



**Feel like you are being watched...
...you are!!!**

If you have been walking the sandy beaches this past month at Manson's Landing and/or Smelt Bay; you have had the eyes, in this photograph, ...on YOU!!!

Pacific sand lance, (*Ammodytes hexapterus*), have been spawning and are now hatching, IN the sand and pebble beaches on Cortes Island!!

Pacific sand lance (PSL) spawn IN the sand at the highest reaches of the intertidal (10'-14' tidal range) over the winter months; hatching occurs ~30 days after spawning.

This small (6-8" long) schooling fish is a critical component of the marine ecosystem, providing forage, AKA food, for some 45 species of fish, 40 species of seabirds and 12 species of marine mammals!!!

Forage fish provide the critical linkage in the marine food web between the lower and higher trophic levels.

Friends of Cortes Island (FOCI) was invited to participate in a coastal initiative to document forage fish spawning activity from Victoria north to Campbell River. Project Watershed Society, based in Courtenay, coordinates the initiative from Deep Bay north to Campbell River and into the Islands. Four Cortes Islanders joined Project Watershed Society, in Comox in October, for field training and were sent home with all the field equipment and data sheets ready to fill out! We initiated sampling at Manson's Landing on Nov. 4 and have been sampling there every week since. We positively documented the beginning of egg laying the first week of November and, at our last sampling December 7, we documented our first hatchlings!!

Most exciting... is the microscopic identification of PSL eggs under the microscope! The eggs are just 0.6 – 0.8 mm in diameter, so we work at 120X magnification to locate them. PSL eggs are readily identifiable as they attach to multiple sand grains. See the photos attached below; photo kudos to Arlene Tompkins and Christian Gronau. The ECOLab at Cortes Wild! is our center for lab operations with 3 stereoscopes ready to go; join the lab team for the best treasure hunt of the season!!!
**Note that Cortes Wild! & the ECOLab will be open from 11-3 this Sat., Dec. 14 and we will have PSL eggs for you to view, under the microscopes.

Local ecological knowledge provided by Mike Manson and Bruce Ellingsen, told of harvests of forage fish from Cortes beaches in the early 1900's – 1950's. The oldtimers referred to these fish as... sweevies. Accordingly, we have named the Cortes Island forage fish team... Team Sweevy!!!

You too, can become a volunteer member of Team Sweevy; just call Sabina @ 6467. We will continue our sampling through the end of January 2020, so come on out to learn all about sweevies first hand. Sincere thanks to all our volunteers to date!!!

And... for those of you walking the beaches, remember to bend down and send some LOVE to the wee ones underfoot!!!