



WILD MINDS 2019

Welcome to year four of **Wild Minds**, a fun and engaging summer youth gardening program where 12 youth came together to explore, learn, play, and work in the beautiful Strathcona and Cottonwood Community gardens in Vancouver's Strathcona inner city neighbourhood.

Youth were immersed in urban wilderness, where they learned about native plant ecology and ecosystem interdependence, with this year's focus on birds. Along with hands on skill building work, the youth also helped nurture and re-wild these beautiful community gardens, transforming them into even more diverse ecosystems.

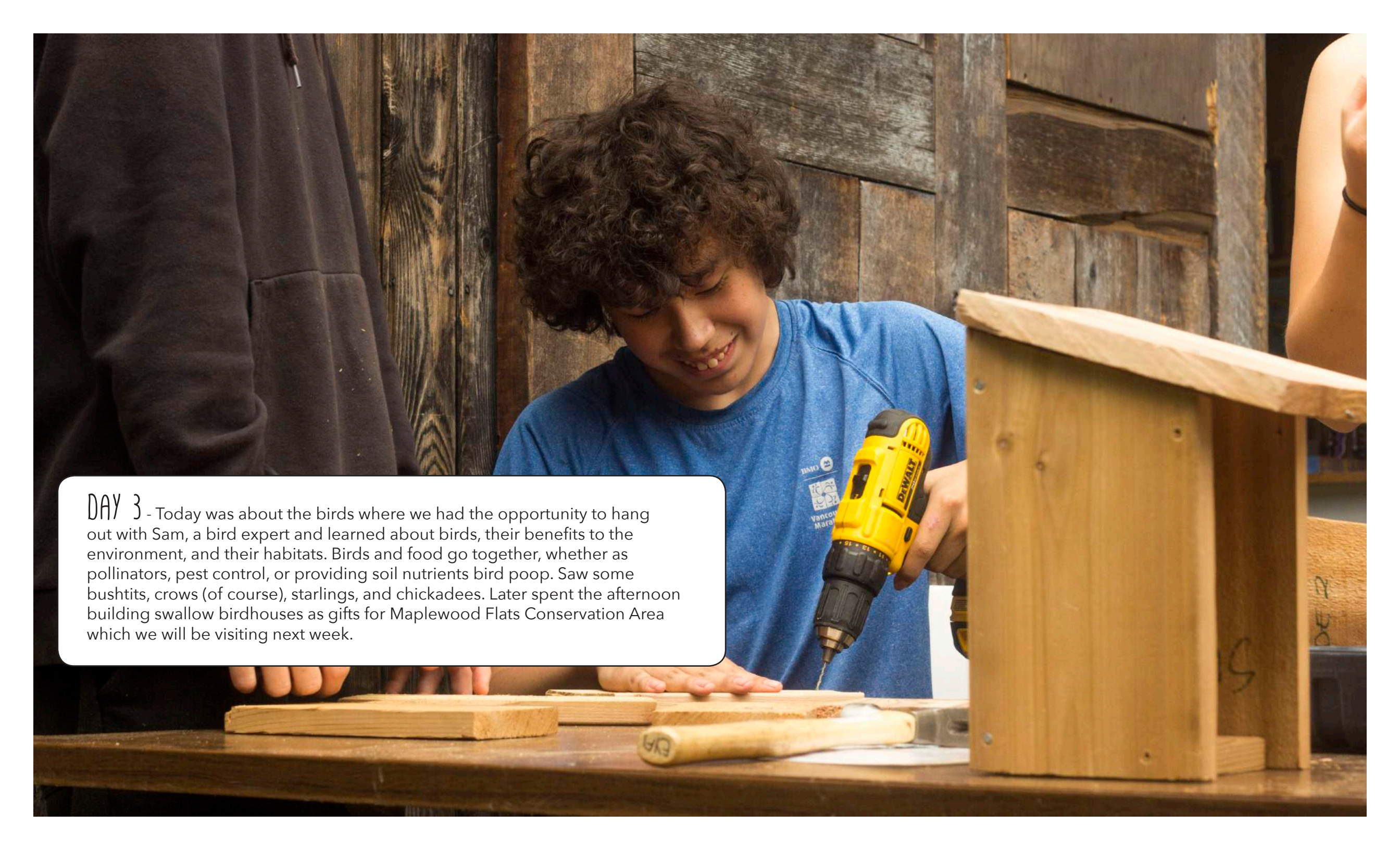


DAY 1 - It was fun to be running Wild Minds again this summer with the Environmental Youth Alliance and a great group of youth, many from Britannia School, and a number who face systemic barriers in life.

