



Species Are Sacred A Stó:lō world view on Species At Risk in S'ólh Téméxw (Fraser Valley)

Oral traditions have been instrumental in forming and maintaining the foundation of Stó:lō /Coast Salish society. There has always been value in acknowledging the connection that elders have with their children and grandchildren, to experience the sharing of historical understanding through story, uniting past and present. Sharing history through oral society means expressing one's world view, which is a comprehensive, diverse perspective that balances the physical, spiritual and intellectual worlds. World view translates to a living knowledge of resources that reflects thousands of years of observation and connection.

Ancestors of the Coast Salish people were either sky-born "tel swayel" or transformed into their current forms by Xe:xá:ls in the time when the world was 'being set right'. Xe:xá:ls (Transformers – three sons and one daughter of Red headed woodpecker and Black bear) traveled through the land, up and down the river, transforming beings into certain plants, rocks, mountains, animals and geographic places within S'ólh Téméxw long long ago, creating the world as it exists today.

Family connections that date back to the origins of the Coast Salish people still exist. Those connections are alive in the ancestral names, ceremonies and hereditary use and passing of specific sites around the territory.



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Species at Risk, and Oral Traditions Building Bridges between Cultures

Some of the Stó:lō origin species include:

Ts'elxwéyeqw *Chilliwack tribe:
Black bear with white spot

Pelho'lhxw *Pilalt tribe:
Mountain Goat, Rush, Sandhill crane

Máthekwi *Matsqui: Beaver

Some species that have sacred value to all Stó:lō :
Sockeye Salmon, Western Red Cedar tree, giant frog, salamander, blue jay

As eras come and go, so do the indigenous creatures of the lands and waters. Creation teaches us to be humble about how we make our footprints in the world, always being sure to only take what we need and honor all living things.

The creatures featured in these 'Species are Sacred' stories provide us with insight as to which winged, four legged, finned and two legged creatures were alive at the time the story was created. In carrying on with oral traditions, giving the creatures humanistic traits offers respect and helps our human hearts and minds better understand them by relating to their circumstances.

History through story provides opportunity to seize a moment, and offer the passing of relevant wisdom. Not everyone is a story-teller. Those who carry the history are responsible for keeping & maintaining the knowledge and passing it on in order to preserve the historical record.

Some stories and teachings are shared only with specific people and at very specific times in one's life, for example: coming of age teachings for girls would not be shared with boys.

There are still people who believe that oral traditions should remain unwritten, and continue on as oral traditions. This is partially based on the fluidity and evolution that oral traditions allow, where written and static forms of history are to be taken as solid fact and remain that way. The 'Species Are Sacred' pages are designed to share Stó:lō world view, history and artwork as well as provide awareness about local indigenous species at risk in the lower Fraser Basin.

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Artwork designed and provided by Carrielynn Victor.

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Sméq'w'o [Smehkw-uh] Great Blue Heron



The people were living around Sumas lake (Semá:th). Mink was having trouble finding himself a girl and made up his mind to get one. There were wild vegetables growing at Semá:th. A lot of people were digging roots that grew in big patches. Everyone staked out where they were going to dig. A lot of people were digging and Mink spied a girl he'd like to become acquainted with. He hung around where this girl, Blue crane, was digging. Blue Crane's habit was to get a basketful and bring it home in the evening.

Mink made up his mind and went up to her to propose. Blue Crane was a nice looking girl. When asked, she refused his proposal and said, "You'd freeze to death if I accepted you". (Mink is known to be crazy like Raven.) Mink told her that it didn't matter because he loved her and wanted her for his wife. Since he was agreeable and he didn't think he'd freeze, she accepted his offer.

Mink and Blue Crane were married and continued digging their vegetables. Each day they'd go out to dig some more so they'd have it stored away for winter. He would go out with her when she went out digging, but she would do the digging and he would just sit down. It was late in the Fall and she was digging while he was sitting back looking on, when the North wind began to blow.

After Blue Crane's bag was full they went back to Crane's fall house, where she was staying while she was digging vegetables. The next day when they went out, Mink tagging along, it was a nice day and the sun was shining.

