

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
JANUARY 2008 NEWSLETTER



COME  
EXPLORE  
THE  
NORTHERN  
ROCKIES



WED  
JAN 30  
7PM  
AT THE  
NATURE  
HOUSE



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 Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, 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)

### **Naturalists in the Northern Rockies**

By Cathy Koot

Wednesday, January 30, 7:30 pm Scout Island  
Nature Centre

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area of the Northern Rockies covers 6.4 million hectares of BC's Serengeti. See and hear about highlights from the first annual Muskwa-Kechika Naturalists Camp that was held in the heart of this magnificent wilderness. Photographer Wayne Sawchuk, poet Donna Kane and author/naturalist Ben Gadd were joined by 7 keeners from around the province in August 2007. The party flew in a bush plane from Muncho Lake into camp. There we rustled up the pack horses from a sandbar in the Gataga River and headed for the alpine to see wildlife, plants and rocks galore. Then we settled in for a few days of hiking and paddling around a delightful northern lake. See you there!



### **Pre-Bird Count Evening**

The pre Christmas Bird Count meeting was well attended and very informative. Tips were provided on how to identify our common winter bird species. Phil also demonstrated how he could play bird songs on his Ipod. This can be helpful in identification of species by the song or call. Playing the song with a speaker can also be used to attract some birds. If you are interested in doing something similar with your Ipod you can contact Phil. Thanks Phil for another great evening.

**Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count, Dec 16<sup>th</sup> 2007**

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect for the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count held on December 16<sup>th</sup> was a record 41 participants in the field which somewhat counteracted the weather which wasn't the most cooperative with windy conditions throughout the day making it difficult to hear or see forest birds.

Despite the weather and probably due to the extra field work, the count was quite successful with our second highest bird total and tied for third highest species total. We cannot realistically expect to break any records when Williams Lake freezes over in early December but one particular lagoon at the sewage treatment plant seems to be offering some compensation by offering refuge to a variety of waterfowl including a pair of Wood Ducks, an expanding species which was once considered something of a rarity in the Cariboo.

The two Crossbills species belong to the 'irruptive' forest finches and can be plentiful one year and completely absent the next. Their relative abundance is usually attributed to the cone crop and apparently the cone crop on both Douglas fir preferred by the Red Crossbill, and spruce preferred by the White-winged Crossbill was good this year as both appeared in good numbers.

Bohemian Waxwing numbers had an all time high with over 1600 claimed on the count. It's always difficult to conjure up a number for the large flocks which can populate anywhere from 5 or 6 count territories during the course of the day. However single flocks of well over 2000 birds seen post count give credence to the record number.

There were no new species on the count this year but a single immature Harris's Sparrow at a feeder near the Golf Course is now averaging one appearance per decade. Other species of irregular occurrence were a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches and a pair of Purple Finches at an 11<sup>th</sup> Ave feeder and a Winter Wren occupying a micro habitat beneath the roots of a spruce tree overhanging a small patch of open water in the river valley.

There were no blatant omissions this year although Pygmy Owl could have been expected given the numerous sightings prior to the count, but this species is most often seen perched on the tips of trees which wouldn't have been a particularly hospitable place to be on count day. Sightings of White-crowned Sparrows pre and post count would also indicate that this species was also missed.

Thanks to Fred McMechan for once again hosting the after count get together and participating on the count, along with Anna Roberts, since its inception in 1969. Thanks also to all the counters, both in the field and at feeders, for contributing to the success of the count and providing the data which will serve to add greatly to our understanding of birds wintering in the area. Of course we can't leave out Phil who once again did a superb job of getting all of us out and well organized for the count.

## Results from the 2007 Christmas Bird Count

Wood Duck	2	(0.3)	White-breasted Nuthatch	2	(0.1)
American Wigeon	1	(1.8)	Brown Creeper	1	(2.2)
Mallard	173	(116.8)	Winter Wren	1	(0.3)
Green-winged Teal	4	(5.4)	American Dipper	17	(25.9)
Common Goldeneye	11	(5.9)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	6	(4.2)
Hooded Merganser	3	(7.5)	Townsend's Solitaire	8	(20.4)
Ruffed Grouse	8	(2.9)	American Robin	1	(4.7)
Bald Eagle	6	(11.3)	European Starling	48	(91.2)
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	(0.3)	Bohemian Waxwing	1568	(1006.1)
Red-tailed Hawk	1	(3.0)	Song Sparrow	23	(21.1)
Rough-legged Hawk	1	(1.5)	Harris's Sparrow	1	(0)
Golden Eagle	3	(0.7)	Dark-eyed Junco	100	(61.3)
Merlin	2	(0.3)	Snow Bunting	48	(28.4)
Wilson's Snipe	5	(4.0)	Red-winged Blackbird	25	(22.6)
Rock Pigeon	429	(258.2)	Pine Grosbeak	35	(75.1)
Mourning Dove	11	(11.2)	Purple Finch	2	(0)
N. Saw-whet Owl	cw	(0.1)	House Finch	379	(175.7)
Belted Kingfisher	1	(0.5)	Red Crossbill	43	(15.9)
Downy Woodpecker	28	(16.5)	White-winged Crossbill	85	(0.1)
Hairy Woodpecker	31	(21.8)	Common Redpoll	73	(146.5)
Three-toed Woodpecker	2	(0.2)	Pine Siskin	35	(20.2)
Northern Flicker	32	(27.3)	American Goldfinch	12	(30.5)
Pileated Woodpecker	29	(23.4)	Evening Grosbeak	45	(23.4)
Northern Shrike	4	(3.8)	House Sparrow	134	(165.9)
Gray Jay	12	(16.4)			
Steller's Jay	1	(3.3)	<b>TOTAL Birds</b>	<b>4822</b>	
Black-billed Magpie	8	(10.9)	<b>TOTAL Bird Species</b>	<b>55</b>	
American Crow	307	(510.2)			
Common Raven	354	(277.8)			
Black-capped Chickadee	337	(242.8)			
Mountain Chickadee	264	(149.7)			
Red-breasted Nuthatch	59	(76.8)			

cw = seen during count week

Numbers in parentheses indicate previous 10 year average

## Conservation Strategy Forum

In the last Muskrat it was mentioned that the Conservation Strategy developed by Richard Case and Barb Coupe (with the help of a volunteer committee) was formally accepted by the Cariboo Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition (CCBAC) last November. As a follow up to the June 2006 conservation community forum, there is a second forum being organized to plan how to begin to implement this strategy.

**Conservation Strategy Forum Saturday January 26 2008****Thompson Rivers University Campus**

Bring your passion and expertise to the forum. The day-long forum will be crucial in developing a sustainable future for our region. It's essential that all Community sectors and individuals coordinate planning and actions toward implementing the recommendations of the CCBAC Conservation Strategy. There will be ample opportunity to discuss priority issues as identified by the participants, leading to clear intentions for moving forward on key tasks. The morning's focus will be rural and resource issues. In the afternoon we'll look at urban recommendations. All are welcome, so please forward this information to anyone you think will be interested. Feel free to attend all-day or only those parts that interest you.

**Agenda**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:30 am	Doors open
9:00 am – 9:45 am	Executive Summary of Conservation Strategy-Rob Higgins
9:45 – 10:15 am	Maintaining Ecosystem Processes –Phil Burton
10:15 am – 10:30 am	Break
10:30 am - 10:45 am	Develop Discussion Topics Collectively
10:45 am – 11:45 am	Discussion using “Open Space Concept” Structure and Preparation of Summary for Sharing with Group
11:45 am – 12:30 pm	Sharing of Summaries and Establishment of “Next Steps”
12:30 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	Sustainability Coordinator idea/ Smart Growth, success stories and ideas
1:30 pm – 1:45 pm	Develop Discussion Topics Collectively
1:45 pm – 2:45 pm	Sub-group Discussion using “Open Space Concept” Structure and Preparation of Summary for Sharing with Group
2:45 pm – 3:30 pm	Sharing of Summaries and Establishment of “Next Steps”
3:30 pm	Adjourn to a public gathering place to wind down

**Event is free**, but we need to know numbers to order lunches. **Beverages and snacks will be provided, but please bring your own cup and drinking water if you can.**

**Please register by January 12** Email Jenny Noble [neptune@goldcity.net](mailto:neptune@goldcity.net) or phone 250-747-8535.

Or paper copy to Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society, 197 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave N, Williams Lake, BC V2G 1Z5

Name:

Affiliation (optional)

Phone

Email

Familiarity with the Conservation Strategy's recommendations will be helpful. Printed copies

are available at the public libraries, Scout Island Nature Centre, the CCCS office, and our local MLAs' offices. You can also obtain it on CD through Marg at CCCS 398 7929 or as pdf on the website [www.cconserv.org](http://www.cconserv.org).

### **Scout Island Nature Centre News**

I hope that everyone is enjoying the snow as well as the lengthening days. Jenny and I will be using January to catch up on and organize the administrative details of the Nature Centre. As well, I will be organizing the winter programs that will start in February. They include:

- **Mentoring future biologists:** This program is working on developing a high school course that matches grade 11-12 students with biologists working on research in the area. Right now, the focus is with researchers at the Quesnel Research Centre in Likely. We are working with University of Northern British Columbia and Baker Creek Enhancement Society to get this program up and running for SD 27 and 28 students.
- **Community programs:** These programs are suitable for community groups of all ages (children to adult) and can be booked individually or as a series. Each program is from 2-4 hours long. There will be a charge based on the size of the group and the number of sessions. If you know of a community group (children and adults) that would be interested, please have them contact Sue at 398 8532
- **School programs:** These programs are designed for grades 4-7. Each program is from 2-4 hours long depending on teacher's request (no charge to SD27 classes). There are also lessons adapted to fit the grade 8, 10 or 11 curriculum.

#### **Program Themes**

- Mammals in Winter
- Birds in Winter
- Snow Fun

All of these programs include indoor discussion and observation, walks on the trails, and nature games or crafts. We also offer a program that focuses on the intertidal tank and fresh water tanks with live creatures and is an excellent way to work on invertebrates as well as compare aquatic ecosystems for the high school classes.

### **Elder College Course**

#### **The course—Natural History Sharing Nature With Children**

Using ideas borrowed from Joseph Cornell, David Sobel, Richard Louv, and others we will explore ways to lead children of all ages into nature awareness and appreciation. There will be time to learn about the natural history of our region—not just facts but ways to explore it for further understanding. We will practice techniques that will give participants activities that they can use to help children learn about and experience the joy of nature. Be ready to be active and have fun. Sign up through Elder College, Tuesday January 22 at St Andrew's United Church Hall at 1pm.

**Winter Field Trip--Snow Fun at Moose House****Saturday February 2 Starting at noon**

Sue and Jurgen invite members to come out to their home "Moose House" to play in the snow (or sit inside and watch others in the snow). Ski, snowshoe, sled (bring your own equipment), or walk.

There will be a potluck early supper so bring a dish to share and beverage of your choice (your own cup and plate would help also). For directions or to carpool, call Sue at 398 8532 or 620 3498. If the snow turns useless or the weather seems to be extreme call and make sure it is a go Friday, Feb. 1. If you want to stay overnight, that is fine, they have lots of extra space.

**Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area      January 14, 2008**

Way back on November 25th, before the ice arrived on Williams Lake it was reported that the waterfowl were quickly abandoning the lake. A search from one end to the other on Saturday found 3 Common Loons, a Western and a couple of Horned and Red-necked Grebes. A lone Swan was on the San Jose sandbar and ducks are down to a few Common and Hooded Mergansers, a smattering of Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead and a Gadwall at the bottom of Grebe Drive and a female Greater Scaup on the loafing log at the former weir. A female Shoveler was with a pair of Mallards on the seepage pond in the lower creek valley. On December 2nd a report from Williams Lake produced a few late waterfowl. There were small flocks of Greater and Lesser Scaup and about 25 Common Goldeneye, a few Bufflehead and a couple of Canada Geese on the ice edge. At the east end of the lake were two female Mergansers; one Common and one Red-breasted for probably the first December record. There were no signs of the Loons or Grebe. On January 14<sup>th</sup> three male Common Goldeneye and a pair of Hooded Merganser were on the few patches of recently opened water at the Scout Island Marsh. Quote from Phil "The marsh must make a welcome change from sewage lagoon fare. I refrain from declaring the first sign of spring."

On December 9th we had our first report and only one so far, of a Snowy Owl. It was found along the rail tracks on South Lakeside. On the morning of January 4th a Long-eared Owl was located at Scout Island. It was found roosting on the trail between the boat launch and the viewing tower. It was still there in the afternoon and provided this photo. When disturbed it adopted a rather absurd elongated stick like posture but looks very much like a Short-eared Owl when in flight. Thanks for the photo Phil. On January 14<sup>th</sup> a Pygmy Owl paid a surprise visit to a home near the golf course.

A Northern Flicker flew across Allpress Road at Rose Lake on January 4th. The Flicker does not usually visit the higher elevations in the winter. Perhaps this reflects the mild winter.



On November 25th it was reported that two White-breasted Nuthatches have been coming to a Centennial Avenue feeder. Four days later one was found at an 11th Avenue feeder. Also on November 29th a Harris Sparrow was found at a feeder near the golf course. Both of these birds are rarely seen in Williams Lake.



On December 7th it was reported that the berry trees on 11th avenue were being invaded by very large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings. On January 4th large flocks of over 1500 were reported in town.



On December 30th this Brown-headed Cowbird was found at Kris' feeder near the Nature Centre causeway along with the Red-winged Blackbirds. It was still there On January 4th and was also making visits to the Nature Centre feeder. Cowbirds are quite unusual in winter. If you look close at the email copy you may be able to see a slight brown colour on the head.

Pine Grosbeaks have not been very plentiful this winter. On January 2nd two females were found at a Rose feeder. Since then they have increased to a half dozen and they are seen daily. They have not been accompanied by any males. On November 25th a flock of 18 Red Crossbills were in Douglas Fir above the Rudy Johnson Bridge while a similar sized flock of White-winged Crossbills were in Spruce at the Meldrum Creek Ranch. Both of these species have been seen in the area this year. On December 9th there was another report on crossbills, this time from the river valley. Two flocks of White-winged Crossbills with between 60 and 80 birds each were sending Spruce cones showering to the ground. One group was near the first bridge down the dump road; the second group was at the lower parking lot. It probably indicates a better than average seed crop in the fir trees. Cross-country skiers at Bull Mountain have been reporting crossbills high up in the fir trees. A pair of Common Redpolls accompanied the Pine Grosbeaks to the Rose Lake feeder on January 2nd. Their numbers have been gradually increasing and on January 11th there were close to 30.

Jim Sims

## **Membership Is Due**

If you have not paid your 2008 fees please complete the form on the next page and mail or drop it off at the Nature Centre. Membership fees are due each year on January 1<sup>st</sup>. I apologize for failing to remind you of this in the last Muskrat. Please consider making a donation to Scout Island Nature Centre. Your donation will help with the many programs that are offered by our staff. If you would prefer to obtain an email copy rather than a snail mail **paper** copy please let Jim know at [simsj@telus.net](mailto:simsj@telus.net) . If all of us could do this it sure would make Margaret and my job very easy besides think of the saving in paper

**Welcome to New Members**

A big welcome to our newest members Gwen Phillips, Frank Schroeder and Peggy and Gary Zorn. We look forward to meeting you at one of our upcoming functions.

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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