

**Stoney Creek Trail Report
No. 57 - December 2023**

The Front Photo is of a **Roundneck sexton beetle**. Because they are nocturnal, I was lucky to spot this one last spring on the lid of the litter barrel near Bateman Road. There are more interesting details about this creature in the following feature on insects.

Index

Page 3: [Insects](#)
Page 6: [Blooming times](#)
Page 7: [Odds and Ends](#)
Page 8: [Various Statistics](#)
Page 9: [Weather Statistics](#)

Winter is the “off-season” for flora and fauna, so now’s not the best time to go looking for them. For Trail Reports this time of year, I turn to some material gathered in a warmer time of year when “wildlife” is more active.

I’ve been doing these Reports for almost five years now and I find something new and interesting every week, if not every day. Over the years, I’ve collected photos of a fair number of insects. In the past I’ve featured ants, bees and spiders. In this issue you’ll see a few that I’ve never written about, or even mentioned.



On the left is a **Woollybear caterpillar**. It is the larva of the **Isabella tiger moth** (*Pyrrharctia isabella*). You’ve probably noticed that they always appear in the fall. This one was making its way across the Trail on the Straightaway.

Because they go dormant and can even freeze over winter before metamorphosing into moths in the spring, Woollybears are found in both temperate and cold climate regions.

Their spiny hairs (bristles) can cause skin irritation in some people when touched, but they are not protective or venomous. Contrary to some folk tales, the size or width of the brown and black bands indicates not whether the coming winter will be harsh or mild, but how well the caterpillar fared during the growing season.

-----//-----

You may recall that the October Trail Report had a bar chart showing **how many Trail plants, shrubs and trees bloomed each month**. On Page 6 you will now see them listed by name. (Photos of all can be viewed on the [Website](#)). The species native to BC are highlighted in green in order to give you an idea of the extent to which human activities have affected our natural environment. You will see that about two thirds of the flora growing on the Trail are actually invasive species. Of course, I have no way of showing which native flora have disappeared from the Trail.

Insects on the Trail (1/3)

The **Roundneck sexton beetle** (*Nicrophorus orbicollis*), is a member of the carion or burying beetle family (*Silphidae*). With an average length of 15 to 20 millimeters and a glossy black exoskeleton with bright orange markings, the Roundneck Sexton Beetle has a very distinctive appearance.

These beetles are necrophagous, meaning they feed on carrion. Mated pairs work together to bury carcasses in order to hide them from their many competitors. The



carcasses, mainly of small vertebrates such as birds and rodents, become a food source for the beetle larvae.

In a subterranean chamber, the female lays eggs near the carcass. Later, both parents participate in caring for the brood.

Carrion beetles have a symbiotic relationship with mites (look closely for them in the photo). The mites climb aboard the beetle in order to be flown to new food sources which they could never reach on their own.

To the benefit of the beetles, the mites eat the eggs and maggots of flies that compete with beetle larvae for the carion. Thus, a mite-laden beetle is more likely to have offspring that survive.

Roundneck Sexton Beetles face threats from habitat loss, pesticide use and other human-induced environmental changes. Conservation efforts to preserve their natural habitats and minimize the impact of human activities are crucial to ensuring the continued existence of these remarkable beetles and their ecological value.

Insects on the Trail (2/3)

The **Green bottle fly** (*Lucilia sericata*) is a type of blow fly, slightly larger than a house fly, found throughout warmer regions of the world.

The female lays her eggs on all kinds of carion, and sometimes in the hair of live animals such as the wet wool of sheep, which will result in lesions and infection.

