

Stoney Creek Trail Report

No. 89 - August 2026



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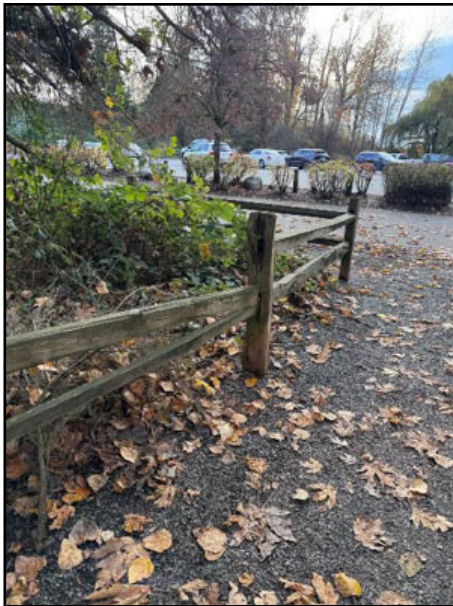
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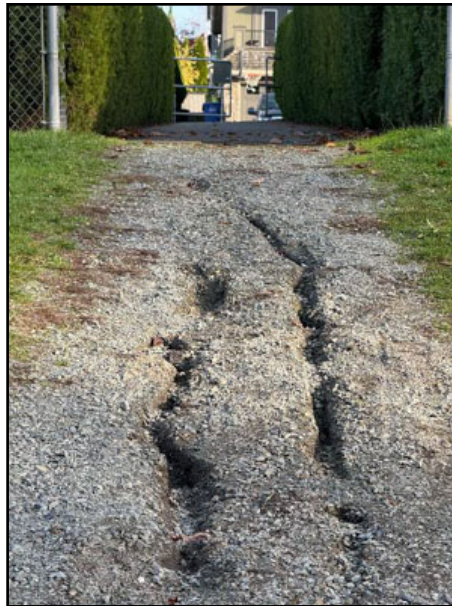
The photo on the front page introduces the main feature in this report, the American crow. These two were perched atop a hemlock tree in the Dog Corral.

My thanks to the anonymous trail walkers who must be helping to pick up litter 😊. The tally for July plus August is equal to that of June alone! Of course, this is partly due to the fact that nearby schools have not been in session.

Over the last several months, Parks, Trees & Trails has taken care of many maintenance issues. These photos can remind us of what we should appreciate.



Broken fence rail



Erosion on the path



Damaged dog corral gate



Replaced bag dispenser



Downed tree limb



Broken gate latch

The American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*): 1/4



In Indigenous cultures, crows are often regarded as symbols of good fortune because of their intelligence. Among many non-Indigenous people, however, they are often viewed as little more than nuisances. A closer look reveals a bird of extraordinary intelligence.



Because of their hoarse calls and slow, steady wingbeats (they rarely glide), these big black birds are easy to identify. They are so familiar that we stop noticing them. To many of us who walk Stoney Creek Trail, a crow might just be a bothersome bird fussing about overhead in the branches of a maple or participating in a noisy avian mobbing of an owl or eagle.

For anyone who spends much time in the presence of crows, they can become surprisingly familiar neighbours. They will learn to recognize individuals and even remember who feeds them. Their boldness and adaptability are major reasons why they thrive in cities as well as rural areas.

Crows and other members of the corvid family are [susceptible to West Nile virus](#). The crow population declined sharply after the virus was accidentally introduced to North America in 1999. Dead crows are used as "sentinels" by health agencies to track the spread of WNV. Still, the crow is considered a species of least concern.

The Crow: 2/4

Crows have a variety of calls for alarms, food, and social interactions, and will also mimic animals and other birds. They learn from one another and will share information about specific dangers with other crows. If one crow discovers a good source of food or learns to avoid a particular hazard, others often observe and adopt the same behaviour. Crows face potential attack from great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, and eagles. Their eggs and nestlings are frequently eaten by raccoons, ravens, and domestic cats.



Studying the crow behaviour is not easy because capturing them can be difficult. Under observation, their problem-solving skills and use of memory have been compared to that of apes or human pre-schoolers. Young crows playing for sheer fun is considered to be a sign of advanced intelligence. They can remember individual people for years and [distinguish between someone](#) who has threatened them and someone who has not.

