

Video/ Podcast Transcript

Hello listeners! My name is Jordy Decker, and I am Ellie Zamanzade, and we are excited to take you outside on a walk around the UBC Okanagan campus. On our walk, we will learn about the species living in the Okanagan region.

Before we begin exploring, we want to acknowledge the unceded Syilx territory on which UBC Okanagan is situated. We are grateful to the Syilx peoples who have cared for and lived in harmony with this land for thousands of years. Most, if not all of the information we are drawing on today comes directly or indirectly from the Syilx peoples and the knowledge they've fostered and shared for thousands of years, long before colonization began. In particular, we would like to thank Elders Pamela and Grouse Barnes for the video you watched prior to this podcast; We would like to thank Dr. Bill Cohen, a professor in the Okanagan School of Education, whose lessons inspired this project. We would like to thank the Okanagan Nation Alliance for the resources they share on their website, including the 13-moon calendar and their work in preserving nsyilxcən language.

We would also like to introduce ourselves, our personal connections to this land, and what led us to the creation of this video and podcast.

As I mentioned earlier, my name is Jordy Decker, and my family are White settlers of Ukrainian, Slovakian, English, and Dutch descent to Kamloops which resides on the unceded territory of the Secwepemc peoples. I first came to Kelowna for school in 2014 and have lived in either Kamloops or Kelowna for the past 10 years. I am a Bachelor of Education student at UBC's Okanagan campus and I hope to become a middle school or high school teacher once I complete the program. It was not until moving to Kelowna that I started to think critically about my identity and privilege as uninvited settler. It is part of my responsibility to seek opportunities to learn the true history of these lands

alongside my future students by following the lead of the Syilx and Secwépemc peoples and uplifting their voices. I am endlessly grateful for the Syilx peoples who have shared resources and stories which we draw upon in this lesson.

I'm Ellie. I'm originally from Iran—a place with a deep history of poetry and storytelling. About a year and a half ago, I came to Kelowna to do my second Master's in Education. From the moment I arrived, this land felt like home. Living and learning on the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) peoples has taught me to slow down and listen- to nature, to others, and to myself. This place has shown me what community can feel like, and how important it is to respect the stories and traditions that came long before me. I'm still learning, and I hope to keep doing so in a thoughtful and respectful way.

As we are not Indigenous to these lands, we cannot rightfully welcome you to them. Instead, we aim to approach this responsibility with utmost respect for the original caretakers of these lands and we hope that this will be merely a first step in your journey toward learning about the history of the Syilx peoples and territory. We are honored to be a part of your learning journey and connection to this land and the community.

We would not be able to talk about the species in the Okanagan without discussing the impacts of colonization. While the Syilx peoples were committed to reciprocal relationships with the land, the colonizers were interested in resource extraction and domination over the land and its peoples. The disruption of harmony with the land and displacement of Syilx peoples has led to the nsyilxcən language becoming endangered and many native species becoming endangered or extinct.

While we are primarily speaking to you in English, we will be including some nsyilxcən language as well to highlight the Indigenous language of this land and the Syilx peoples. We found pronunciations for the nsyilxcən terms on firstvoices.com so we want to thank

those who contributed to the preservation of the language and sharing it on that website.

So, to learn about the species that are visible to us on campus, we want to give you the opportunity to get outside and explore! We recommend grabbing a partner or a group of three so you can discuss what you find along the way.

We used the Seek app by a company called iNaturalist. The app is free to use! If you would like, you can download this app too, but you do not need to make an account. Alternatively, you can just use the handout that includes pictures of the plants at different stages of their growth so you can recognize them during whichever season you are exploring. The app also seems to drain the battery life of your phone quite quickly so you may want to charge your phone before going outside, or you can always refer to the handout if you can't charge your phone before heading out.

On the handout, you will see that we have included the name of the species in English and for some of them we have also included the name in *nsyilxcən*. You might notice these species appear in different colors—some have leaves and flowers at different times of the year, while others may not flower at all. We have also included check boxes so you can check off the species once you find it. There are also check boxes for you to use to indicate whether the species you've identified is native to the Okanagan or if it is an introduced species.