First day is typically an orientation discussing what wild means and the benefits of rewinding urban spaces while also getting to know the many garden and food forest spaces in the gardens. For starters the youth learned to identify native plants and their characteristics. It was special when we found a large patch of ripe salal berries to eat since many of the youth had never tasted salal berries before.

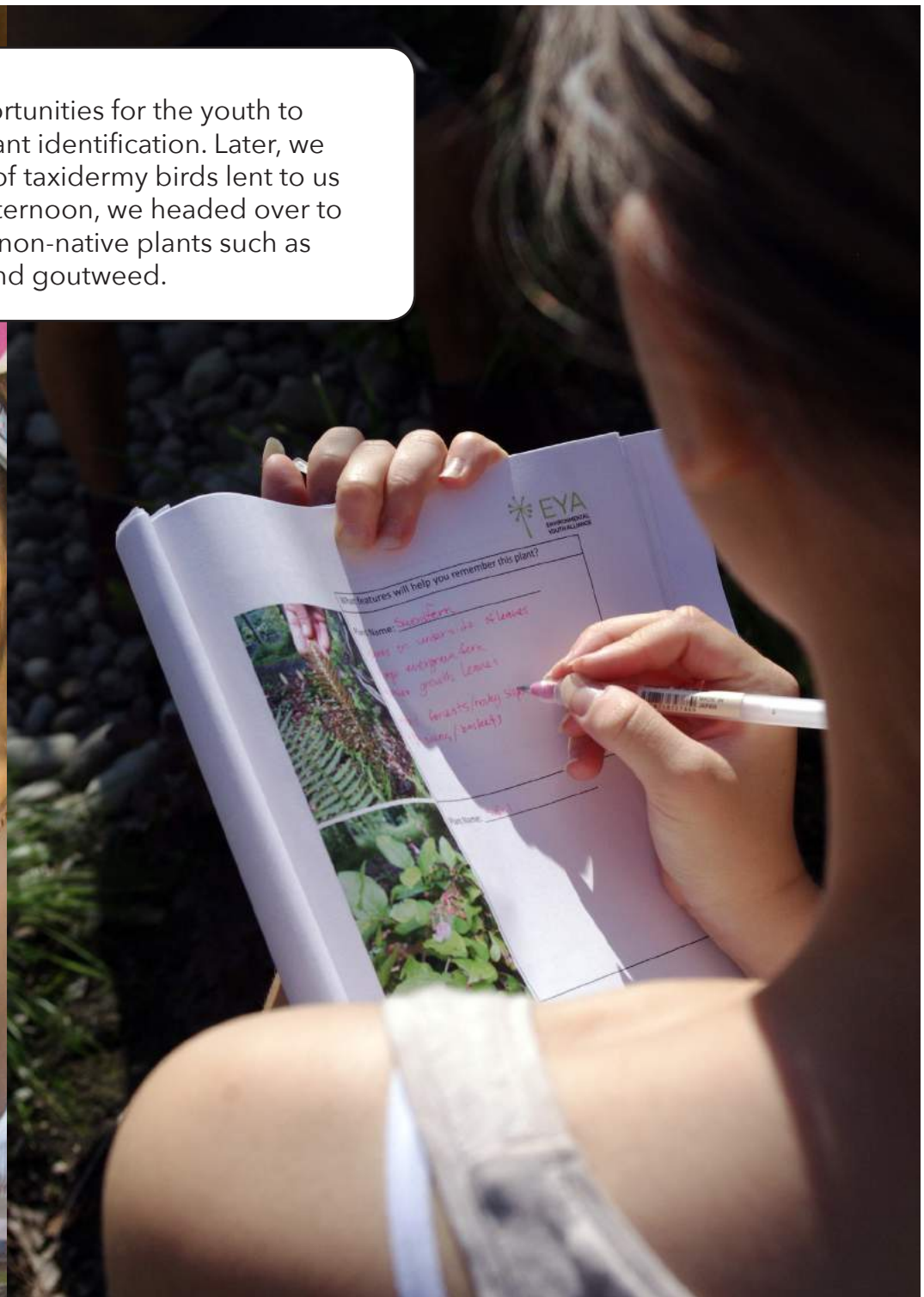


DAY 2 - Got down to some work today in the Environmental Youth Alliance youth garden at the Cottonwood Gardens. Watered and weeded some of the veggie beds. Also harvested wonderful mulberries from a large tree that we later used to make fruit leather. Meanwhile, over in the Native Plant Demo Garden, we dug a hole to erect a tall bird perch and nesting pole.



DAY 3 - Today was about the birds where we had the opportunity to hang out with Sam, a bird expert and learned about birds, their benefits to the environment, and their habitats. Birds and food go together, whether as pollinators, pest control, or providing soil nutrients bird poop. Saw some bushtits, crows (of course), starlings, and chickadees. Later spent the afternoon building swallow birdhouses as gifts for Maplewood Flats Conservation Area which we will be visiting next week.

DAY 4 - The gardens provide many learning opportunities for the youth to engage with. Each day started with some native plant identification. Later, we learned more about birds by looking at a number of taxidermy birds lent to us from the UBC Beatty Biodiversity Museum. In the afternoon, we headed over to the youth garden to clear away a patch of invasive non-native plants such as Himalayan blackberry, buttercup, morning glory, and goutweed.