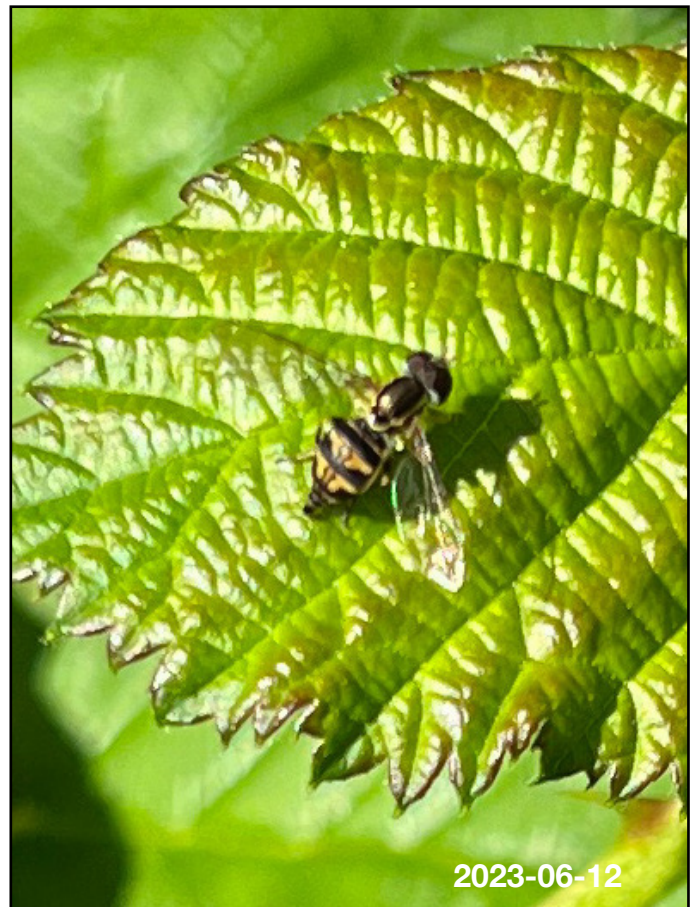
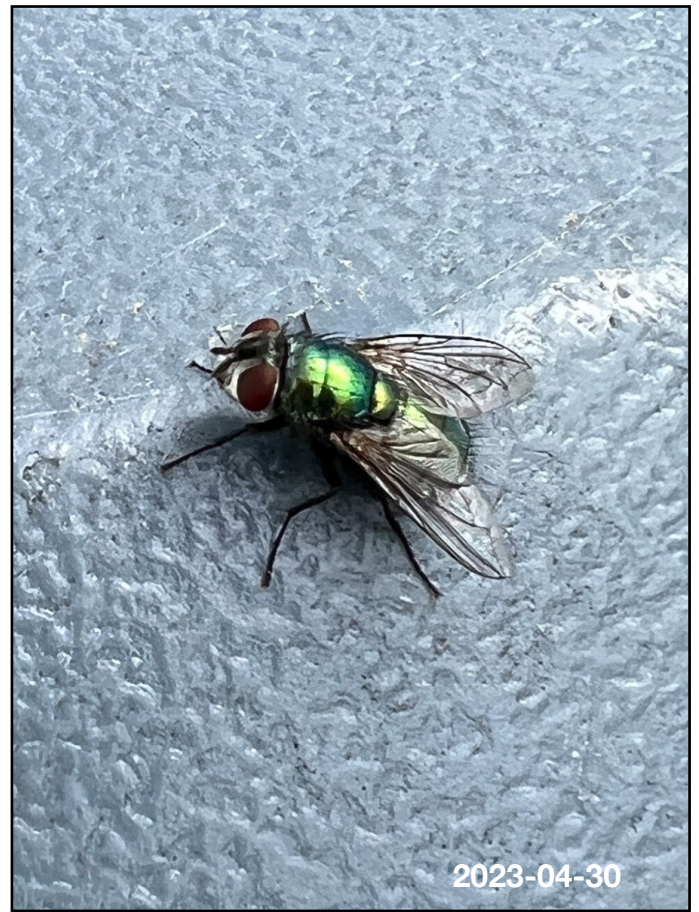
Because their larvae feed primarily on decaying organic tissue, they have been used in forensics. It is one of the first insects to colonize a corpse, so the development and progress of the maggots can be used to determine an approximate time of colonization, and thus the time of death of the victim.

