



Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Research - Conservation - Education

The Vancouver Avian Research Centre 'Birds are Brilliant' Schools Program

What VARC does

The Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) is a Registered Canadian Charity dedicated to wild bird research, conservation and education. It conducts year round bird monitoring and banding and provides public outreach to raise awareness of environmental issues particularly as they relate to breeding and migratory birds.

In support of VARC's mandate to educate youth, VARC has developed an Avian Environmental Education program for schools and youth groups which provides an engaging educational experience, fostering awareness and appreciation of birds and the environment.

Program description

Depending on the group involved, VARC offers several parts to its program.

- 1) Site visits to its banding station
- 2) Presentations to teachers, youth leaders and parent groups.*
- 3) Information on Bird Friendly Campuses and Gardens.
- 4) Hummingbird monitoring and banding at the school campus (request information from VARC for this particular project).

The program includes a field trip to VARC's Colony Farm Banding Station where students are introduced to the research techniques required for monitoring migratory birds and the population ecology and ecosystem dynamics of wild bird populations, in an age specific way. Students will learn about bird migration; the various habitats and communities they depend on during both spring and fall migration and the breeding season; and the conservation actions required to protect these habitats to ensure the long term survival of bird species.



*VARC is a volunteer organization and does not currently have the resources to provide 'in-school' support (except the Hummingbird Program) but offers tools and information to assist teachers and youth leaders.

Site Visits

There are 2 different types of visit offered by VARC a) a General Site Visit or b) a Structured Site Visit.

General Site Visit

The structure of group visits starts with a short talk when students arrive to tell them who we are, what we're doing and why we're doing it. We then typically split groups in to 2 – one group accompanies our net extractors on net rounds while the other group stays at the banding station to watch the banding, take photos and ask questions. We then supervise while each child gets the opportunity to hold and release a bird. The groups are then switched.

At the end of the visit we give another short talk about habitat conservation and the importance of safeguarding areas like Colony Farm for breeding and migratory birds. We also provide each child with information on how they can help to make a difference.

In addition we talk about creating bird friendly campuses and gardens by preventing window strikes, and putting up feeders and nest boxes.

Because of the environment and to ensure the welfare and safety of birds the General Site Visit is more suitable for children over the age of 6. We recommend that the younger the participants the smaller the group and the lower the

adult to children ratio – we cannot provide any supervision, that must be your responsibility. The optimum size for younger groups is 10 – 12 children. We don't recommend any group over 20 participants no matter what the age.

Structured Site Visit

This program has been developed specifically for school groups over the age of 12 - younger groups can be accommodated under the General Site Visit - and combines the General Site Visit with 2 additional educational units.

Upon arrival at the site the children are split into 3 groups and will move between 3 different stations:-

- 1) The banding station
- 2) An interactive station
- 3) A lecture station

Each station takes about 45 – 60 minutes and uses a Workbook to answer questions and complete exercises. VARC will provide a PDF version of the workbook for schools to print for their students.

Stations Overview

- 1) As identified above, Station 1 is the Banding Station itself. Here children are given the opportunity to see birds in the hand. Our Bander-in Charge, Derek Matthews will talk to the children about each species as it is being banded by our volunteers. The children will all be given the opportunity to hold and release birds themselves.
- 2) Our Interactive Station requires the children to locate answers to questions in their Workbooks. The answers are on posts in an area adjacent to the banding station and they will need to review photos, listen to mp3 players and use their powers of observation to find the answers.
- 3) Our Lecture Station uses posters and bird samples to cover two very important topics:
 - a. The Wonders of Migration
 - b. What you can do to help birds in their fight for survival.

The children will be asked to complete information in their Workbook and to identify and discuss steps they will take in their lives to make a difference.



Visits take place on Tuesday or Thursday and the earlier you can arrive the more birds the children will enjoy. You will need to allow 3.5 to 4 hours at Colony Farm to complete the program.

We require a minimum of 30 children and a maximum of 65 – 70. We request a donation of \$10 per child where possible.

What time would it be?

Bird banding is a very early morning activity – we start at dawn and continue until mid-morning depending on capture rates. Bird activity is highest in the period immediately following dawn and then dies down as the morning progresses so it is best to get your group to the station no later than 8.00am but the earlier the better.

Should we schedule a back-up date in case it is raining that day?

This is always a good idea. We band Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from April 1st to October 31st weather permitting. Although we would prefer groups to visit on the weekend as we have more volunteer help available, we understand that schools may require trips to be scheduled on a week day. We suggest scheduling the visit for a Saturday with the idea that it can be moved to the Sunday if the weather doesn't co-operate and likewise during the week, scheduling the visit for a Tuesday with a back up of Thursday.

How do we get there?

A map is inserted below with directions to the banding station. DO NOT USE GPS it will take you to the wrong location.

What are the facilities at the banding station?

We have a very visitor friendly set up with banding pagoda, picnic tables, coat and backpack racks and a wilderness eco-friendly washroom at the station.

Are there any costs involved?