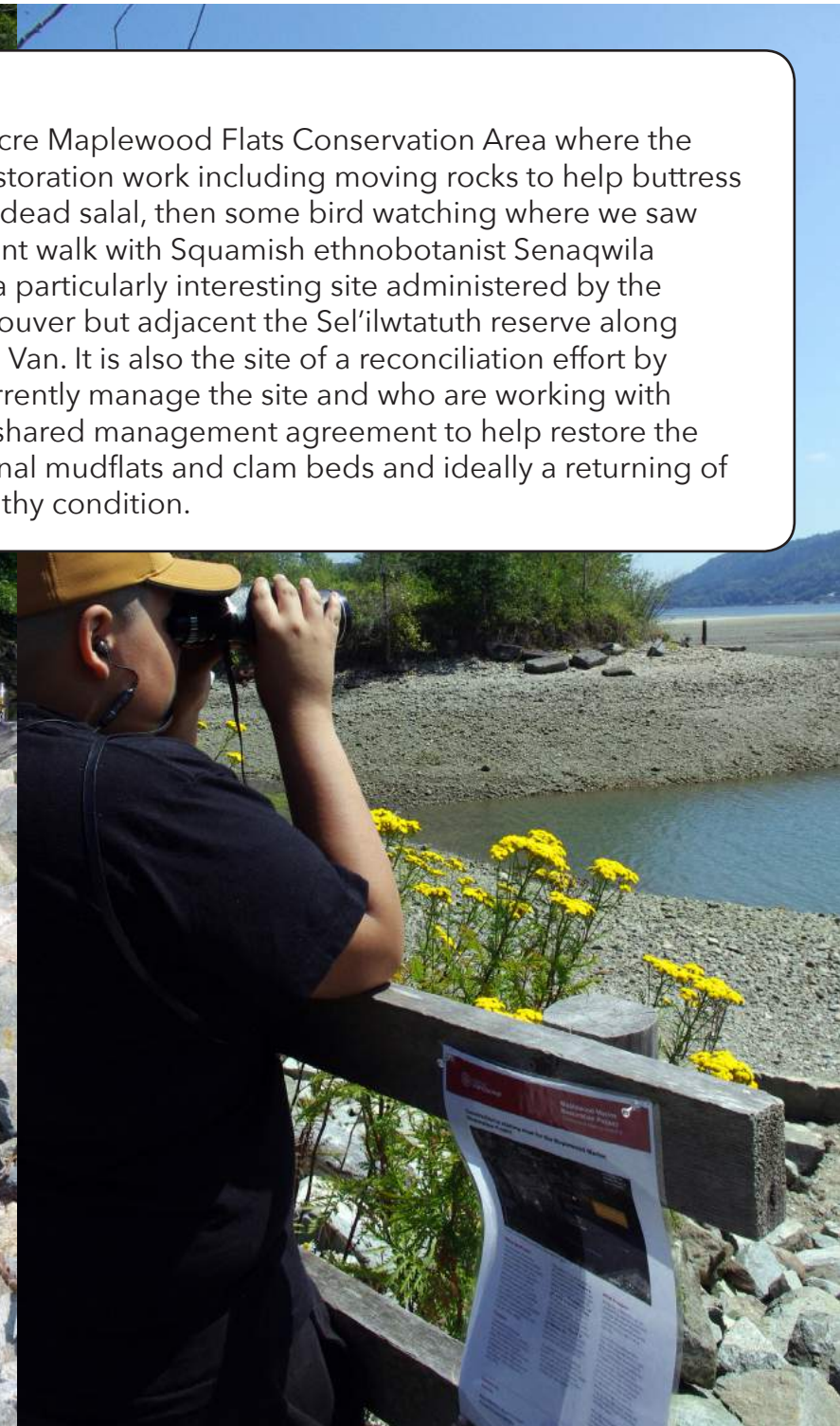




DAY 5 - Another fun day for the youth who certainly like to move. They like the physical work, so we started the day working in the Cottonwood Youth Garden where we cleared more invasive plants in preparation to plant native species. In the afternoon we played some games such as Predator Prey where a blindfolded predator must capture (tag) their prey through sound. Then another game called Get to Know your Tree where a blindfolded person is led to a tree where they get to know it through feel, smell, etc, then are taken far enough away and then without the blindfold, must try to find the tree that they first got to know. These games were a great way to understand and connect to nature through play.



DAY 6 - Visited the 300 acre Maplewood Flats Conservation Area where the youth did a little habitat restoration work including moving rocks to help buttress the shoreline and clearing dead salal, then some bird watching where we saw a nesting osprey, and a plant walk with Squamish ethnobotanist Senaqwila Wyss. Maplewood Flats is a particularly interesting site administered by the Municipality of North Vancouver but adjacent the Sel'ílwtatuth reserve along Dolarton Highway in North Van. It is also the site of a reconciliation effort by the Wild Bird Trust who currently manage the site and who are working with the Sel'ílwtatuth through a shared management agreement to help restore the habitat, including the original mudflats and clam beds and ideally a returning of this land to its original healthy condition.