The blowfly is also used in maggot therapy which is the medical removal of dead or damaged tissue (such as is experienced by diabetics) to improve the healing of the remaining healthy tissue.

The **Western Calligrapher fly** (*Toxomerus occidentalis*) is a small flower fly (about 5 mm in length) found in western North America. It is a kind of Hover Fly as it will fly in place.

The Western Calligrapher looks like a small bee, but is harmless (not having a stinger). It is also quite attractive in appearance, getting its name from the intricate pattern on its abdomen.

The Western Calligrapher searches for nectar and pollen from all kinds of flowers. It is thus a good pollinator and very beneficial to both garden and wild flowers. It will also eat aphids. What's not to like?



Insects on the Trail (3/3)



The **Yellow-spotted millipede** (*Harpaphe haydeniana*), like the yellow jacket wasp, has *aposematic colouration*. The yellow spots warn of its ability to exude toxic hydrogen cyanide as a defense (small dogs, beware!). Thus this millipede is almost immune from predation. They are great at tidying up the environment by consuming leaf litter.

Northern Eudeilinia moth (*Eudeilinia herminiata*) is found across Canada where the trees and shrubs in the dogwood family are found. (The Red Osier dogwood grows along the Straightaway beside the Creek). It's a small moth with a wingspan of from 2½ to 3 cm. It can be found during summer.

The **Eight-spotted skimmer** (*Libellula forensis*), a common dragonfly, is good to have around because it preys on small insects, some of which are pests.



Blooming Times on Stoney Creek Trail

These are the months in which the flowers, shrubs and trees found along the Trail come into full bloom. (**Native flora**) Are you surprised at how many kinds of flora there are?



Pacific Ninebark

MARCH

Bitter cherry
 Indian plum
 Purple deadnettle
 Red flowering currant
 Snowdrop

APRIL

Azalea
 Bigleaf maple
 Cherry plum
 Dandelion
 Red elderberry
 Oregon grape
 Pacific bleeding heart
 Periwinkle
 Salmonberry
 Skunk cabbage
 Solomon's seal
 Western trillium
 Wood bittercress

MAY

Amur maple
 Bistort
 Bluebells
 Buttercups
 Cascara
 Chickweed
 China rose
 Chocolate vine
 Black chokeberry
 Early winter cress
 Fringe cup
 Ground ivy
 Black hawthorn
 Herb Robert
 High-bush cranberry
 Large-leaved avens
 Nootka rose
 Pacific ninebark
 Pacific waterleaf
 Piggy-back plant
 Red oak
 Red osier dogwood
 Saskatoon
 Snowberry
 Summer snowflake
 Thimble berry
 Trailing blackberry
 Black twinberry
 Yellow archangel

JUNE

Blackberries
 Cleavers
 Foxglove
 Himalayan balsam
 Orange jewelweed

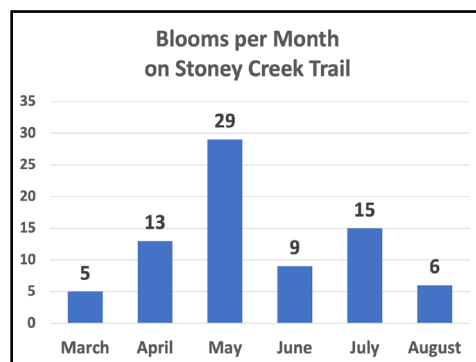
Red clover
 Sweet mock orange
 Wall lettuce
 White clover
 Yellow jewelweed

JULY

Broad-leaved helleborine
 Cooley's hedge-nettle
 Cow vetch
 Hawksbeard
 Hedge bindweed
 Hedge mustard
 Hemp-nettle
 Lesser burdock
 Nipplewort
 Saint John's wort
 Snowberry
 Spirea
 Tansy ragwort
 White campion
 Willowherb