That day the North wind began to blow very hard and Blue Crane said, "Mink, you are shivering." Mink said that he wasn't, even though he was. (Mink always thinks he's the boss and he can say anything.) Blue Crane wasn't cold because she was working and digging. Blue Crane said, "Why don't you work so you won't get cold." The North wind blew harder and Mink's teeth were chattering, but Mink said "I'm just whistling through my teeth." Blue Crane knew that the big cold was coming and that it was going to freeze.

When she knew the freezing weather was coming, Blue Crane flew away to the south and left mink. As she started to fly, Mink told her he was cold. He was shivering cold, but she was already on her way and the North wind blew her South. Mink stayed where Blue Crane left him and froze.

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Slí:m [sleem] Sandhill Crane

Stó:lō Legend

In early times, there lived a young maiden who turned away many young men because they weren't handsome enough to please her. A young man took interest in the maiden and did many things the young woman told him to do that would make him handsome enough.

The young man went to see a spirit-woman far in the mountains who he had heard could change faces. He told the spirit woman of his situation and asked her to change his face. He fancied a face on the spirit woman's wall that had freckles, but she handed him a different one without freckles. He refused every face until she went to another room, and came back with the freckled face. After removing his face, and putting the new one on, the spirit woman advised the young man to follow the same path home.

The young man got lost and came across a Cinnamon bear. She insisted that he stay overnight with her and her beautiful sister, black bear. They cooked for him and in the morning the young man had to escape from cinnamon bear sister as she was up to mischief and planned to keep him to herself.

The young man didn't make it far when he was overtaken by the mischevious Cinnamon bear, she attacked and swallowed him. Cinnamon bear began to groan in pain, her stomach was in terrible pain. When she got home she laid by the fire and told her sister to call grandfather crane. Crane came, laid an ear next to Cinnamon bear's stomach and said "this is a very serious matter, it sounds as though you have a human being inside you".

Thinking that he was mocking her, Cinnamon bear angrily caught up some ashes and threw them in his face.

They scattered all over him. So Crane, heretofore black, became grey; and he has remained grey to this day.

Now he laid his nose to Cinnamon bear and sniffed; but the young man reached out and grabbed the crane's nose. Crane screamed and flapped his wings, as cranes are accustomed to flap them today. The young man maintained his grip until crane's nose had stretched into a long beak, then he suddenly let go and Cinnamon bear went sprawling back. Sadly, crane picked himself up and went away.

When the young man returned home after his adventures, he was marvelously handsome and the young maiden was fascinated by his changed face. He told her that he had gone to see the spirit woman. The maiden set off on the same path the young man took to find the face changer. She barged in on the face changer, but the old woman sensed her coming and had hid all the faces.

The young maiden asked if she could have a more beautiful face than the one she currently had, and the old spirit woman agreed to help. But the new face the spirit woman put on the maiden was terribly lopsided. The maiden ran out the door with her new face, not even thanking the old woman, she ran to the young man and asked what he thought of her new face. He replied that the new face was dreadful and told her to leave him.

The maiden was forever left with the dreadful face, as she could never again find her way to the path that led to the house of the old spirit woman that changed faces.



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Hiháwt [heewahwt] Pacific Water Shrew



Water shrew was playing by a creek with his siblings, spring was turning to summer and the leaves of the skunk cabbage were getting big, and the smell was growing stronger.



Water shrew's sister stepped on a maple seedling that was budding from the previous year's seed, she shrieked in pain and began to cry. Water shrew brother ran to her side and picked up her little foot to examine it. Forest snail was crawling past and grew curious about the cause of the shrieking sound and went to investigate.

Sister shrew had been poked by a fuzzy golden hair that stuck out from the winged maple seed. Brother shrew was looking for it while sister was holding her foot, when Forest snail arrived next to her.

Looking up at sister shrew, forest snail asked what had happened. Sister shrew took a deep breath from her sobbing and explained that she was running along a wet log to keep up to her brother, when she slipped and her foot landed on a maple seedling. She had one of the hairs from the seedling in her foot and it hurt.

Forest snail looked back at the log sister shrew had fallen off of, and then at the slow quiet creek that the log laid over. Forest snail looked back at sister shrew, and back at the creek. When Forest snail spoke, sister shrew heard the concern in his voice, "do you often fall off of logs when crossing creeks my girl?" To this sister replied that she did, and all her siblings did for they had poor eyesight. Forest snail wanted to help. He asked sister shrew if she knew any other ways to cross the water. She explained that her family knew how to hold their breath and dive underwater, but the only way they crossed the top of the water was to run on sticks and logs. Snail slowly nodded his head, and told the shrews he wanted to help. He would go home and pray on a way he could assist them both.