DAY 7 - Another bird day with guests OWL Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society. Brought along a roadside hawk native to South America and a barred owl and who suffered a head trauma after being hit by a car. Was great to learn about these amazing raptors. Who knew that owls could turn their heads 270 degrees or that peregrine falcons are the fastest bird and can dive at 320km/hr. Later we dissected owl pellets, which we discovered are regurgitated rather than being pooped because they include indigestible material left in the gizzard such as teeth, skulls, claws, and feathers and are too dangerous to pass through the rest of the owl's digestive tract. We were able to determine if the owl had eaten a mouse, shrew, mole, rat and how many. Was a cool activity for the youth.



DAY 8 - Shifted from birds to bees this day with bee expert Marika from the Environmental Youth Alliance teaching us about pollinators (yes, even wasps and flies are pollinators). It is not too hard to love a bee and all pollinators especially when we realize that their pollination accounts for 35% of food production. Armed with nets, the youth live trapped various insects to identify and release, providing the youth a close up opportunity to get to know these wonderful creatures and their interdependence with all life. Super cool was that one of the youth possibly caught a queen honey bee, a rare catch.



DAY 9 - Went back to the Youth Garden and dug into some work. Spent most of the day clearing away some invasive and weeds, replacing Himalayan blackberry, which can quickly overwhelm and smother all other plants in time, with new native plants, including salal, salmonberry, huckleberry and a few other plants and thus creating much more plant diversity. Looked like the youth had fun.