AUGUST

Autumn hawkbit
 Canada thistle
 Plantain
 Sow thistle



Odds and Ends



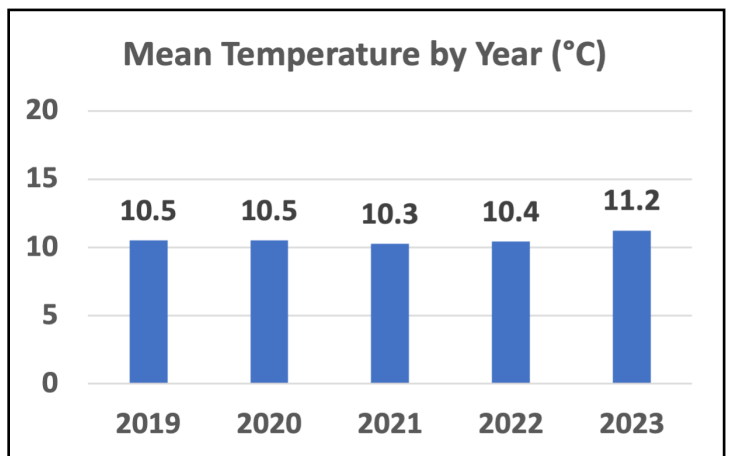
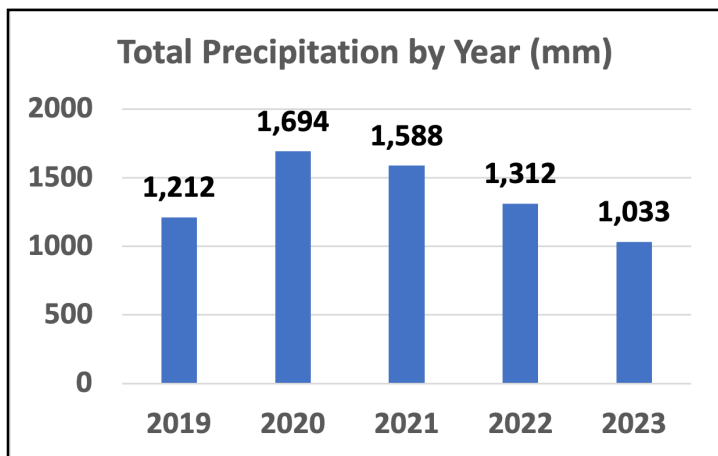
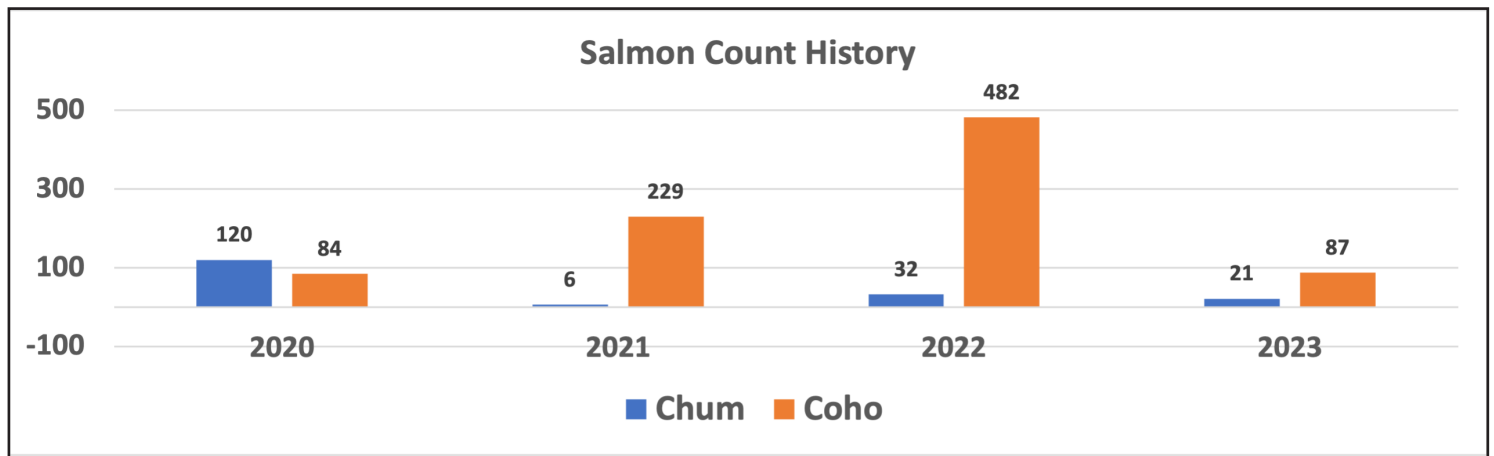
