

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

MAY + JUNE 2010 NEWSLETTER





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

Membership fees: Family (\$30), single (\$25) or student (\$10) memberships can be mailed to the above address. Please complete the membership and waiver forms available at the Nature Centre (250) 398-8532, muskrat@midbc.com or the web site below. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail Fred_McMechan@telus.net

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Web Site <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>

Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Bev Frittenburg, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Ordell Steen, 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 (296-3638) or e-mail us at [muskrat\(at\)midbc.com](mailto:muskrat(at)midbc.com)

Traditional Basket Making Workshops

July 30th & 31st at Scout Island Nature Center
Birch Basket Making Workshop Friday, July 30th
Pine Needle Basket Making Workshop Saturday, July 31st.

Taught by Cecelia Derose 9am-3pm at the Scout Island Nature Center. Bring a pair of good comfortable scissors, an interesting branch or piece of red willow to make your basket handle and your lunch. All basket making materials are provided for participants by Cecelia
Call Scout Island Nature Centre and register today, space is limited to 10 participants per day!
250.398.8532 or email mmmforbes@yahoo.ca

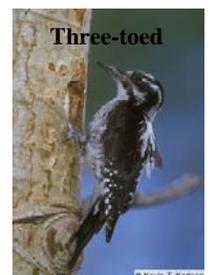
Cost for one day is \$55, both days is \$85

A limited number of bursaries are available

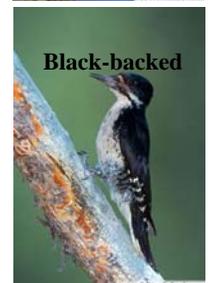
Help with a Sharp Set of Eyes Needed

by: Sharon Henry [shenry\(at\)wlake.com](mailto:shenry(at)wlake.com)

Twice on Sheep Creek hill, going west to the Chilcotin, just below the Moon turnoff road I have seen a (Phil Ranson thinks) three toed woodpecker or it could be a black backed flying across the road in front of me and I could not stop to check it out. The woodpeckers have been stripping the trees in the lower side of the road. If any field naturalists going out that way see one, would they please try and identify it for the atlas square. Sandy Proux and I are trying to find out which one it is. I will keep looking.



Three-toed



Black-backed

Owls of the Boreal Forest

Monday October 4th

John Neville will stop by the Nature Centre on his British Columbia Nature tour. John is an author of many CDs of bird songs that he has recorded in a natural setting. One of his many CDs is "The Beginners Guide to BC Birdsong". Don't miss this opportunity.



Planning for the 2011 BC Nature AGM

by: Fred McMechan

Our club will host the 2011 BC Nature AGM. This event will be held during May 12 – 15, 2011 at TRU, Williams Lake campus. The first meeting to start making plans will take place in the latter part of July. In order to have a notice about this event placed in the 2010 fall edition of the BC nature magazine we need to have this inaugural meeting. But most of the planning will be carried out during the fall months. The schedule of events and the registration procedures will be presented in the winter edition of the magazine, and also on the BC Nature and Williams Lake Field Naturalists websites. If you wish to participate on the planning committee please contact Fred McMechan at 250 392 7680 or email me at fred_mcmechan@telus.net.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

by: Margaret Waring

Thank you to everyone for their help. We had our annual sale on Saturday May 8th and again it was a great success. We sold tomato plants, raspberries and strawberries, flowers, herbs and vegetables, trees, bird houses and feeders, books, clothing and all the treasures you dropped off helped to make the sale successful. We earned \$1278. \$600 is for the bursary we will give to a graduating high school student and the rest goes toward education programs at the Nature Centre. I thank everyone who helped; the tomato growers, the gardeners, the contributors, the pricers, the sellers and the clean up crew and all of you who bought things too! Now I think it is a good time to remind you to start gathering and collecting for next year!

Summer Field Trip Reminders

We are pleased to announce the promised addition of a fall field trip on Saturday September 25th. The trip will be to the Churn Creek area. Details are attached to the end of the newsletter. There are two field trips to the Alpine (Potato Range and Eureka) planned this summer and one evening of batting with Anna at Scout Island. **A reminder that you are to register with the trip leader well in advance of both alpine trips.** Full trip details are included at the end of the newsletter

Bluebird Route Report

By: Jim Sims

This spring when I cleaned out my bluebird boxes I was discouraged to discover that after I had monitored my boxes last summer a bear had damaged about half (30+) of the boxes on my route. It took a second outing to repair or replace the badly damaged boxes. On June 12th I monitored the boxes for 2010 and was again disappointed but this time it was by the low occupation levels. On most years I will have one of the higher occupation rates; usually over 90% of the boxes occupied. This year my rate was only 69% occupied. Both Swallows and Bluebirds were lower

but the Swallow numbers were not as good as the Bluebirds. Is it possible that the birds were reluctant to return to the area following the failure of a large number of nests last year? Has anyone experienced low occupation rates after the loss of a large number of boxes due to predation by bears?