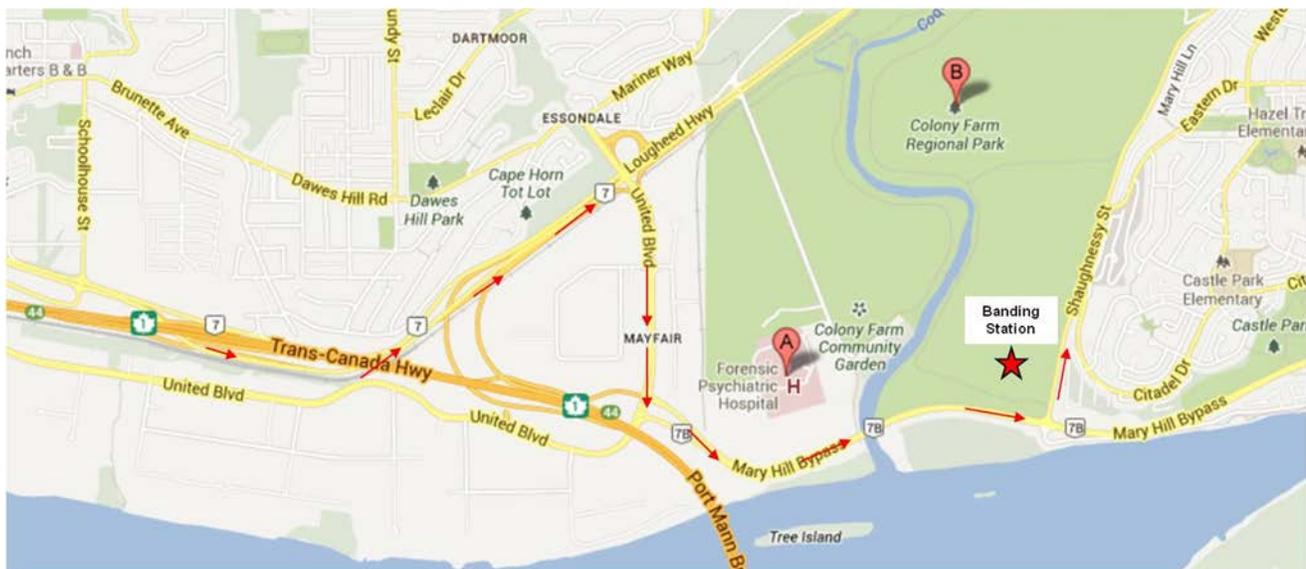
Typically we ask for donation to VARC of \$10 per child but this is not mandatory for anyone who cannot afford it. Tax receipts will be issued for amounts over \$20. (VARC is a Registered Canadian Charity). A minimum contribution of \$100 is required to book the morning for your group (\$300 for the Structured Program).

What should we bring?

- Warm clothing – Colony Farm is a low lying area and can be cold even in the summer months and especially early in the morning
- Rubber boots or waterproof shoes – The banding station is in the old field habitat and the grass can be quite wet especially in the early morning
- Binoculars and cameras
- Water and snacks

How do we get to Colony Farm and the banding station?

Please note that we are closest to the Shaughnessy Street entrance to the park NOT the community gardens on Colony Farm Road which is a good 20 minutes' walk across the park. Do NOT use GPS it will take you to the wrong entrance.



Mary Hill Bypass and after about 5 km turn right at the traffic lights. This is Shaughnessy St.

FROM THE WEST:

Take Highway 1 east. Take exit 44 for United Blvd/ British Columbia 7B E / British Columbia 7 E. Keep left at the fork to continue toward Mary Hill Bypass. Merge onto Mary Hill bypass. Turn left at the first traffic light which is Shaughnessy St.

FROM THE NORTH / EAST:

From Lougheed Hwy, take the British Columbia 7 Business/British Columbia 7B exit toward Trans-Canada Highway/Vancouver/British Columbia 1. Merge onto

FROM THE SOUTH / EAST:

Take Highway 1 west –After crossing Port Mann Bridge take Exit 44 for BC 7 toward United Boulevard. Keep right at the fork and continue toward United Boulevard. Keep right at the next fork and follow signs for United Bld S/ British Columbia 7B E and merge onto United Blvd. Turn left onto the BC 7B E ramp and merge onto Mary Hill Bypass. Turn left at the first traffic light – this is Shaughnessy St.

ALL ROUTES

Once on Shaughnessy Street, about half a mile along on the left hand side (through one set of lights) is a pull-out overlooking Colony Farm Regional Park – Park here (There is also a small additional parking lot on the opposite side of the road).

Walk through the metal gate and down along trail and in to the park – You will pass a pond on the right – 200 yards after the pond is a metal gate on the right hand side with green and yellow garbage can and a ‘Wildlife Habitat Area – Research Personnel Only’ sign - walk through the gate (PLEASE CLOSE AND LATCH IT BEHIND YOU) and follow the trail around to the banding station

We highly recommend that you follow up this visit with a review of ‘How to Create a Bird Friendly Campus’ and by having the children build [Window Mobiles](#) to protect against the huge problem of window strikes. Please review our website for details of these.

To arrange a visit please contact us at kerry@birdvancouver.com. Our website is www.birdvancouver.com