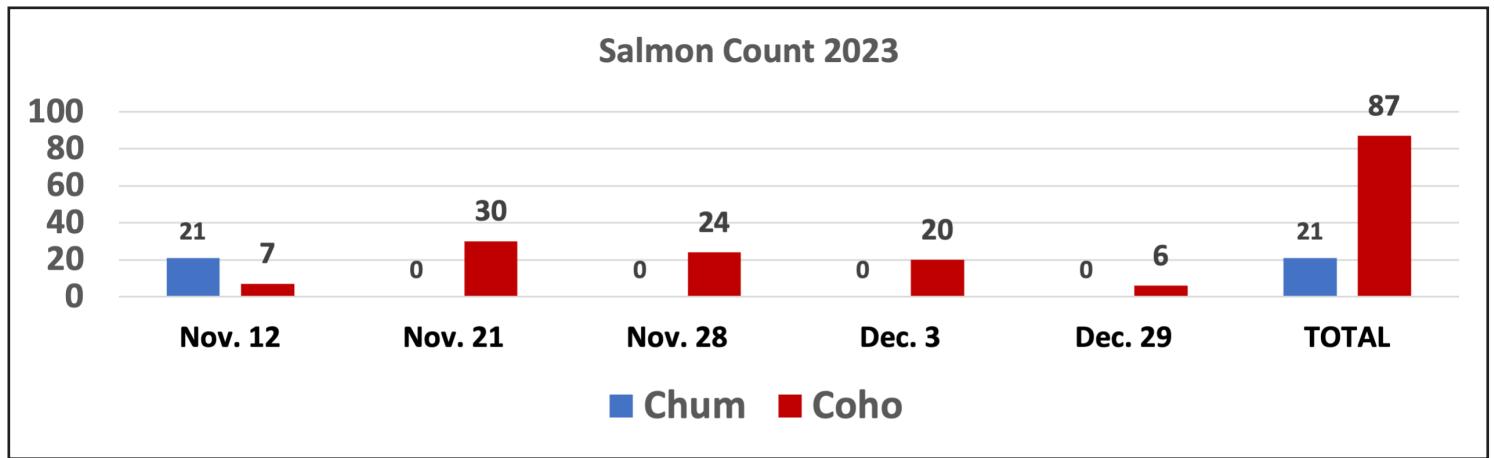
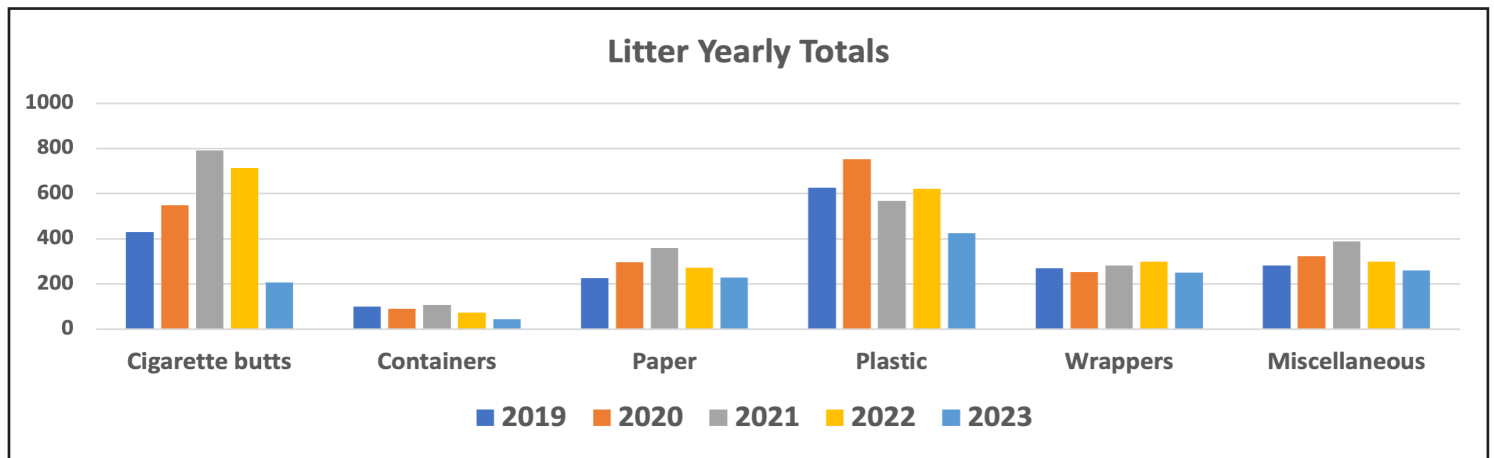
Top: Turkey tail and Chicken fungi on decomposing logs. Frost enhances a spider web.