We also want to encourage you to scan or take pictures or take notes and drawings about the species you find that are not included on the handout. You can share what you found with the class to see if anyone saw the same thing as you!

Before you head outside, we also want to echo what Elders Pamela and Grouse Barnes shared in their video about the importance of treating the land as something we

are borrowing. This means that when we interact with the land, we want to leave it in the same condition as when we met it, or better. For the purposes of this activity, this means that we will not be picking any plants, disturbing any wildlife, or littering. If you would like to leave the land in even better condition, you could even collect any litter you may see while you are outside.

The Okanagan is considered a “biodiversity hotspot” because it includes a variety of ecosystems that provide the required conditions to support a variety of species. Protecting the Okanagan’s immense biodiversity requires our commitment to the preservation of native species. It also requires our participation in restoration projects aimed at recovering ecosystems that have been impacted by climate change, invasive species, and urban development.

We want to start your walk behind the Engineering, Management, and Education building beside the bus loop where you will see an outdoor classroom, and just next to the outdoor classroom, you will see a pond. It is important to note that this pond was man-made and was not here prior to the development of the university campus. This pond is a home to a variety of plant and animal species.

Some of these species are native to the Okanagan. What this means is that the species naturally evolved in this region without introduction by human activity. You will also come across species that are “introduced”. This means that the species is not native to the region and was introduced by human activity, like farming for example.

Some introduced species are also referred to as “invasive species”. Invasive species are introduced species that cause harm to ecosystems and native species by spreading rapidly and outcompeting the native species for nutrients and space to grow and thrive. Invasive species threaten the survival of native species. Native species whose survival is threatened are referred to as “at-risk” species. Species that are at-risk have the

potential to become extinct. Species that are the most at-risk and are in immediate danger of becoming extinct are called “endangered” species.

Some species are also at risk because of the spread of knowledge about their medicinal purposes or the appropriation of cultural and spiritual practices from Indigenous peoples. This has led to people over-harvesting the plants without ensuring their long-term survival, which is something that Indigenous communities who have relationships with these species have been mindful of.

The species we have included on your handout include native and introduced species. You are likely to find other species aside from the ones we have included on the handout, so we encourage you to make note of those species and learn more about them as well.

We will be connecting some of the species to the Syilx 13-moon calendar. The Okanagan Nation Alliance explains that this calendar “aligns with the natural rhythms of the land” (Direct quote from ONA website). The calendar includes rough dates for each season, but these vary as they are dependent on the weather patterns and growth cycles of key plant species.

For the purpose of this lesson, we will only make note of the seasons associated with the species that you actually came across on campus today. But we will include links to a couple examples of Syilx 13-moon calendars if you are interested in learning more about them.

We will be sharing the plants in the order that we found them, but you may not find them in this order – especially if you are exploring at a different time of the year. You

are welcome to follow along with our video to see the location where we found each species, or you can make your own path and make note of the species you will find as you find them. The rest of this video will discuss the species you will find on your handout. You are welcome to listen to this audio while you walk or you can watch the rest before you head outside.

Nature Walk activity:

We started our walk by exiting the 0-level floor of the EME building. We entered the pond path at the entry next to the bus loop.

1. The first species you will come across is the Nootka Rose. The Nootka Rose is a native species. It is frequented by pollinators when it blooms in early summer. The flowers are pink, they have prickly stems, and they produce fruits called “hips”.
2. The next species we saw was the Blue Spruce. It is a tree with blue-green needles. The Blue Spruce is an introduced species.
3. The next species is also an introduced species. It is called the Japanese Spirea. The Japanese Spirea is a shrub that has green leaves growing from its red-brown stems and clusters of pink flowers. They typically grow on the edge of a body of water.
4. The next species, known as kʷətskʷətswixups in nsyilxcən, or Common Yarrow in English, is a native species. They have tall stems, fern-like leaves, and white flowers. They are drought-tolerant and can grow in a variety of climates. Some people plant them as a companion plant because they attract insects that provide pollination.
5. The next species you will see surrounds the perimeter of the pond and is called broadleaf cattail. The broadleaf cattail is also a native species. It can be found in some of the wetland ecosystems in the Okanagan.
6. The next species we came across is a native species called Siya in the nsyilxcən language. In English this species is known as the Saskatoon or Serviceberry.