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Pacific Water Shrew

Stó:lō Legend

Brother shrew noticed a rash on forest snail's sides, when he pointed to it and asked forest snail what it was, snail didn't know. Brother asked if it was itchy, and snail nodded. Brother asked if the rash ever went away and snail shook his head. So brother offered snail some of his alder bark and told forest snail to make a tea and drink the tea, the tea would make the rash disappear.



That night forest snail drank the alder bark tea, and sat quietly praying on a way to help the shrews. He closed his eyes to rest, in his vision he saw stiff black hairs on the hind feet of the shrews. With them they were able to run quickly across the creek. Snail knew what he had to do.

Before the sun came up following morning, snail made his way back to the log where he had seen the shrews, he quietly entered the home of the shrews and crept up next to the brother who had helped him the day before. Forest snail plucked the fine hairs from his own shell, rubbed them until they became stiff and placed them on the feet of brother shrew, he then turned and did the same for sister shrews feet.

Forest snail left that morning and never returned to the place where he had met the shrews. He was grateful for the medicine brother shrew had shared with him and pleased he had something to share in return. The shrews carried on living nearby the slow quiet creek, and from then on they were able to run swiftly across the water on their hind feet, with the stiff black hairs that forest snail gave them.

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Stó:lō Legend

Tseyí:yex [tsueeyuxh] Pacific Giant Salamander

A young girl was walking on the beach by herself, drawing swirls in the sand with a stick as she went along. She heard someone singing and stopped. The singing was coming from behind her, so she turned and stood looking back at the beach, but she heard nothing, and all she saw were the swirls she had drawn in the sand.

Carrying on down the beach, the girl heard the singing again. This time she called back to the singing without turning. And the singing stopped once more.

When the girl turned and stared back at the beach, she saw that there were gaps between some of the swirls she had drawn, and small hand prints in their place. This puzzled the girl and she walked back along the beach to look closer at the imprints in the sand.

She was sure they were handprints, and followed them into the bushes. As she gently stepped alongside the hand prints she could hear the singing she heard before just ahead of her in the distance. So curious, the girl kept on.



Arriving at a cold swift stream, the girl lost the tracks at the water's edge. She sat down on a soft mossy spot on a log, and sang the song she had been hearing. Out from the water popped a large salamander. It stood perfectly still and smiled, sparkling its big brown eyes at her, it opened its mouth and began to sing the most beautiful song she had ever heard.

Suddenly there was a crashing in the bushes, startled the salamander jumped back in the water. Out from the cedars walked the girl's grandmother. She was harvesting stinging nettle roots for fishing line. She looked at her granddaughter and knew something was up. "My dear grandchild, did I startle you?" The girl nodded her head, glancing quickly back at the water. Her grandmother apologized and reminded to pick some blackberries on her way home to go with dinner.



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Tseyí:yex [tsuyeeyuxh] *Pacific Giant Salamander*



That salamander popped its head out of the water again, but this time it spoke, "I am a girl like you" she said. And the girl leaned closer and smiled into her big brown eyes, she touched the soft smooth skin of the salamander and asked her if she had any clothes. The salamander didn't have any. The girl looked around, thinking such a beautiful creature deserved a beautiful shawl.

She thought of how the salamander led her from the water, and to the mountainside under the tall dark canopy of the forest. The girl loved the sky, she always walked along the river to see the clouds and the distant mountains. She dreamt of running her hands along the mist that pours from tops of the mountains in the early morning.

As she was day dreaming salamander heard her thoughts and saw her vision. She said "I too love the sky and distant mountains, I sing to them to come closer but they never do." The little girl dipped her hand in the water and with her eyes closed she held her hand cupped full of water to the sky, when she lowered her hand to salamander she had a shawl in it. Wrapping salamander, she smiled and smoothed out the wrinkles. She said "now you have a shawl as beautiful as the songs you sing, and the sparkle in your eye."

Salamander peered in the water to see her reflection, the shawl she wore looked just like the clouds in the sky and the mountains in the distance. She felt so beautiful, all she could do was smile. The salamander the girl were friends for years and years, when the girl grew up and married she left behind the salamander, but they always remembered each other.

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