Middle: Seasonally decorated memorials.

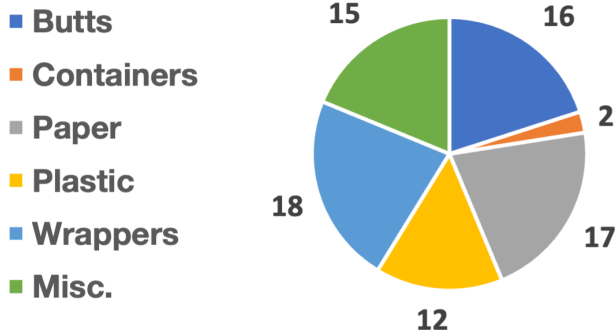
Bottom: New pines planted on Hemlock Hill. Rain raised the water level, but salmon spawner numbers are very disappointing. This barrier is meant to prevent cars and trucks from using the Trail (just kidding!!)



Year-end statistics



Litter Tally December 2023



Total litter items = 80 (last month = 83)

Containers: bottles, bottle tops, cans, coffee cups, lids, juice boxes.

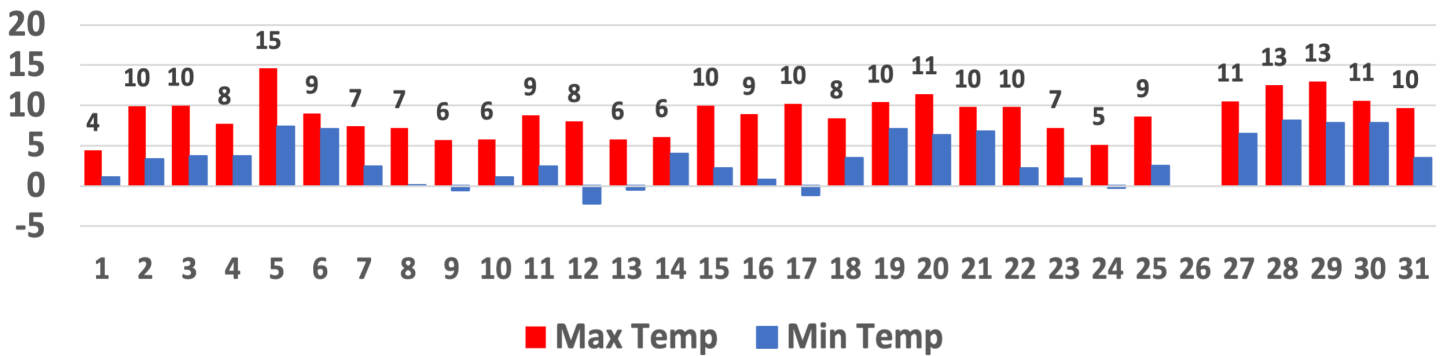
Paper: tissues, napkins, posters, newspaper, receipts, cardboard, etc.