In one experiment, crows were given a puzzle in which a piece of chicken hung from a string below a perch. To reach it, a crow had to pull the string upward with its bill, hold the retrieved section under its foot, then pull again. By repeating this sequence, some crows successfully raised the food to within reach.

Crows will store food for future use, an indication of the ability to think beyond the present moment. They will even change hiding places if they suspect another crow has been watching.



The Crow: 3/4

Crows are remarkably adaptable. As omnivores, they thrive in both rural and urban locations across most of North America. We often see them eating carrion (roadkill) on our streets and highways, but they also eat insects, seeds, berries, nuts, small animals, and occasionally the eggs and nestlings of other birds.



Crows are quite handsome birds with their glossy black feathers. Males and females look alike, though males are usually slightly larger. They typically live 7 to 8 years in the wild, although captive birds have been known to live up to 30 years.

They do not breed until the age of two. Their nests are typically built in a tree or large shrub, 3-20 m above the ground, in a vertical fork or at the base of a branch. The nest (built by both sexes) is a large, bulky basket of sticks, twigs, bark strips, weeds, and mud, lined with softer material such as grass, moss, plant fibres, and feathers.

Crows are monogamous and highly social, living in close-knit family groups, with older offspring often staying to help their parents raise younger siblings. These family bonds can last for years.

When winter comes, many Canadian birds migrate some distance southward. However, urban and coastal crows (which tend to be smaller than interior crows) often remain year-round, gathering with thousands of others at dusk in [massive, communal roosts](#), returning to the same groves year after year.



Crow Feathers: 4/4



You may have noticed that many birds have been looking a bit scruffy over the past month. That's because most species molt at this time of year in preparation for the coming cold season. Feathers are not like hair: they don't grow continuously. They gradually wear out and need to be replaced. New plumage improves insulation, waterproofing and flight performance.

This black feather was shed by a large crow. The long, tapering shape indicates it's from the outer part of the wing. Although the photo does not show it clearly, the feather, even faded from age, still has a slight iridescent sheen typical of *corvids* (crows and ravens).

The feather is asymmetrical, with a wide vane on one side of the quill (shaft) and a narrow one on the other. In the close-up you can see that the vanes have hundreds of fine barbicules (branches) locked together by barbs, much like Velcro, creating a continuous wind- and water-resistant surface. If these branches become separated, preening allows the bird to lock them back into place. The wispy tuft of down near the base of the quill hints at another function of a feather—providing insulation.

Incidentally, molting is an energy-intensive process, requiring extra protein and nutrients. It's important to keep your backyard bird feeder [well-stocked](#).





Mountain ash berries are a favourite food of many birds.



For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
Picking.

Seamus Heaney, "*Blackberry-Picking*"

A Little Cottontail



This little rabbit was instinctively relying on concealment for protection in the tall grass beside the Hemlock Hill path. It would have been born early this summer and, having developed very quickly, is living independently of its mother.

The **eastern cottontail** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), the small brown rabbit with a conspicuous white “cotton” tail, commonly seen around Abbotsford, is not native to British Columbia.

Red Alder Leaf Damage

A common sight this time of year: **perforated leaves on red alder trees.**

These insects were found sitting harmlessly on the underside of alder leaves:

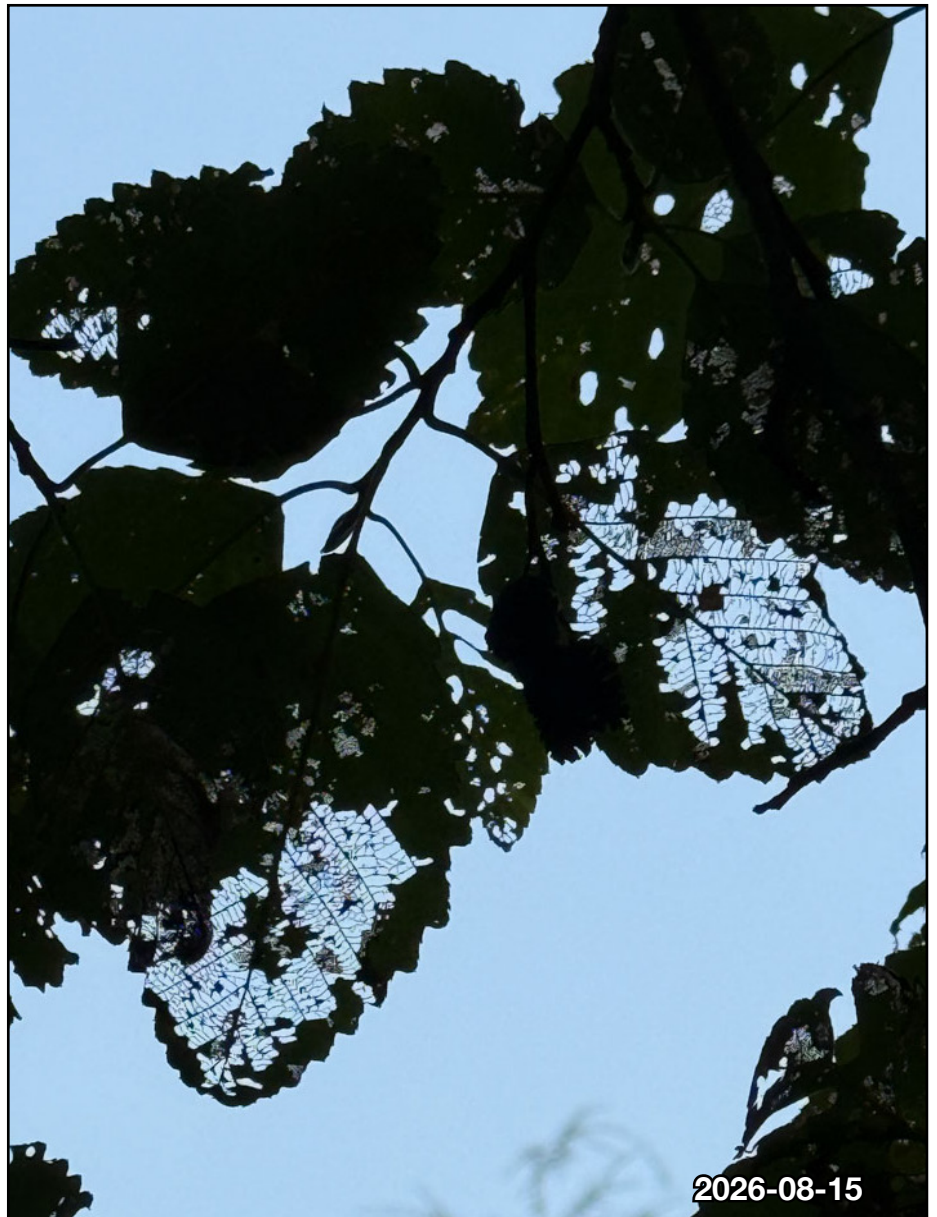
1. **Marmorated stink bug**
2. **Winter firefly** (a beetle)

Note: bugs have piercing-sucking mouthparts, while beetles have chewing mouthparts and hardened wing covers.

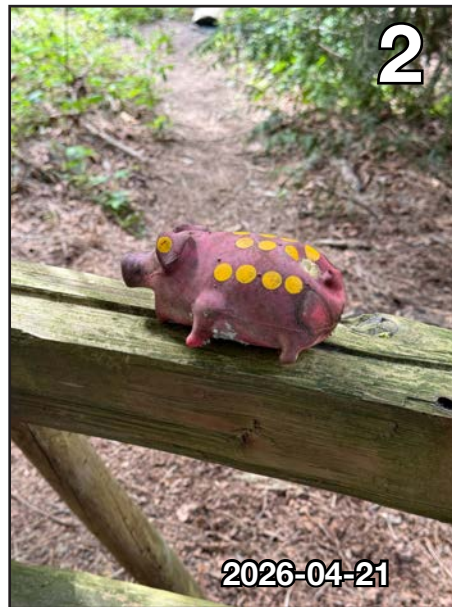
The insect responsible for chewing holes in the leaves:

3. **Alder flea beetle**

The adult flea beetle eats small holes through a leaf, while the larva consumes only the soft tissue, 'skeletonizing' it. The damage is not particularly harmful to the trees.



