

Metchosin Garry Oaks Home to Rare Butterfly!

Moralea Milne

There's a small rare butterfly known as the Propertius duskywing (*Erynnis propertius*) that is still found in Metchosin. Those who name butterflies must have been experiencing that zombie brain feeling that comes from a bad cold or a colossal hangover when they came up with this common name. The scientific species name, *propertius*, is considered to be in honour of Sextus Propertius, a poet from ancient Rome (born 50–45 BC). Since propertius duskywings only use oak trees as a host plant on which their caterpillars feed, whereas they should have used the name oak duskywing. How much easier it would be to have a name that describes an important component of this butterfly's life, than the name of a long dead, obscure poet, but hey that's just me thinking out loud...

The (newly named) oak duskywing is a relatively small (wingspan 35–45 mm), somewhat inconspicuous butterfly of the skipper family, clothed in shades of grey and brown. The females are a little more flamboyant, with more white markings on the forewings. During April and May, males can be found on mud, sometimes on hill tops, and will perch on vegetation waiting for a female to accost.

In the few years I have been interested in butterflies, the oak duskywing has gone from being somewhat uncommon, to threatened (blue-listed), to rare (red-listed). With so many oak trees to feed on, you might wonder why the population



Propertius duskywing

Moralea Milne photo

has plummeted, and like many things, there are many reasons. Loss of habitat is paramount; many areas that were once Garry oak ecosystems have succumbed to development, whether for housing, industry, or agriculture. With development, not only the trees are lost, but also the flowering plants that are needed as a nectar source for the adults. Weather and climate change can be having an effect; with an early onset of the dry season, like last year, the flowering nectar sources were in short supply. Even where the oaks have escaped the axe and chainsaw, our compulsion to tidy the landscape has led to further losses.

In Canada, oak duskywings lay their eggs only on Garry oaks; the caterpillars spend their entire lives in the trees, eating the leaves, usually feeding at night and hiding during the day. In their younger stages they chew two channels in the leaf and

fold the resulting flap over themselves, securing it with their silk. They overwinter in the prepupal stage (just before they form a chrysalis), having woven themselves within a leaf. The leaf-enclosed caterpillar drops to the ground, nestling in among other leaves, hoping to remain safe from predators. Unfortunately, in many cases, soon after reaching the ground they are assaulted by rakes and tines, thrown into piles, and either composted or burned.

One of the ways in which we can help the oak duskywing to survive requires that we do less rather than more. On a sunny fall afternoon, this is the perfect excuse to save yourself the trouble of raking, to give yourself permission to go for a walk, watch sports, or read a book, all without guilt. And when someone asks why your yard is festooned with oak leaves, you can with all honesty say that you are hard at work saving this lovely rare species of butterfly!

TALK AND WALK

Unless otherwise noted, all talks take place at 7:00 pm at the Municipal Hall, 4450 Happy Valley Road, behind the Fire Hall.

Springtime: Time for the Bats and the Bees

BATS with Dave Nagorsen and Jill Robinson from Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) – April 7 and 8

It is our great good fortune to have BC's premier bat expert residing in Metchosin, plus we are partnering with HAT to hold our Bat Talk and bat house building workshop. Vancouver Island has ten species of these marvelous nocturnal creatures. Please join us to learn more about their important insect devouring capabilities, their communal lives, and how we can best help to provide good stewardship. There is a rumour making the rounds of a surprise announcement ...

For those interested in attracting bats to your property, we now have 22 bat house kits that have been provided through funding by the Metchosin Foundation and by our awesome volunteer master carpenter, Ole Frang. **YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER** to attend the workshop as there is a limited quantity of kits.

The bat house workshop will be held at 10:00 am the next day, Saturday, in the pavilion at the municipal grounds. Bring your own cordless drills and hammers, we will supply everything else. The screws we will be using are #8s from 2 to 3.5 inches long, so select your drill bits accordingly.

THE BEES' NEEDS: Wild pollinators of the Garry Oak Ecosystem and why gardens are important for conservation, with Professor Elizabeth Elle, Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences at SFU – May 5 and 6

Professor Elle has been a member of national (the Canadian Pollination Initiative) and international (the Integrated Crop Pollination Project) research collaborations aimed at protecting pollinators and enhancing pollination services to wildflowers and crops. She is also an award-winning teacher dedicated to both traditional university education and public engagement with the important conservation issues of our day.

Although much of Elizabeth's time is currently dedicated to managing a large and complex university department, she really just wants everyone to know that bees are awesome, and if you are worried about pollinator declines, you should plant a garden.

Contact morealemilne@gmail.com for further information about these programs.

The St Mary's Challenge

Sharleen Thompson



Elizabeth May speaking on food security at St Mary's.

The St Mary's Challenge has been a great success. The speakers who have already spoken sparked lively discussions.

The first speaker, Andy MacKinnon, spoke about the world-wide extinction of species and the correlation with human population growth. He did this on both a global level and a local level. The second speaker, Geoff Strong,

spoke on climate change. He did an excellent job of explaining the science and the current consequences on the refugee problem as well as other effects.

The third speaker was Elizabeth May, who spoke on food security and all the dynamics and interrelated effects of food companies' actions. For example, she talked about how the food companies that ramped up the fishing on the Grand Banks, leading to the collapse of the East Coast cod, subsequently sold all their factory ships to Africans who are now overfishing the African coastline and threatening that coast with a similar collapse.

The next two speakers were Wally Eamer, featured in the March edition of the Harvard business *Alumni Bulletin*, who spoke on Native reconciliation and inclusion; and Nancy Ford, who talked about marginalized people and the tent city.

The last speaker of this Lenten Series will be Herbert O'Driscoll, one of Canada's best known theologians. He will talk on grace and a call to action of communities of people to do something about all these issues of our times. He will be speaking at St Mary's church on April 5 at 7:00 pm.

Got feedback? You can contact the *Muse* team by sending email to metmuse@shaw.ca.

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