

Invasive English Holly in Metchosin

April 17, 2018

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English Holly

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English holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is grown for its bright red berries and spiny, dark green evergreen foliage. A large shrub or small tree, English holly has become a serious invasive because of its adaptability to grow in shade or sun, and the ease with which its seeds are spread by birds. Seedlings are now commonly found in mixed deciduous and coniferous forests around the south coast, along the edges of wetlands and especially near residential areas.

English holly grows rapidly 7 to 10 m tall, casting deep shade that deprives native plants of light. Its roots effectively out-compete many native species for nutrients and water; it is a notorious water hog, thus preventing native plants from obtaining sufficient water. It can grow from seed (in berries) and vegetatively.

Leaves are thick, glossy, dark green and wavy, and 1–3 inches long, appearing alternately. They have sharp, stout spines along the edges, although leaves may be smooth on older branches. Flowers are whitish, sweetly scented and inconspicuous. Female trees produce bunches of red, yellow or orange berries in winter that are poisonous to people but not to birds.

It is still grown commercially and commonly used in decorations and floral arrangements as well as in landscapes. A few native and ornamental alternatives to plant instead of English holly include: Holly-leaved Osmanthus; Red Elderberry; Meserve Hollies; Tall Mahonia; and San Jose Holly. Read more about these alternatives in the *Grow Me Instead* booklet for BC.

<https://bcinvasives.ca/invasive-species/identify/invasive-plants/english-holly/>

Introduction

My wife Brenda and I have lived in Metchosin for 30 years (I guess that makes us newcomers) and we have been hiking casually since we first moved to the area. But now that we are “empty-nesters,” we have been hiking five to six times per week in the local Metchosin parks and Sooke Hills for approximately the past 10 years.

Over that period of time, we have become more and more interested in, and more and more aware of, the native plant species of the area. Through this process, we have also become more aware of the invasive species of the area.

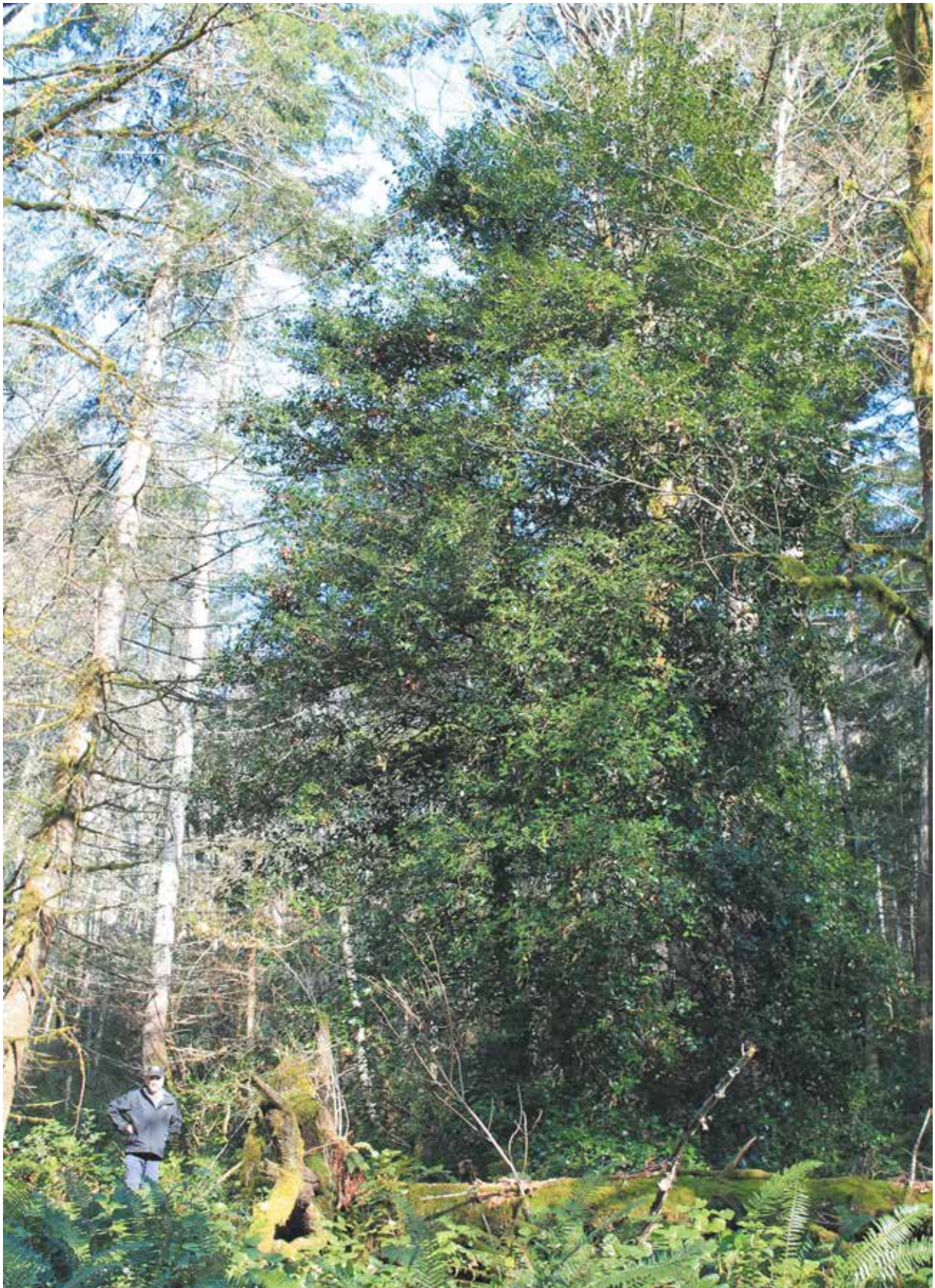
Over the past several years we have paid increasing attention to English holly and based on observations made throughout Metchosin and other parts of the CRD, such as Thetis Lake, we feel that we can demonstrate that holly in our area appears to have hit a maturity in its life-cycle where it is in the process of multiplying dramatically and expanding its territory.