A Collection of Odds & Ends 1/2



Litter items—some reclaimed and others not:

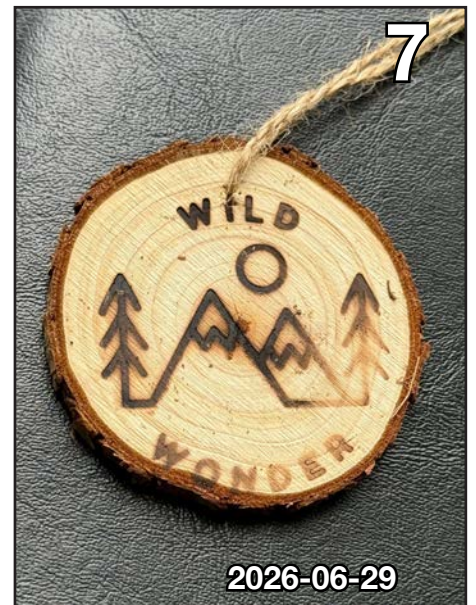
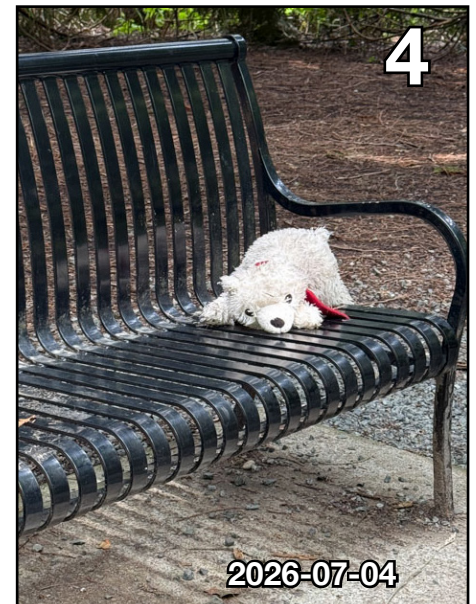
1, 2, 3. **Dog toys** abandoned over the past few months.

4. A sad little **stuffed toy** (puppy, teddy bear?) left behind on the Bowl bench.

5. An ingeniously fabricated **butterfly** made from fabric and a pipe cleaner.

6. A **derelict purse** on the Bowl bench, left in plain sight for days, but never reclaimed.

7. This **handmade graduation medallion**, made from a thin slice of a cedar branch, is a nice souvenir.



Odds & Ends 2/2



1. The mottled **bigleaf maple leaves** (native) indicate the tree is under stress.

2. A **great northern aster** (native) is beginning to bloom.

3. A delicate little **fringed willowherb** (native) is in the same family as fireweed.

4. Blooming **orchard grass** (introduced) has dense clusters of tiny flowers.

5, 6. The native **twinberry honeysuckle** (*Lonicera involucrata*) and the non-native **European honeysuckle** (*Lonicera periclymenum*).

7. The helicopter seeds of the **Amur maple** (introduced) are pink when immature.



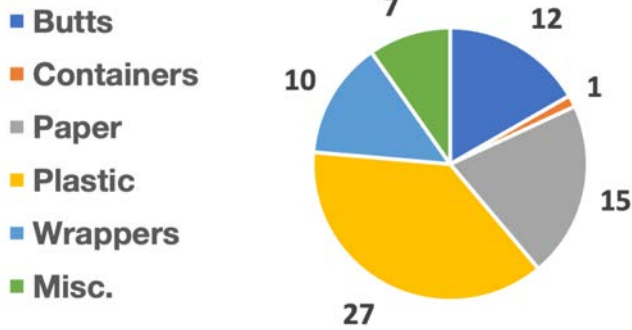
Dredging Bateman Pond: August 26/27



First, AquaTerra Environmental removed the water-dwelling critters that would have been harmed. Then, monitored by AquaTerra, the DDI (Diking, Drainage and Irrigation) team removed a large quantity of gravel the following day.



Litter Tally August 2026



Total litter items = 72

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

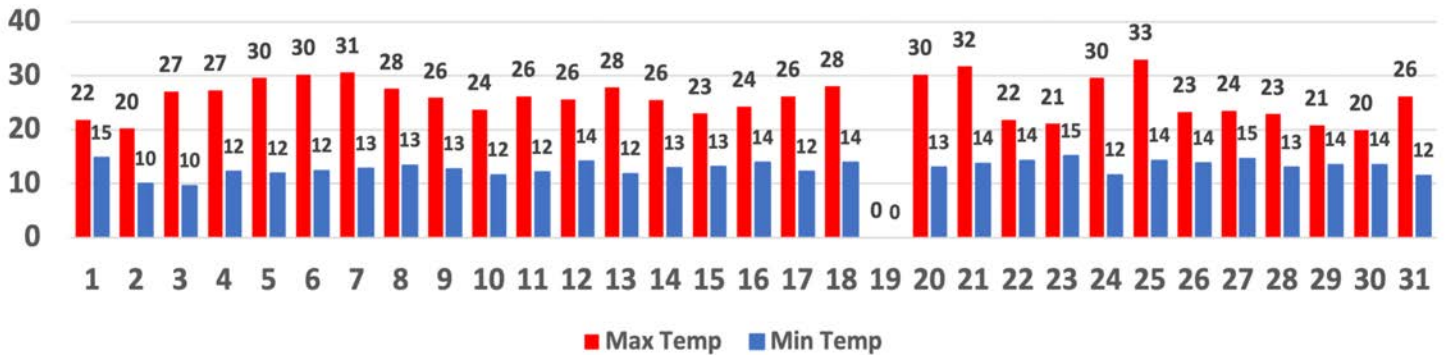
Paper: tissues, napkins, posters, newspaper, receipts, cardboard, etc.