Siya is incredibly important in Syilx culture. Siya is one of the four food chiefs and is chief of all above-ground plants. Siya is also one of the key species in the Syilx 13-moon calendar. The Time of the Saskatoon or Serviceberry in 2025 was roughly June 25 to July 23.

7. The next species, sʔatqʷtɬp, is known in English as the Ponderosa Pine. It is a native species that is relatively drought-resistant and has adapted to thriving in fire-affected habitats. Ponderosa Pine is coniferous with bright green needles. You may see some of its cones on the ground at the base of the tree.
8. The next species is smúkʷaʔxn, known in English as the Arrowleaf Balsamroot or the Okanagan sunflower. It is drought-resistant and grows in many different types of habitats. The Arrowleaf Balsamroot is associated with the Time of the Sunflower seeds in the Syilx 13-moon calendar. In 2025, the Time of the Sunflower Seeds was roughly between May 27th and June 24th.
9. The next species is ʔuxʷtɬwɪtɬp, known as Chokecherry in English. It is a shrub or small tree with white flowers with fruits that are red to black in colour. It is also native to the Okanagan. In the Syilx 13-moon calendar, the Time of the Chokecherry in 2025 was roughly August 23rd to September 20th.
10. The final species is known as sčrsilmlx in nsyilxcən, or Oregon Grape in English. It is a native shrub with yellow flowers and dark blue berries. Its yellow flowers attract pollinators. Oregon Grape is a resilient plant that is drought-tolerant.

Sensing Activity:

Once you have found and taken notes about the key species on your handout, and before you head back inside, we want to invite you to participate in a sensing activity. This is an opportunity to pause, ground yourself, and get in touch with your senses to take in your surroundings.

Stop where you are and be as silent and as still as possible. If you are comfortable, close your eyes. What do you hear? Can you hear the roar of the construction mixed in

with the singing of the birds, or the buzz of the bees bouncing from flower to flower? What do you smell? Can you smell the sweet aroma of lilacs dancing in the air? What can you feel on your skin? Are your shoes crunching on the frozen ground? Or perhaps it has rained, and you've got some water soaking into your shoes? Is the sun warming your cheeks, or is the wind giving you shivers? Finally, when you are ready, slowly open your eyes. Start by looking down. Do you see any insects crawling around? Do you see any plants swaying in the wind? Now look around you. Do you see any animals running or flying about? Now look up. Do you see any images in the clouds? Or perhaps it is sunny, without a cloud in sight. Are there any large tree branches providing shade? Now, we invite you to take a few deep breaths, and while you breathe, reflect on how it feels to pause and connect with your surroundings. If you would like to pause the video for a moment, please do so. Once you are ready, you can press play to hear our final words.

Thank you for participating in this noticing and grounding exercise. Remember that you can do this exercise whenever you need a moment to slow down, or whenever you want to take in the beauty and wisdom your surroundings have to share with you.

Final part:

We want to thank you for participating in this learning experience with us. We want to thank the Elders, knowledge keepers, the Syilx land, and protectors of the Syilx land for providing information, wisdom, and resources we referenced to help facilitate this learning experience. And finally, we want to remind you and ourselves of what Elders Pamela and Grouse Barnes shared: The land we are on is borrowed from the future and it is our responsibility to treat it as such.

SOURCES FOR SCRIPT:

thirteen moon calendars: <https://syilx.org/shop/>

Thirteen moon calendar: https://education.ok.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2020/07/Field-experience-guide_web.pdf

Pronunciations: <https://www.firstvoices.com/syilx/kids/categories/2527e529-71bb-4091-97df-25947c6e42f0>

More pronunciations. <https://www.rdco.com/en/parks-and-trails/syilx-okanagan-partnerships.aspx#Trees-shrubs-and-wildflowers-cip-na-scak-il-clcal>