

# MUSKRATE EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
FEBRUARY 2007 NEWSLETTER





The newsletter for the:  
Williams Lake Field Naturalists  
1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC, V2G 5K5

**Membership fees:** Family (\$27) or single (\$22) memberships can be mailed to the above address. Please include your address and phone number with your membership fee. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail [Fred\\_McMechan@telus.net](mailto:Fred_McMechan@telus.net)

**Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists:** president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Kris Andrews, treasurer Nola Daintith and directors Ordell Steen, Anna Roberts, Rob Higgins, Rick Dawson and Cathy Koot

**Editors:** If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the Muskrat please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3636) or e-mail [simsj@telus.net](mailto:simsj@telus.net)

### **AGM - Williams Lake Field Naturalists**

Come in out of the **chilly** night, join your friends in the Scout Island Nature Centre for some **chili** during the pot luck supper and following the AGM meeting enjoy a **Chile** Slide show. The AGM of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists will be held on **Friday, March 23**, at the Scout Island Nature House. The outline of events will be as follows:

- there will be a potluck supper starting at 6 pm
- the business meeting, the AGM, will start after the dinner and cleanup, approximately 7:15 to 7:30
- the program will start after the business meeting and will feature two journeys to Chile. A description of each is given below.

The election of officers for the executive will be held during the AGM. Positions on the executive are president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, 5 directors.

The program will have two parts:

- 1) Kris Andrews will show photos of her trip to Chile from Terra del Fuego in the south to Arica in the north. There will be photos of birds, flowers and landscapes.
- 2) Sue Hemphill, Jurgen Hornburg and Anna Roberts will share their experiences on their 2005 trip to Chile where they climbed mountains and looked at alpine flowers.

We encourage you take part in this important club event.



**Sue & Jurgen in the Chilean Andes**

## Scout Island Nature Centre 2007 Spring Banquet

The 2007 Spring Banquet will be on Friday, April 13 at St. Andrew's United Church Hall. The featured speaker will be Chris Harris, well known Cariboo-Chilcotin outdoor photographer and guide. His presentation will include imagery in his most recent book "The Bowron Lakes: A Lifetime Journey". Chris will relate stories of his experiences during more than 30 years and 100 trips exploring, photographing, and guiding in the Bowron Lakes circuit. His imagery will show spectacular landscapes, lakes, wildlife, plants, and people through the eyes of a professional photographer and an interpreter of nature. Chris will also take us into his own personal journey of coming to know and deeply care for this spectacular wilderness area and the life within it. His compelling imagery, stories, and insights will allow us to share with him some of this journey.



**Bowron Lakes**

The banquet will begin at 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:00. Tickets are \$30.00 for adults and \$15.00 for those under 16 years of age. Tickets will be available at the Open Book or from any member of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

## Bluebird Routes

It won't be long before the snow melts from Becher's Prairie. As soon as the snow goes, is a good time to check nestboxes for any needed repairs and a clean out of the old nest from last year. Some bluebirds return by the 3rd week of March and start looking for a nest site early. More nestboxes are being made, if a replacement is needed. If you are putting out slot boxes please try to pair them with a hole box and monitor the use of the different box styles by swallows and bluebirds.



## Scout Island Marsh Nest Boxes

The nestboxes on posts in Scout Island Marsh were checked recently to find that Barrow's Goldeneyes, a Wood Duck, and a Hooded Merganser had all used these boxes last spring. A dump of 18 Goldeneye eggs was found in one box. Two more duck boxes have been added to the marsh and Tree Swallow boxes have been put on all of the posts.



## Canadian Nature Network

Canadian Nature Network meeting with Sarah Weaver on Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, in the Scout Island Nature House. It will start at 9 am. Members are welcome to participate. For more details refer to the January 2007 Muskrat or call Fred at 392-7680

## Thanks to Connie and Leo

A big thanks goes out to Leo and Connie for the program on their interesting trip to Scotland.