Plastic: dog waste bags & shreds, other items made of plastic.

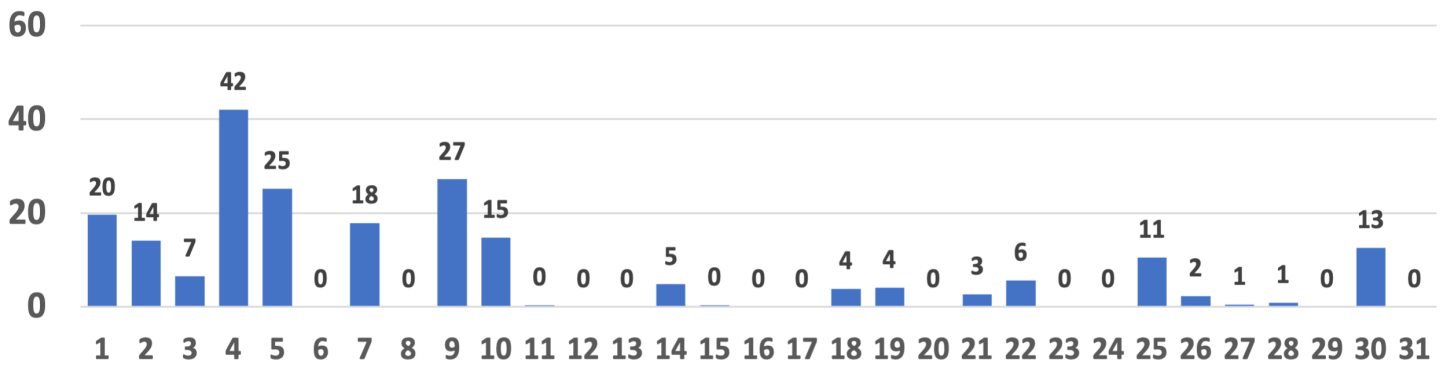
Wrappers: candy wrappers, foil, cellophane.

Miscellaneous: clothing, glass, chewing gum, dog balls & fragments, etc.

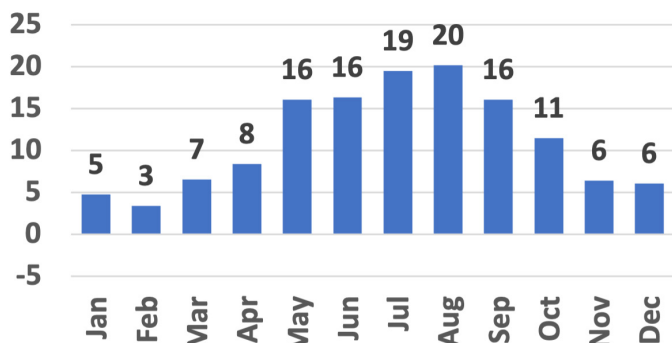
Air temperature at YXX December 2023 (°C)



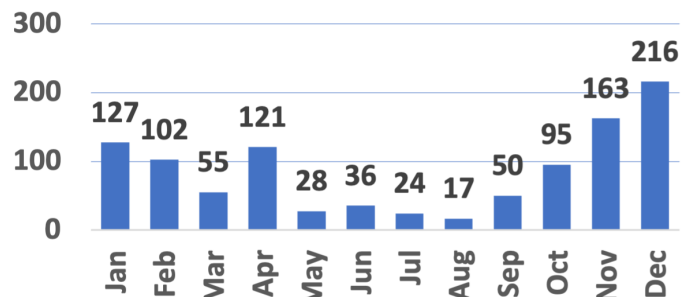
Precipitation at YXX December 2023 (mm)



2023 Mean Temperatures (°C)



2023 Total Monthly Precipitation (mm)



For convenience, I use these custom place-names

