

President's Message Summer 2015

The coming season promises to be a landmark year for CVN. 2015-2016, is CVN's 50th year since its official incorporation in 1966 as the Comox-Strathcona Naturalists Society. Thanks to the hard work of the volunteers of the BC Nature AGM Committee, between May 12 to 15 2016, we will be hosting BC Nature's AGM and celebrating our 50th anniversary. In doing so, I think we should bear in mind that we are actually celebrating 100 years of Canadian conservation history, out of which CVN was born.

The founding of CVNS in 1966 brought together a variety of naturalist interests in the region's natural history, and capped a long history of eminent Canadian naturalists in the Comox Valley that went back to Alan Brooks and Hamilton Mack Laing, which regrettably too few remember today. Founded, as so many other North American environmental societies, in the wake of the 1962 release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* which gave birth to the environmental movement, the Comox Valley Naturalists Society brought together a broad variety of environmental interests, botanical, geological, ecological and ornithological, which had important predecessors in the Comox Valley.

Throughout its 50 years, CVN has played a key role in shaping conservation values in the valley. CVN became what it is today thanks to key founding figures, such as Melda Buchanan and Ruth Masters who remain cornerstones of BC's environmental history. BC's environment and our green spaces were never saved benevolently by governments or corporations. They were saved by the people who defied status quo and advocated for their preservation and conservation, with our environmental heritage and its future in mind. Just as Canada's conservation history and policy arose out of the cornerstone laid by the 1917 *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, Comox Valley Nature's achievements arose, not just out of the need to keep a good census of birds, but out of the need to conserve bird habitat and botanical heritage.

The Comox Valley's environmental roots go back to the people who were directly involved in the shaping and implementing of *The Migratory Birds Convention Act*, and what it was intended to stand for. One of its most extraordinary architects was the unassuming president of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club, an ex-chemistry professor and cool-headed civil servant called Hoyes Lloyd. In 1918 when the act was passed, Hoyes Lloyd went on to be appointed the Head of Parks Branch in charge of administering the act. There was in Hoyes Lloyd a commitment that went beyond the simple or strict administration of the act. Hoyes Lloyd did not hesitate to step on sensitive toes when he thought it necessary. It was his obligation as president of the Ottawa Field Naturalist's Club. In a famous case, well-documented in Briony Penn's soon to be released book, *The Real Thing: The Natural History of McTaggart Cowan*, in the February 1925 issue of the *Canadian Field Naturalist*, Hoyes Lloyd did not hesitate to risk his career and use his private position as President of the Ottawa Field Naturalists to publicly attack and overtly criticize his political master, the Interior Minister, Charles Stewart.

His priority was the preservation and conservation of Canadian environmental heritage. These men and women were no ordinary compliant public servants. Men like Hoyes Lloyd were scientists committed to their obligation to conservation for the public good, over political expediency or personal comfort. That today some would call Hoyes Lloyd's conduct "unprofessional," merely reflects a timid pusillanimity that

has enabled conservation priorities to be cowed and fail. And that is why these men and women deserve to be remembered and celebrated today.

To this day, one of the most famous pictures of Canadian environmental history remains the 1922 photo of the men who built Canada's conservation heritage: Canada's first Dominion Ornithologist, Hoyes Lloyd together with Percy Taverner and Hamilton Mack Laing in a Manitoba Camp. These were the people who laid the groundwork for CVN and the unabashed environmental voice of Melda Buchanan, who played such a large formative role in BC's environmental heritage. When Janet Foster wrote the first history of Canadian conservation history in 1978, (*Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada*) this was one of the handful of pictures she would naturally select. It is a picture to which CVN's origins can be traced, right to Hamilton Mack Laing. It tells a thousand words about Canadian and Comox Valley naturalists – if we understand the history to be celebrated in May 2016.



Figure 1: Hoyes Lloyd, Canada's First Dominion Ornithologist, at Oak Lake with Percy Taverner, David Sampson and Hamilton Mack Laing.

With the planned joint celebration of BCNature's AGM and CVN's 50th anniversary between May 12 to 15 2016, many of our colleagues from across BC, and both past and future members will gather in the Filberg to celebrate both our longevity and our achievements. In celebrating those last 50 years, we will actually also be celebrating the 100 years that go back to *The Migratory Birds Convention Act*, which is

the foundation of Canadian conservation heritage. And Mack Laing will be celebrated again, because his presence in the Comox Valley is the cornerstone of our historical roots.

Today we face new challenges, some of which Laing was the first to write about, which will require increased volunteer participation and commitment. The tools with which we will face these challenges are the same conservation tools that were conceived in the Conservation Conference of 1909 that laid the foundation for *The Migratory Birds Convention Act*, which noted that all sound conservation depends on their application at a global scale. The health of the Comox Valley depends on the health of the planet.

This summer begins with clear signs of drought and May –June weather that would normally be associated with July August, consistent with El Nino conditions that are projected to last well into 2016 by NOAA.¹ The warm relatively dry winter we have enjoyed is morphing into a major drought that has caused BC Hydro to impose unprecedented water conservation measures. There is increasing agreement that these are not simple weather variations, but part of a growing trend confirming climate change impacts. The challenge for us will be how we contribute to our community's adaptation to these major changes

CVN is involved in a number of projects and activities from invasive plant control, bird and plant census, Garry oak ecosystem restoration to pre-school and youth nature education. All of these activities are the basis of a community-based response, and will contribute to easing our adaptation to emerging problems. CVN is therefore on the right track to environmental continuity. CVN's success for the next 50 years only requires that we continue to grow our volunteer base, and develop the legacy that men like Laing handed us..

Loys Maingon (RPBio) President
Comox Valley Nature

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1. <http://www.theweathernetwork.com/uk/news/articles/climate-and-environment/el-nino-could-last-into-2016-says-us-weather-forecaster/52586>