## Scout Island Nature Centre News

We have really enjoyed our **Katimavik** volunteer, Mathieu Malo Rondeau, for the last three months and were sorry to see him go. He built cabinets for the Nature House, painted murals, kept the creatures fed and lots more. Jurgen and I and the Groenenburgs also had the pleasure of billeting him. He was full of energy and interested in everything. If you would like to have one of these interesting young people in your home for 1-2 weeks, consider billeting for the next session. We need a billet family for March 22 (evening) until April 6. Let Sue know if you are interested. Thank-you to those that wrote our MLA urging the government to continue this program. They are continuing it for at least one more year and said it was because of the letters they received.

## New in the Library

Interactive Plant Keys and Color Photos for BC—A CD that you can use to identify plants.  
Encyclopedia of North American Wildflowers—a beautiful book donated by George and Gloria Atamanenko in memory of Winifred Bennie.

Volunteers Jurgen Hornburg, Sam Rivera, and Matheau have been working hard on the structure for the new Forest to Water tanks. These three tanks will be connected so that amphibians in the display can move freely from land to marsh to deep water and help to demonstrate the connectivity between these habitats. We hope that they will be ready in time for Spring Break Program for Children. Ian Higgins will be helping run this program.

## Spring At Scout Island Nature Centre Nature Exploring for Ages 6-13

March 20- 22 12-4 p.m. A Different Program Each Day

Learn about the birds flying in from the south, dip into the marsh that is waking up, feed the toads, spot the otter and the fox, and choose a secret spot for you. We will be outdoors as much as possible actively exploring.

Take part one, two, or all three days. The cost is \$15 a day Call 398 8532 to register

## Conservation News

Mountain Caribou are again in the news. The government's Species at Risk Coordination Office (SARCO) recently did a public presentation in Williams Lake on their plan for protecting this red listed species. They need to hear from people in our region that we want the Caribou herds in our mountains to be self-sustaining as the **science team** recommended. This requires snowmobile restrictions and careful monitoring of modified harvesting when it starts again. Further information is below from the Mountain Caribou Project ([www.mountaincaribou.ca](http://www.mountaincaribou.ca)). The SARCO draft recovery plan is proposing a set of herd-specific options which are less than the **science team** believes will be necessary to fully recover mountain caribou. Rather than protecting sufficient critical habitat to ensure full recovery, the plan would rely heavily on predator control and alternative prey management (moose, deer and elk). Wolves, cougars and bears would carry the burden for caribou recovery instead of timber companies and heli-ski operators. Timber companies are already lobbying for minimum impacts to "timber supply."

We must push the government to choose full recovery, which would require protecting mountain caribou habitat, including connectivity between the herds. Please write a letter to the Premier and copy it to SARCO. More information is on the website if you need it to draft your letter, but your letter doesn't need to be long, 3 sentences let's them know what you think. *Let there be caribou in the Cariboo!*

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### **Premier:**

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## **Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area**      February 23, 2007

The Scout Island Marsh remained frozen with only the occasional patch of open water through the early part of February and there was a significant amount of snow cover throughout the valley for most of the month. Perhaps this has been reflected in the absence of some of our common winter species this year. The warmer weather during the past couple of weeks has resulted in the ice melting from the creek though the marsh. This has resulted in some waterfowl returning to the marsh and we expect this to increase significantly during March.

On February 4th it was reported that **Hooded Mergansers** had started to move up the valley and were now found on open patches of water in the Scout Island marsh. On January 28th a couple of **Common Mergansers** were on the Fraser along with 4 or 5 **Common Goldeneyes**. While observing these, a flock of **Bohemian Waxwings** descended onto an ice flow in mid river and drank briefly before flying up near the observers to bait a couple of **Solitaire's** that were trying to defend the last remaining berries on the slope. On February 18th the first **American Coot** was reported back in the Scout Island marsh.

On January 28<sup>th</sup> a **Rough-legged Hawk** was one of the few signs of life on the Farwell Canyon Road. A **Golden Eagle** was found again on the Soda Creek Hill on January 28th. Bev reports that a **Bald Eagle** was picked up On February 9<sup>th</sup> in the McLeese Lake area. It was found on the ground unable to fly. It was taken to the rehab centre where they found its crop to be compacted with a mass of bones. It had gorged itself and was too heavy to fly. It was treated with a lot of water that eventually got the bone mass moving and it was eventually passed. The Eagle was released on February 18<sup>th</sup> and was happy to quickly fly away. This can happen with Eagles when they feed on carrion. They may remain on the kill unable to fly for a couple of days.

A member spotted a **White-tailed Ptarmigan** from the chair lift at Timothy Mountain on last weekend of January.

The **Killdeer** was still found in the Creek Valley on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

Four **Morning Doves** arrived at the Alkali Lake Ranch during the last week of January.

Owls and in particular, Pygmy Owls, seem to be the story of the month. On February 17th the Rose Lake **Great-horned Owl** was heard calling in the distance. Was it on the lookout for another open door into a chicken coup? Sandy spotted four **Pygmy Owls** along Highway 20 on a trip out to Riske Creek early in the last full week of January. Another four were seen on January 28th, one on the Sheep Creek hill, one near Riske Creek and a couple more on either side of the Rudy Johnson bridge. A **Short-eared Owl** was reported sitting on a fence post for most of the morning at about 135 Mile on February 21st. Kris was tracking a **Saw-whet Owl** at the Scout Island marsh at dusk on a couple of occasions at the end of January; both times it avoided her camera lens. Liz sent in this photo of a Saw-whet Owl from Alkali Lake.



Saw-Whet Owl

A pair of **Yellow-shafted Flickers** has been reported at a Chimney Valley feeder. The Cariboo seems to be a transition zone for wintering Yellow-shafted which breed from about Mackenzie north. Many of these Yellow-shafted show signs of hybridization with Red-shafted. There is one in the Commodore Crescent area with red whiskers of the Northern as well as a red nap of the Yellow-shafted. The under wings are a pink colour and don't match either of the species. The Yellow-shafted were recently reported as being more common in the Okanogan this winter.

This photo of the **Pileated Woodpecker** was taken by Kris at Scout Island on January 28th. The Pileated woodpeckers have been foraging in a large dead cottonwood tree. If you look close at the coloured email copy you can see this one is a female. The lower band of dark on the face that begins at the bill is black but on a male it is red.



Female Piliated Woodpecker

Four **Stellar's Jays** and a **Gray Jay** are regular visitors to a Commodore Crescent feeder. The first **Pine Siskin** in several months joined the jays in early February but did not stay. This **Brown Creeper** made regular visits to the area around my Rose Lake feeder but it has not been seen for a couple of weeks. Usually it travels up the trunks of the trees around the feeder looking for bits of sunflower seeds that have been cached by the Nuthatch and Chickadees. Here you can see it holding a small bit of sunflower at the end of its bill as it was feeding on the ground below the feeder. It flew into a fir tree too close to me one afternoon and it remained stationary tucked up against the trunk of the tree where it was almost invisible as it blended in with the tree trunk. It did not move until I left.



Brown Creeper

On January 4<sup>th</sup> a **Varied Thrush** returned to yard near the golf course after being absent for a month.

Kris got this photo of the **Northern Shrike** at Scout Island on January 30<sup>th</sup>.



Northern Shrike

On February 19<sup>th</sup> it was observed that the **Red-winged Blackbirds** at Scout Island were become more vocal as they begin to think about declaring territories.



Pine Grosbeaks

**Pine Grosbeak** Numbers have increased in the Williams Lake Valley. They have been reported frequently around Scout Island. This increase has corresponded to a reduction in numbers in the Rose Lake. As the snow accumulated at this higher elevation the flock size has reduced from as many as 20 birds through to the middle of January to a maximum of only five that are currently visiting the feeder. On February 8th a single **Common Redpoll** was sitting in a birch tree at Rose Lake. It appeared to be traveling with a flock of three Pine Grosbeaks. This is only the second one seen in the area of the feeder this year. They have been very sparse throughout the region this year.

Jim Sims

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**WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS MEMBERSHIP**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Cost: Family membership \$27 \_\_\_\_\_ Single membership \$22 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Membership cheque made out to Williams Lake Field Naturalists. A charitable receipt will be given)

I have included a donation of \_\_\_\_\_ to the Scout Island Nature Centre Fund Raising Campaign  
(Please provide a separate cheque made out to Scout Island Nature Centre)

Please mail completed form and cheque to:  
Williams Lake Field Naturalists - 1305A Borland Road - Williams Lake, BC - V2G 5K5