebrates) to travel through. The cardboard is also easy to flip over and look for evidence of activity without disturbing the natural environment. In 2024, multiple parks were surveyed and monitored totaling 540 individual "flips" of the various survey sites. As expected, Matheson Regional Park once again had blue-grey taildroppers detected. Excitingly, we also found activity in Devonian Regional Park, where we haven't detected activity since 2015.

The recent detection of the blue-grey taildropper in Devonian Regional Park after a decade can partially be attributed to the amazing work done by the Devonian Stewardship Group, which meet weekly through the fall, winter and spring. The group has spent two decades in the park restoring the Garry oak ecosystem and the Douglas-fir forest, removing broom, daphne and blackberry, among other invasive species. The occurrence of a rare and at-risk species, like the blue-grey taildropper, is a testament to their hard work and dedication, and it highlights the possibilities for success of restoration activities in all of our parks.

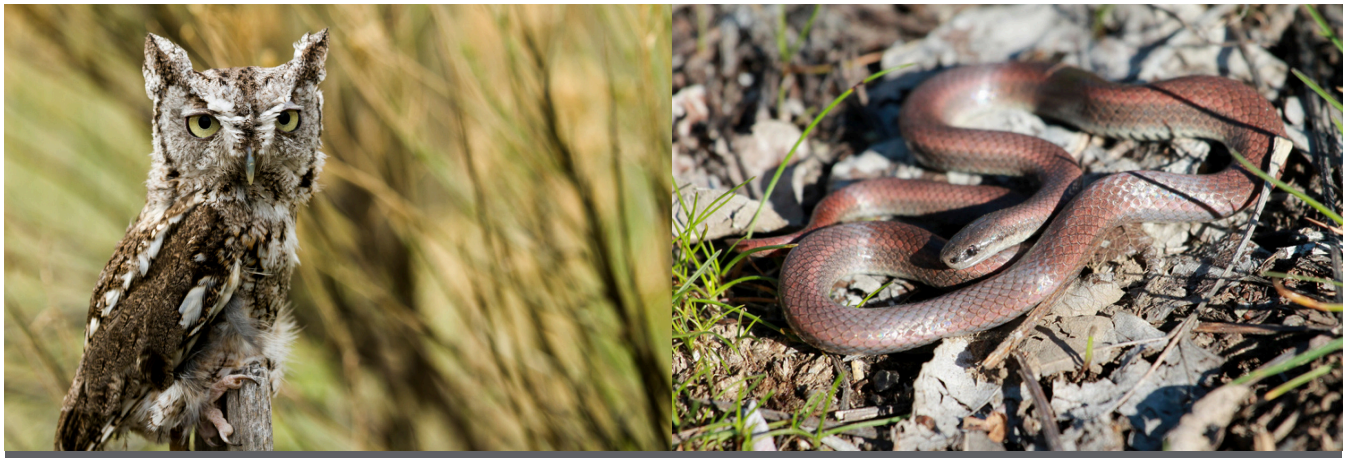
If you are interested in joining the Devonian Stewardship Group on a regular basis, please email Nadine at ncollison@crd.bc.ca.



Blue-Grey Taildroppers
All Photos by Dr. K. Ovaska with Biolinx Environmental Research Ltd.

Research Permits

by Nadine Collison



The Western Screech Owl and Sharp-tailed Snake are just two of the species researched in our regional parks.

If you were able to attend the Volunteer Appreciation Event in November, you would have heard Dr. Chris Bone from UVIC present his team's amazing research about large mammals and how they move through Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park. This is just one of our many researchers who hold a permit through our Research Permit program.

The Research Permit program has been operating for over 25 years, and we have 5 – 20+ research projects running per year within our regional parks system. The researchers come from all over Canada and the United States, from universities, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. The research can focus on native species, like western screech owls or rough-skinned newts. It can be focused on geomorphology, like the studying of fault structures, or it can have a recreation focus and how that interacts with the environment. It can even have a human-health focus, like tracking ticks and Lyme disease.

Doing research in regional parks allows researchers to gather data in an area that they have confidence will be minimally disturbed. It also guarantees the stability of research sites over the long-term, such as hummingbird research that has been conducted in our parks for decades. The research can either be observational, so just gathering data with what already exists, or it can be experimental, such as studies with artificial warming structures designed to detect how the environment will respond to warmer temperatures associated with climate change.