Many of you may have noticed that a bluebird route is set up with two nestboxes on adjacent fence posts located about 200 metres apart. This is done because both species defend a territory with a 100 metre radius from the nest. Therefore the earlier nesting Bluebird will occupy only one of the boxes and the other one will be available for the Swallow. When competition for a box is high the Swallow can become very aggressive. On rare occasions the Swallow has taken over the nest that had been occupied by the Bluebird at times resorting to killing the less aggressive Bluebird in the nestbox similar to what the staff reported below at Scout Island. I have never seen a case where the Bluebird has been the aggressor. This year for the second time I have found Swallows in two adjacent boxes. It is interesting to note that this occurred in the same area as before.

SINC Nestbox Video Cams Report

by: SINC summer staff

Once again the video cams were installed in nesting boxes near the Nature Centre. If you have not stopped by you missed the Barrow's Goldeneye that raised a family in one of the boxes. Her family fledged a week ago and the box is now empty.

The camera in the tree swallow box provided a lot more interest this year. Tree swallows are very protective creatures and actively defend their nests. With lots of tree swallows in the area there is tough competition for boxes, and they can be very aggressive when trying to claim a nest. In early May we had a tree swallow pair begin building a nest in our box. She laid a total of 7 eggs, but during incubation we noticed the nest empty many times, and we could no longer see the eggs. After a couple days of this we saw 4 swallows in the box fighting until one was victorious. Three days and a new nest later, we now have 5 new eggs!

Date of note:

May 19th swallow starting to build a nest in the swallow box

May 25th 6 eggs in the swallow box

May 27th swallow sitting on 7 eggs now

June 11th 4 swallows fighting in nest- 1 victorious

June 14th 1 egg, the other 7 no where to be seen

June 24th 5 eggs, not incubating yet



Barrow's Goldeneye and chicks in SINC nesting box

Scout Island Nature Centre Report June 2010

by: Sue Hemphill

The Nature House sure has been noisy for the last 3 weeks. There are 60 -90 children visiting each day looking for bugs, dipping in the marsh or marveling at the creatures in the sea tank. As I am writing this, there are a lot of squeals coming from outside as a group of grade 4's play

Octopus Tag with Ian. Melina is out looking for bugs with more grade 4's. Monica is at a school leading children on a plant scavenger hunt. The staff developed very interactive lessons and the classes appreciate all of the energy. To date the staff has had "fun" with 1829 students. That doesn't include the 350 that came over four days to dissect fish, learn about the intertidal tank, and release their Chinook salmon to swim to the Fraser River (thank goodness for the rain so that there was enough water in the Williams Lake River). This was all part of the Salmonids in the Classroom program (funding provided by DFO). The staff also had "live" displays set up at the Children's Festival and Howdy Williams Lake Day. On Rivers to Ocean Day, 40 people came to our evening program and learned about the connections between the oceans and rivers. The intertidal tank and releasing the Chinook were the highlights. Last week staff helped Guy (DFO) net fish for the tank. This week Purnima Govindarajulu took us all out to look for amphibians and gave us some great ideas for helping people to observe amphibians and not put extra stress on them. So we have been noisy and busy at the Nature House.

Restoration planting of areas continues. We now have the solar powered pump watering all of the 2009 planted areas. Volunteers are busy replacing some of the trees that suffered over the winter and admiring the trees that are doing well that were planted over the last 4 years. About 400 conifers were sold or given away to help other groups restore areas. The larger ones were kept and are being potted up to larger pots. The goal is to have trees that are at least 1.5 metres tall before we plant them out so that they stand a fighting chance with the tall weeds and grasses. Volunteers are also busy watering and fighting weeds.

Speaking of volunteers, this is the last year we will have Katimavik volunteers to help. The government is making cuts to the Katimavik program. Besides cutting the size of the program (1/3 of the communities including Williams Lake are being dropped), they are asking youth to pay \$550 to enter the program. Please write Dick Harris MP (or phone his office) and copy it to the Honourable James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages letting them know how you feel.