The past seven years or so, Brenda and I have spent many hours pulling and cutting holly in the parks and have had very good success with the smaller plants. The resprouting rate has not been as disappointing as I thought it might be. However, the number of mature, berry-producing trees has grown significantly over the past several years which has led to an alarming density of young holly sprouts in several places throughout the district including Metchosin Parks. We believe that if significant action isn't taken to control the spread of holly it has the potential to become a significantly larger problem than Scottish broom and in several places already is. Scottish broom habitat makes up a significantly smaller percentage of the local habitat in comparison to the habitat English holly thrives in and is quickly spreading in to.

A bit of good news is English holly is not a species that will spread significantly overnight, it takes several years to reach berry-producing maturity. I believe this fact, if we take the long-term view, will allow us the time we need to get it under control.



The intersection of the Galloping Goose Trail and Rocky Point Road: feral English holly on both sides of the Galloping Goose Trail. Unfortunately, English holly thrives in riparian areas. Many of Metchosins riparian areas are already becoming infested.



There are actually two large hollies in this picture, the tallest of the two is approximately 40-feet-tall. This photo was taken from the Cougar Ridge trail. I believe at least one of these trees is a female and has been producing berries. There are several large trees in this area.



Above are two images of young sprouts off the Cougar Ridge Trail not far from the Galloping Goose Trail. They were taken 50–60 yards off the trail in to the bush in what I believe is Metchosin Park land. The bottom image: arrows indicate at least 9 holly sprouts in a very small area, this density of sprouts is quite common. These must have come from berries.



In this image I am standing at the base of a large holly tree that is on the edge of a riparian area between the Cougar Ridge Trail and the Galloping Goose Trail. There are several other trees about this size within 30 yards of this one and there are dozens of young sprouts within 50 yards of this tree. (Courtesy of Art Brendan).

Useful links

VANCOUVER / LOWER MAINLAND

- English Holly Herbicide Treatment Study, March 2013. http://www.earthcorps.org/ftp/ECScience/Projects/Holly_Research/Holly_Treatment_Study_Report_2013.pdf
- Evergreen -- Invasive Plant Profile. <https://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/Invasive-Plant-Profile-English-Holly.pdf>
- Invasive Species Council of British Columbia. <https://bcinvasives.ca/resources/photo-gallery/english-holly>
- Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council. http://www.ssisc.info/home/english_holly
- UBC—Comparing herbicide application methods for controlling *Ilex aquifolium* (English holly) in Pacific Spirit Regional Park. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/undergraduateresearch/52966/items/1.0347237>

VANCOUVER ISLAND / GULF ISLANDS

- Islands Trust Funds. <http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/initiatives/privateconservation/land-stewardship/invasive-species/english-holly.aspx>
- Salt Spring Island Conservancy. <http://saltspringconservancy.ca/english-holly/>
- Nanaimo
Controlling Invasive Plants: Information and Process. Package https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/services/home-and-property/invasive_plants.pdf
- Greater Victoria
District of Saanich. <http://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/Environment/Invasive%20Plants%20Booklet%202015%20web.pdf>
- Friends of North Saanich Parks. <http://fnsp.ca/page3.html>
- Invasive Species Management: Education through Restoration at Camp Thunderbird. https://www.uvic.ca/socialsciences/environmental/assets/docs/course341/Invasive_Species_Management-Camp_Thunderbird_Fall2013.pdf

WASHINGTON STATE

- Symposium on English holly in Pacific Northwest Forests*, <https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/weeds/EventFlyers/Holly-symposium-2014-meeting-summary.pdf>
- Invasive English holly in Clear-Cut and Forest Units in Western Washington Managed Forest. <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/35586>
- Washington State. <https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weeds/english-holly>