Morgan Davies, our Conservation Biologist, coordinates the research permits. She states that there seem to be trends in the research, revealing that the current trend is a focus on pollinators and their relationship with plants. She goes on to say, "The research permit program lets us support research that builds new knowledge without negatively impacting the things visitors value about parks, such as special species and great outdoor experiences." With each research permit granted, the researchers commit to sharing progress and key findings with the CRD in plain language. Over the years this research has been shared with our interpreters so they can share the latest science with the public. Research can also inform park management so we can better protect and maintain our regional parks and regional trails. The Research Permit program allows us to support the scientific community while benefiting from the most modern and localized research available. And like the relationship between fungi and trees, it's a perfect symbiosis.

Decades of Devotion in Devonian

by Devonian Restoration Group

Devonian Regional Park is a beautiful 16-hectare waterfront park in Metchosin. It is a mixture of Douglas-fir forest, wetlands, Garry oak meadow and a large pond (Sherwood Pond) that periodically connects to the Salish Sea through Sherwood Creek during winter storms. The park is very popular for dog walking and provides access to Taylor Beach via a walking trail and an equestrian trail from the William Head Road parking lot.

In 2002 Moralea Milne recognized the impact of Scotch broom invasion on the flowering native plants in the Garry oak meadows in Devonian Regional Park. In her typical style she devised a solution: she rounded up some like-minded individuals to remove the broom. Sadly, Moralea was killed in a tragic car accident in 2018. She will always be remembered as the heart and soul of our volunteer group, and CRD Regional Parks has placed a commemorative sign near the ocean-end of the equestrian trail.

The first few years were exceptionally demanding, as we were removing broom that was head height and many had stems that were several inches in diameter. The broom was carried out of the park to William Head Road to be taken away for disposal by the CRD. Each round trip was about a kilometer. Broom of this size is fairly heavy and the stretchers were piled up to take the maximum that the stretcher-bearers could carry. To add to the stamina requirement, it's worth noting that we put in three-hour sessions of invasive removal in the early years.

The upper meadow in 2006, still covered in broom.
Photo: Moralea Milne

The upper Garry oak meadow now - full of native plants.
Photos by B. Hall

While removing broom is still the priority, we now remove a number of other invasives that appear scattered around the park including English holly, English ivy, spurge laurel, cyclamen, hawthorn, blue bells, Himalayan blackberries and split-leaf blackberries. All these invasives have established themselves in the greater biodiversity and are considered “control species”. This means there is no chance to eradicate the species, so we try to cover the entire park to keep these species under control every year.

We currently work a two-hour session in the park on Sundays from September until the end of March. The number of regular volunteers has been fairly steady since we started removing invasives in 2002. Volunteers come and go but we appreciate the friendship bond that is formed by participating together in a project that we all believe in. As of this year there are still three volunteers that have been part of the project since inception. To date we have collectively worked 6,277 volunteer hours.

As a final note, we will always welcome new volunteers to come and remove invasives from the park and be part of the camaraderie we all enjoy!

The Devonian Restoration Group

Staff Profile: Avalon Shavers, Conservation Technician

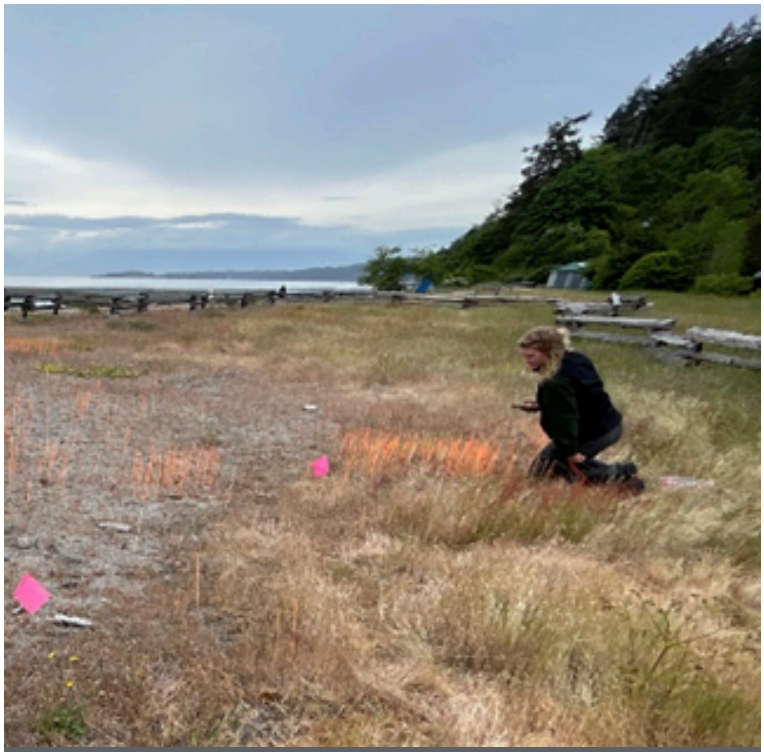
Tell us a bit about yourself:

I grew up in Southern Manitoba and I was fortunate to spend time at Riding Mountain National Park every summer, where I learned to swim in frigid water, boat in all conditions (canoe, kayak, and sail), and endure clouds of mosquitos to enjoy a beautiful sunset. Some of my best memories include exploring national and provincial parks during road trips across Canada. After working a variety of jobs, including as a guitar teacher and a hairdresser, I moved to Victoria in 2016 to pursue further education. I completed the Environmental Technology Cooperative Education Program at Camosun College in 2020; I worked for Parks Canada Agency as an Aquatic Invasive Species Vessel Inspector and for Defence Construction Canada as an Environmental Coordinator. In pursuit of a more field-based role, I was lucky enough to land a position as one of the Conservation Technicians for CRD Regional Parks. I always appreciate spending time outdoors, whether it's learning practical skills, relaxing, or deepening my understanding of the natural world. I am continually humbled and inspired by the intricate relationships between species, their habitats, and the stewards who care for them.

Avalon and Milo
Photo: A. Shavers

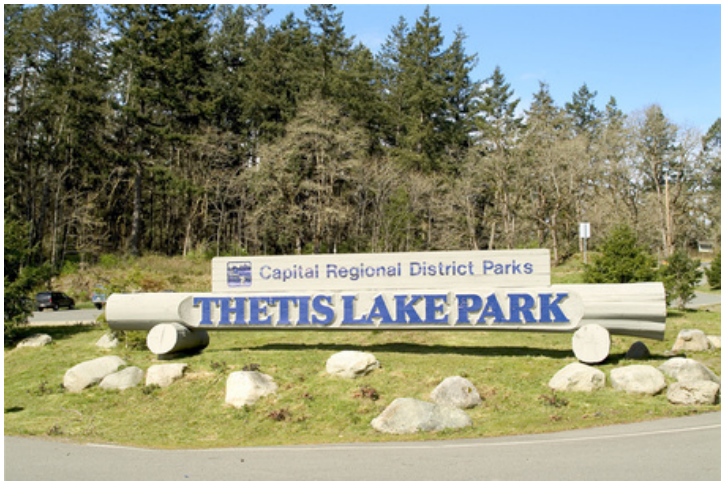
What do you enjoy most about working in Regional Parks?

I am incredibly grateful to work in the beautiful regional parks and live on Vancouver Island. I enjoy so many aspects of working in regional parks! Through my work, I continuously learn about all aspects of environmental, ecological, technological and social sciences both through desktop research and from local experts and knowledgeable community members. I am happy to work in a role which contributes to quality of life by supporting the preservation of biodiversity and in return, human well-being. It is rewarding work, and I know how much value the parks provide to the community and visitors. I'm lucky to work with a great team that values conservation, reconciliation, education, and stewardship, and I'm excited to keep learning and contributing to the conservation programs.



Avalon doing monitoring at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park
Photo: A. Shavers

Park Updates



- In late 2024, the CRD Board approved updated parking fees via an amendment to the Parks Services and Facilities Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 3675, Schedule A. Revenue collected from parking fees helps to offset the costs of park services. The fee update will see nominal increases in the cost of seasonal parking (May to end of September) at Sooke Potholes and Thetis Lake regional parks over the next few years, as well as the introduction of a new short term rate. In 2025, the rates will be $2.00 for two hours, $4.00 per day, or $30 for a season's pass, valid at both regional parks. Parking will continue to remain free at all other regional parks and trails and long-term volunteers will receive a free parking pass.

- Infrastructure improvements at East Sooke Regional Park – Aylard Farm access are well underway and are expected to continue through late spring. A parking lot expansion project is being undertaken in an effort, during peak visitation periods, to reduce park visitors parking along Becher Bay Road and to ensure that there is adequate emergency access for larger vehicles such as ambulances and fire trucks. The project will add 93 parking stalls in the current unpaved seasonal parking area, increasing the number of year-round parking stalls from 61 to 154, including six accessible parking stalls. The current toilet building has also reached the end of its serviceable life and the existing facilities will be replaced and upgraded to meet current accessibility standards.

- The CRD just launched a new website to improve functionality, user experience, and mobile responsiveness. Visit crd.ca to check out the new look.

Upcoming Events & Learning Opportunities