Some ideas to include:

Scout Island Nature Centre has had the great pleasure of working with Katimavik participants since 2004. The volunteer support that Scout Island Nature Centre has received from these youth has been tremendous (1000 hours per year). It is an important component of the volunteer time that is involved in the successful management of the Nature Center. Katimavik participants have planted trees, fixed trails, fought invasive weeds, helped with school programs, painted murals, researched animals and plants, built bird feeders, set up loafing logs for ducks and turtles.... At the same time, we have shared our love of nature and taught them about birds, bugs, plants and more.

Summer Nature Fun Program

398 8532 or scoutisland@midbc.com to register

July 5-August 27

Monday-Friday 9:30-11:30 or 1-3 for Ages 3-8 \$8 per session

Ages 8-13 Mondays 9:30-3pm (\$15) Wednesdays 1-3 (\$8)

Themes for the Week

July 5-9 It's a Leafy World!

July 12-16 Creepy Crawlies

July 19-23 Feathers, Flight and Feet

July 26-30 Our Spinning Planet

August 3-6 Matter and Motion

August 9-13 Skulls and Bones

August 16-20 Who am I? What am I?

Nature Explorers Camp for Ages 7-13 July 26-30

Go deep into a marsh, peek into the lives of the tiniest of creatures, set up experiments, learn survival skills, go on a midnight excursion to listen for owls and bats, and gaze at the stars!

Monday, Tuesday Wednesday 9-4pm

Thursday 1pm- Friday 11am (overnight)

Cost before July 12th: \$100 for the week or \$25/ day

Cost after July 12th: \$125 for the week or \$30/ day

Only 12 spaces—register early

Summer Evening Programs

There will be three evening programs on Tuesdays over the summer. Stay tuned for the schedule.

Amphibian Declines from the Global to the Local

by: Sue Hemphill

On June 21, Purnima Govindarajulu, the provincial herpetologist with B.C. Ministry of Environment, gave a fascinating talk on the phenomenon of global amphibian declines within the context of amphibians in BC, assessing status, threats, and potential conservation measures at Scout Island Nature Centre. This is what I learned from the talk and from the *Guide to Amphibians of British Columbia* that Purnima shared with us. Thirty two percent of the amphibian species are at risk worldwide. The situation in B.C. is equally bleak: 30% of the salamanders and 64% of the frogs and toads are listed as species of concern either federally, provincially, or both. Even the Western Toad, the tiny toads you see each summer as they emerge from ponds by the hundreds, is showing signs of decline in parts of the province that have been studied. There are both global and local reasons for the decline in amphibians and they include:

- Global Change: Climate change (including insect outbreak caused ecosystem change) and emerging infectious disease (including the fungus Bd that has been found around the world –yes B.C. too)
- Industrial Threats: Forestry, Mining, Oil and Gas
- Human Encroachment: Agriculture (pesticide use is part of this), Housing, Recreation (including fish stocking and introduced species) and road mortality

The Cariboo Chilcotin (along with the rest of Northern B.C.) is especially important for the conservation of amphibians as it is not under the same development pressures as southern B.C. We are in a unique position to **monitor and protect** amphibians because our areas appear to support mostly healthy populations. **But we need better understanding of distributions and status of amphibian populations and threats, and you can help with this.**

Purnima presented a guide (available at the Scout Island Nature Centre) that anyone can use to help identify amphibians they see. You can join BC Frogwatch (www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frogwatch/) and report occurrences to help delineate amphibian distributions. The information reported will be entered into the system to help biologist develop a baseline of the numbers of amphibians. This will help biologists understand if there are declines and to plan actions to stop declines. The second part of the effort has to be to **protect amphibians**. We can be part of this also. All northern frogs and most salamanders are semi-aquatic and gather at suitable aquatic habitats for breeding. Wetland drainage or contamination of important breeding sites (which we need to know exist—thus the need for reporting) will reduce the breeding success of amphibians. Introduced fish can also interfere with breeding success. Many amphibians forage in the forest and meadows surrounding breeding sites and these terrestrial habitats are important for the survival of amphibians. Road mortality and pesticide applications also cause a decline in numbers. These are all things that we can have some control over—thinking about habitat protection before we do damage. Protection of habitat rather than restoration.



Finally, do not remove amphibians from their habitat. Most people are fascinated by these creatures. We love to hold them and children love to catch them. This stresses the animals as well as can pass disease between animals. Instead enjoy frogs and salamanders in their habitat – observe don't remove. If you want a close up view, try your binoculars.