DAY 10 - Was a wonderful two weeks with a great group of youth. Also great working with Brennan, our co-organizer from the Environmental Youth Alliance who helped create an engaging and fun program for the youth. For two weeks the youth learned about native plants, birds, insects, food growing, and ecology all the while playing, learning, exploring, and goofing around in some of the most beautiful natural places in Vancouver. All the youth reported feeling a closer connection to nature through this program, while learning new skills and building new friendships.



WILD MINDS PARTICIPANT EVALUATION:

Do you feel more connected to nature as a result of this program?

Yes: 11/11

No: 0/11

Do you feel inspired to spend more time in nature?

Yes: 8/10

No: 3/11

Did you develop new friendships & connections through this program?

Yes : 9/11

No: 1/11

No Answer: 1/11

Did you acquire new skills through this program?

Yes : 10/11

No: 1/11

Do you feel more confident to participate in nature stewardship?

Yes : 6/11

No: 4/11

No reply: 1/11



WILD MINDS PARTICIPANT EVALUATION:

Something that you rocked at?

- I rocked at having lessons plans ready every day and when people showed up late, were not made to feel bad.
- Digging holes because I dig good holes
- The ecology jeopardy game
- Not slacking off and I worked hard
- Working in the garden and getting my hands dirty and doing mulching and stuff. I liked playing games like predator and prey where we had to bang on the sticks and I liked the camouflage game.
- Identifying invasive plants
- Taking pictures of everyone and capturing moments that you were smiling and excited about what you were doing
- Pulling weeds out of the ground
- The predator and prey game
- Mulching and the rewilding was lot of fun

Something that is going to stick with me?

- Everything I learned about roadside hawks and owls. It is really cool that owls can turn their heads around 270 degree and that the roadside hawks was brought illegally from South America and needed to be brought indoors every winter to keep warm
- My knowledge about birds and plants and that birds are a big part of the ecosystem
- That honey bees are introduced to North America
- My knowledge about bees because I never knew they were that important
- The knowledge that I gained recognizing plant and I really like knowing what plant I am seeing and the name and how I can use it
- Learning that bats stay awake all night
- The feeling of holding the bald eagle in my hand
- Everything I learned about native plants and owls
- That the flowers of the plants turn into fruit
- I saw a hawk and an owl
- I did not know that owls ate their animals whole

LESSONS LEARNED

- Youth mentors are essential and very helpful. It is important that we ask what they want to get out of the experience and honor that. Youth mentors are also important for more of the one to one connection and keeping youth on task and focused.
- Perhaps organize 2 field trips. We only went on one and lots of youth were asking for more.
- Is good to connect various issues to food growing. As climate change heats up, food growing skills will become much more important.
- Spend a bit more time in the veggie garden on more varied food growing tasks ie. planting seeds, harvesting, weeding.
- Recruit more young women to have a balanced gender mix. This year was 9/12 male participants.
- Maybe more prizes. This group was very competitive and their enthusiasm and engagement would peak during competitions, especially those involving prizes.
- Games were great and youth seem to have fun with these. Good choice of games and connecting to ecology issues.
- Good work Brennan in helping create a varied program that really held the youth interest. I received very positive feedback from the Streefront teacher at Britannia who said the kids from Streefront who were in Wild Minds spoke highly of the program. High attendance rates attest to their interest.
- Keep the honorarium to at least \$400. If EYA wants to continue working with similar group of youth at risk and of marginalized backgrounds, it is important that the cash remains an incentive.
- If we were to go on a field trip again, there should be a plan to do something different than what we are already doing or able to do at SCG or there is a knowledge holder or elder the youth can learn from that they would not otherwise have access to.



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Project Leaders: Brennan Lew-Cooke (Environmental Youth Alliance), Ian Marcuse (Grandview Woodland Food Connection)

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Project Youth: Jonah Andrews, Drey St. Denis, Alejandra Soto, Kerstin Linares Herrera, Jesse Torrealba, Liam Copeland, Estraea Snyder, Ryan Wesaquate, Sabina Lee, Quintus Young, Donovan William Gene Gladstone Lech kobit, Hayden St Denis

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More Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gwfc/albums/72157709849190891>

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