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

Wrappers: candy wrappers, foil, cellophane.

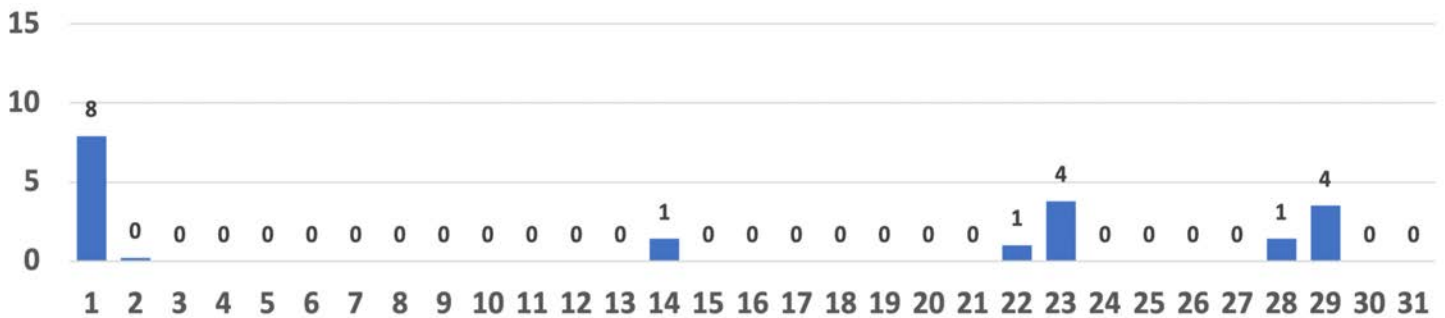
Miscellaneous: clothing, glass, chewing gum, dog balls & fragments, etc.

Air Temperatures at YXX August 2026 (°C)



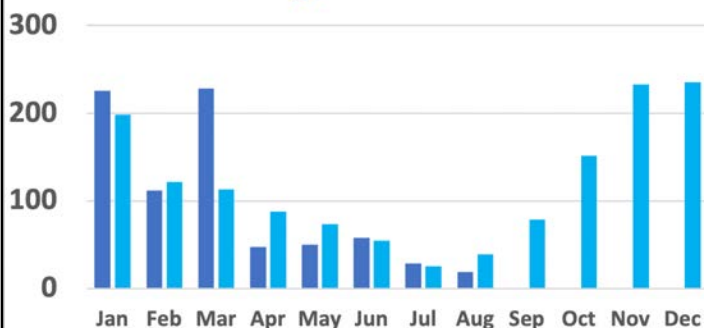
Precipitation at YXX August 2026

Total = 19.2 mm



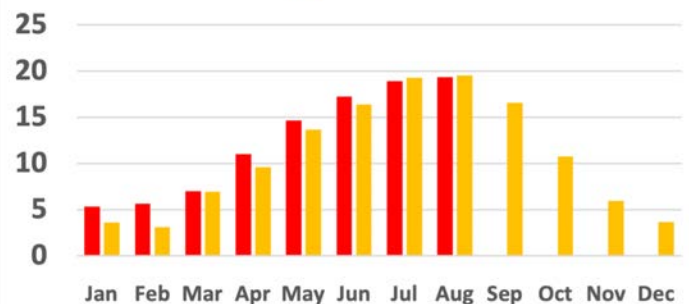
Precipitation in 2026 (mm)

Average: 2019-2025



Average Temperatures in 2026

Average: 2019-2025



In my trail reports, I use these custom place-names for reference:

