

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

FEBRUARY 2008 NEWSLETTER

I AM OFF TO HEAR GLEN CHILTON TALK ABOUT
THE PURSES OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND DUCKS!



NO! NO!
IT IS THE
CURSE OF THE
LABRADOR DUCK
AT THE BANQUET
FRIDAY APRIL 18

BEFORE THAT
BE SURE NOT TO MISS
THE BIG CONTEST
"STUMP THE NATURALIST"
AT THE AGM - FRI - APRIL 4

I'LL
BE
THERE





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

For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail 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

Field Trip Planning Meeting

Wednesday March 26th 5:00pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

If you would like to lead a field trip this year or if you have a plan for great outing but don't want to commit to be the leader please attend this meeting. If you can't attend please let Fred (392-7680) or Jim (296-3638) know the details and a couple of possible dates for your outing before the meeting.

Annual General Meeting of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists

Friday April 4th

The AGM will start with a pot luck supper at 6:30 at the Nature Centre. Following a delicious meal there will be a promised very brief business meeting including the election of the executive.

If you would like to run for a position on the executive please let Fred (392-7680) know. Following the meeting we are asking all of you to join us with a fun time of "Stump the Naturalist" contest. We want you to all bring a plant, rock, flower, feather, photo, description,... for the membership to try and identify. Hope to see all of you there.

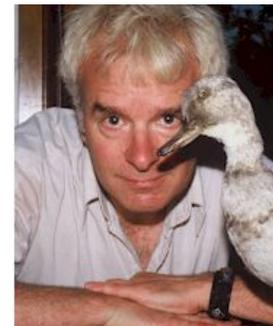
Annual Fund Raising Banquet

Friday April 18th at the United Church

The banquet will begin at 6:30 p.m. with dinner catered by the United Church served 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 in March or from any member of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

Our speaker Dr. Glen Chilton is Associate Professor of Biology at Saint Mary's University College. His research interests involve behavioural ecology, ornithology and cultural evolution.

His talk is titled "**The Curse of the Labrador Duck**". The Labrador Duck bred so far north in Canada that it went extinct almost before anyone noticed the loss of this beautiful sea duck.



Join Dr. Glen Chilton on his epic journey to see all the stuffed Labrador Ducks in the world, to visit all places associated with the Labrador Duck, and to get into as much mischief as he can manage. His quest took him the equivalent of 3.3 times around the world, gave him intimate knowledge of all too many airports, and allowed him to hobnob with eccentric artists and multimillionaire murderers.

Dr. Chilton has written his adventures as a travelogue, *The Curse of the Labrador Duck*.

Plant and Yard Sale Saturday, May 3 at the Scout Island Nature Centre.

Please start planning your donations to the sale, e.g. planting seeds for plants and setting aside goods for the yard sale.

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, both slot and hole, 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 eight nestboxes on posts in Scout Island Marsh were checked recently. Six of the boxes provided homes for Barrow's Goldeneyes. The other two were occupied by Wood Ducks. The broken egg shells that remained in the nest box indicated that all boxes had successful broods. At the same time the eight swallow boxes were checked. Seven had successful broods. It was interesting to note that the swallow boxes did not have any blow fly larvae. The blowfly is a parasite of the young swallows. When it hatches out in the spring it falls down to the ground below the box. In the marsh they would not survive.



Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area February 26, 2008

On the morning of January 20th two **Golden Eagles** were over Farwell Canyon and another 2 were at the Sheep Creek Bluffs. On February 10th two Golden Eagles were south of Alkali Lake in the same area as three or four Bald Eagles and a Shrike.

Kris found the remains, including wings and feet, of what was unmistakably a **Coot** on the ramparts of Fort McMechan at Scout Island on Wednesday. There was speculation as to whether this was a recent immigrant, had succumbed late in the year and remained hidden under the snow, or had survived the winter locally, possibly at the sewage lagoons? The recent arrival theory took back stage until



Kris photographed a live specimen at the Lake outlet on January 17th. So there you have it; like it or not, spring migration is underway.

A couple of weeks ago Kathy Ress from North Lakeside told me of an interesting encounter she had with an Owl. They have a very large compost bin that is about 6 feet square and stands about 4 feet high. It is covered with an opening to provide ventilation. When she went out to put some compost in the bin she was startled when a large bird flew out of the opening. It was an Owl that landed in a nearby tree and rotated its head to watch her. When she left the owl flew back into the bin and remained there for the rest of the day. Perhaps it was attracted to the warm dark shelter complete with a ready supply of mice. Since then Kathy is very careful when she approaches the compost bin. Unfortunately she could not identify the owl but I expect from her description that it was a **Great Horned Owl**. This **Pygmy Owl** was photographed on the wire just north of the Alkali Reserve on February 10th. On January 28th Kathy found a **Barred Owl** in her backyard on Midnight Drive. By time she could find her camera it had departed. On January 20th we had these reports of **Short-eared Owl**.



Steve reported a Short-eared Owl mousing in his Hanceville yard and surrounding open range and Sandy had two Pygmy Owls on Hwy 20 between town and Riske Creek. Otto had another one last January 14th on Chimney Lake Road. Kris has been seeing a **Saw-whet Owl** with some regularity near her feeder and around the Scout Island marsh. She observed the owl catch a vole.

A **White-breasted Nuthatch** has been a regular visitor to a feeder at Eagle Lake (near Tatla). This is the first one recorded at the feeder.

At least six **Dippers** and four **Snipe** were in the Williams Lake Creek near the lower parking lot on Saturday January 26th.

Snow Buntings are remaining later than usual at Williams Lake Airport with a flock of 20 seen several times in mid January. They seemed to be relying on the snow plows to uncover any forage.

The **Brown-headed Cowbird** has still been visiting Kris' birdfeeder along with the **Red-winged Blackbirds**.

On February 10th it was reported that there was some indication that the **Red Crossbills** are beginning to pair up. Nesting can occur very early in the year. On February 17th finches were still plentiful especially Crossbills along the Fraser corridor. Along the West Fraser Road were many small flocks of Red Crossbills interspersed with a few **Siskins**, **Redpolls**, **White-winged Crossbills** and **Pine Grosbeaks**. They were often grouping on the road to pick grit and hinder traffic. A large flock of about 70 **Evening Grosbeaks** were attracted to a Soda Creek Road feeder. At Rose Lake the feeders have been mobbed by Common Redpolls. On February 16th they numbered close to sixty. Prior to that influx the flock was usually about 30. With the warm weather the last few days the large flocks seem to have moved off or find a different food source. A week ago a neighbour described an interesting redpoll encounter. He heard a bird strike his front window so he went to the window to check it out. A small redpoll was lying unconscious

on the ground. A second redpoll joined it and began poking at it with its bill as though it was attempting CPR. He quickly went to get his camera to record this interesting activity but arrived back just in time to see the bird flying away. The unconscious bird was also gone but it was not flying, the healthy bird was carrying it away as it flew across the pasture. Was it taking it away to a more protected spot while it recovered? Other reports of redpolls have been sparse this winter. They have been reported at a 108 feeder but the numbers are declining. There are also some in the Big Lake area as well a few at Pine Valley.

Jim Sims

Conservation Update

The Conservation Strategy Forum was hosted on January 26, 2008 at Thompson Rivers University with over sixty participants. Participants included students, community members, representatives of conservation related organizations, those working within resource based industries, politicians and both university and government researchers. The response to the forum and to the strategy itself was overwhelmingly positive. Many good ideas were exchanged and next steps discussed. The strong suggestion that came from both Phil Burton and Bob Simpson was for people to write in support of the Chief Forester's Future Forest Ecosystem Initiative including asking the government to give budgetary support. The WLFN are sending a letter. If you would like to write one of your own, you can find out more information about this Initiative at www.for.gov.bc.ca/hts/Future_Forests.

Send letters to:

Jim Snetsinger, Chief Forester
Ministry of Forests and Range (executive sponsor)
250-387-1296

P.O. Box 9525 Stn Prov Govt BC V8W 9C3

Jim.Snetsinger@gov.bc.ca

Please contact Jenny Noble neptune@goldcity.net for addresses of more who should receive copies, and be sure to cc to our MLAs Bob.Simpson.mla@leg.bc.ca and Charlie.Wyse.mla@leg.bc.ca

Scout Island Nature Centre Update

Classes have been coming for Fun in the Snow programs. The snow has been great for seeing tracks. We have a great Katimavik volunteer, Maxine Guillemette. She is working on new quizzes and made a great portable watershed that Sue can use with the Salmonids in the Classroom program. In March, she will be helping with the Spring Break program (see below). Right after spring break, we will begin interviewing for summer staff. If you know a university student in the sciences and even better thinking of becoming a teacher, please have them send a resume to shemphill@wlake.com. There will be 2 full time positions for university students May-Aug. \$12/hour. We also will hire a high school student to work weekends in May and June and 30 hours /week in July and Aug. The pay will be \$8 to start. Encourage high school students you know to apply.

Adventure into Spring

Scout Island Nature Centre Nature Exploring for Ages 6-13

March 17-19 9:30-4:30 each day

Spring Break Program that will have children outside exploring and having adventures every day

Take part one, two, or all three days. The cost is \$20 a day

Call 398 8532 to register

Smallmouth Bass in the Cariboo

Scout Island Nature Centre 7:30 March 12

A presentation by Lita Gomez from the BC Ministry of Environment

Smallmouth bass are a popular sport fish, originally from eastern North America. The allure of creating a bass fishery can be tempting, and dozens of illegally-introduced bass populations have recently cropped up across southern BC. Bass can have devastating impacts on naturally-occurring fisheries when introduced outside of their natural range. They aggressively compete with and eat other fish including trout and salmon. Now, smallmouth bass have been found in the Cariboo. The Ministry of Environment has taken a lead role in assessing the risk posed by smallmouth bass to fisheries in the Cariboo. Over 100 bass were caught during the summer of 2007 and the presence of young age classes means that bass have become established and are reproducing. A serious concern is that bass have direct access to the Quesnel River. The Quesnel River is one of the largest tributaries to the middle Fraser River and provides freshwater spawning and rearing habitat for one of BC's largest populations of sockeye, the Horsefly River run. There are also significant runs of chinook, coho (COSEWIC-listed) and pink salmon and important recreational trout populations. These salmon populations are major contributors to First Nations, commercial and recreational fisheries.

We look forward to discussing the current state of the Cariboo bass population and the Ministry's plans to deal with it before it is too late.

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.)

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.) A charitable receipt will be issued for donations.

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