Chilanko Marsh Field Trip Report (27th annual bird count)

by: Jim Sims

Unfortunately the very poor weather on the Victoria Day weekend kept most of you too close to the home fires. You will be disappointed to know that you missed one of our better counts. The cool drizzly weather stayed away from the marsh but was visible all around us. Some highlights include the addition of two new bird species; a male Tufted Duck was observed in the southern marsh and a Cassin's Vireo was heard singing as we walked along the trail leading to the southern marsh. We were surrounded by a major migration of Western Tanagers with over a dozen birds visible at one time. The Sharp-tailed Grouse were observed displaying on a Lek again this year. The Red-napped Sapsucker was absent for only the third time. We will usually find the Sapsuckers at several locations around the marsh. They also nest close to my Eagle Lake cabin and they were absent there as well and still are. We found a total of 81 species, well above the count average of 73. If you would like a check list of Chilanko Marsh Birds please let me know (reply to Muskrat email of phone 250-296-3638)

While we are on the topic of the West Chilcotin you may be interested in knowing that the two rare breeding species at Eagle Lake are back again and have nests. The Plovers are back in the area they occupied in 2008 while the Arctic Terns are once again nesting on Tern Island. If you wish to read more about these two rare breeders in our area articles were published in the last edition of "Wildlife Afield", a publication of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies.



Plover on nest 2010

Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area June 25, 2010

Unfortunately Phil has been busy birding and has not been able to prepare a report. If you would like to be a part of his weekly reports on interesting bird sightings around the region please contact him at [ranson1\(at\)telus.net](mailto:ranson1(at)telus.net) . Phil was able to send along a couple of great photos taken by Sandy.



Long-eared Owl fledglings on Moon Rd, Deer Park Ranch.



Rock Wren one of three at Dog Creek Bluffs

Remaining Field Trips (2010)

Potato Range day hike July 24th lead by Jim Sims (296-3638)

Hike to the alpine on a cattle trail on the north end of The Potato Range overlooking Tatlayoko Lake. Please meet at the Community Park on Tatlayoko Lake at 9:00 am sharp on Saturday morning. There will be a short stretch of road that may require high clearance but will not need 4 wheel drive. The hike is on a good cattle trail that leads to alpine pastures. The trail gains over 3000 feet in elevation and is a steady uphill grind. Bring a hearty lunch with extra snacks, good hiking boots, binoculars camera sunglasses and screen as well as rain gear. Walking sticks are a great asset especially for the long trip down. You may want to turn it into a camping weekend. There are lots of recreation campsites in the area including the Tatlayoko recreation site that could be used if you wish to camp out on Friday or Saturday nights. **Due to the difficult nature of this hike we require that you register by phoning Jim or email the Muskrat.**

Thursday Evening Bats at Scout Island Aug. 12th with Anna Roberts (392-5000)

Join Anna for an evening of bat facts and identification. Meet at 8:30 pm at Scout Island Nature House to learn about our local bat species, then at dusk watch and listen to bats as they feed.

Eureka Peak Saturday Aug 7th Sue Hemphill and Jurgen Homburg (398-8532)

Meet at the Horsefly Bridge at 8:00am. Join Sue and Jurgen for a hike into the alpine on the north end of Eureka Peak located in the Cariboo Mountains near the headwaters of the Horsefly River. There will be an elevation gain of close to 1500 feet so be prepared for a healthy hike. This trip is planned to coincide with the peak of the alpine flower season so bring your plant book to help with identification. The steeper East side of the Eureka ridge is home to a large

mountain goat herd and they can often be seen from the top of the ridge. Be sure to pack a hearty lunch and trail mix as well as good rain gear as you are in the rain belt of the Cariboo Mountains. Streams on the hike up as well as the plateau are dependent on snow melt and rain fall so you should bring a water bottle. Good foot wear is imperative and gaiters could be an asset as the vegetation will be very deep and most likely wet. The last part of the drive is over rough logging access roads so high clearance vehicles should be used. Car pooling will be arranged at Horsefly. If you wish you are welcome to camp over Saturday night but your guides will be returning home Saturday evening. **Please phone or email the Muskrat to register so you can be informed if a change must be made.**

Churn Creek Protected Area Saturday September 25 Ordell Steen (398-5017) and Jim Sims (296-3638).

Hike across grasslands of Churn Flats to Churn Creek canyon and Two Cabin Lake. See examples of nearly pristine grasslands with excellent views and remains of historic cabins. About 4 hour hike on relatively gentle terrain with short slopes. We will drive rough public road (best with high clearance vehicles) to nearly Churn Flats, weather permitting. Meet at Nature Centre at 7:00 a.m. for approximately two hour drive to Churn Creek.

Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park October 24th Fred McMechan (392-7680)

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch, water bottle and you binoculars for this annual day long drive and hike into the park. This will be at the peak of the California Big-horned Sheep rut so look forward to seeing the sheep and perhaps you will be lucky and see or hear some head-butting.