

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
SEPTEMBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

JOHN NEVILLE
coming to Williams Lake!
MONDAY OCTOBER 4th.

I'm
practising
La La La





The MUSKRAT EXPRESS

SEPTEMBER 28, 2010

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@midbc.com

Identifying Birds by Sound with John Neville October 4th at 7:30 at Williams Lake Secondary School

Our first naturalist talk of the Fall promises to be a great one. John Neville, well-known to all birders through his excellent CDs on identifying birds by their sounds, will join us on Oct 4 7:30 pm at Williams Lake Secondary School. We've booked the Commons Room as we're expecting this to be an especially popular topic.

John began recording nature sounds in earnest in 1993 after studying at the MacAuley Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell University. As Neville Recording, he has produced a dozen regional sound identification guides on CD. He regularly presents at birding festivals around the world and has made numerous appearances on CBC and PBS. You can listen to these conversations, hear some sample recordings and order CDs on his website www.nevillerecording.com.

Join for this fascinating evening.

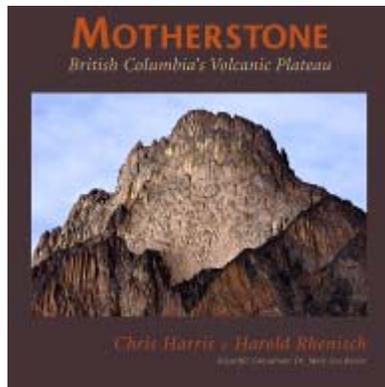


Motherstone – British Columbia’s Volcanic Plateau

By: Ordell Steen

Chris Harris will be showing striking images of volcanic landscapes in the Cariboo-Chilcotin at a public multimedia show on **Wednesday, October 20th** at 7:30 p.m. at Williams Lake Secondary School (commons area). Many of the images were taken from areas few of us get to see. They were taken for his new book

“Motherstone – British Columbia’s Volcanic Plateau”, which will be on sale at the show. Admission to the show is by donation (not required) which will go to the Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area Society, which is sponsoring the show.



As was Chris’ show on grasslands, I know this show on volcanic landscapes will be great and I would like to encourage everyone to attend. The images I have seen are very impressive.

Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park (final field trip)

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.

Update for the 2011 BC Nature AGM/Conference

Planning for the 2011 BC Nature AGM/Conference is underway. The first general meeting was held on July 20. At this meeting Fred McMechan was appointed as the chair of the conference. Topics covered during the meeting included a proposed schedule, committees and responsibilities, a theme and general information on hosting a BC Nature AGM/Conference. The theme will be “Enjoying Nature in the Cariboo Chilcotin”. The next general meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 5, at 5 pm in the Scout Island Nature House. If you are interested in helping to organize this event please attend. If you cannot attend this meeting and wish to assist please contact Fred. The AGM will be held at TRU, Williams Lake Campus, on May 12 to 15, 2011. Most of the indoor activities such as presentations, meetings and the banquet will be held in the gym assembly room or in classrooms. Plans for the outside activities such as early morning birding outings and field trips will be finalized in October. The registration form for this event needs to be completed by November 15 so that this information can be placed in the winter edition of the BC Nature magazine.

For information please contact Fred McMechan at 250 392 7680 or at fred_mcmechan@telus.net

Potato Range Field Trip Report

On July 24th 19 club members enjoyed a grand hike to the top of the potato Range in the scenic Tatlayoko Valley. The wild flowers were abundant and varied and included the wild potato the range is named for. On the top of the ridge we found part of the fossil bed that Fossil Creek is named for. We are already making plans for another hike to the alpine in the Tatla Lake area next summer. Hopefully you can join with us again.



Our lunch time view from the top of the Potato Range

Churn Creek Field Trip Report

On September 24th 15 club members enjoyed a hike under the leadership of Ordell into the Churn Creek Protected Area. After navigating a rough and muddy 4x4 trail, clearing a few windfalls from the road we found ourselves hiking out into the very spectacular grasslands of Churn Flats in the north-west corner of the park. During lunch above a very dry “Two Cabin Lake” Ordell shared with us his knowledge about the history of the cabins. The strong winds made for an exciting drive out as several more and larger trees blocked the road.



Enjoying the views down into the Churn Creek Valley

Indigenous Skills Alive at the Nature House

As you can see from the photo, our pine-needle basket making workshop on July 30 yielded a charming variety of beautiful containers made from natural materials. Cecelia deRose provided the lovely long Ponderosa Pine needles, some of them dyed to warm natural colours, and showed us the simple technique for turning them into useful and decorative baskets. We’re looking forward to tapping her ancient knowledge again to make the traditional birch bark containers that fulfilled so many purposes in lives of the indigenous peoples. Cecelia won’t be available to teach this one until later in the Fall, but we’ll be sure to notify our members when we hear from her.



Baskets Woven During Workshop



Renovations to the Nature House

The renovation of the porch at the Nature House has been completed. This summer the new activity room was used by a host of groups such as children participating in “Nature Fun” activities, people coming to bird watch and tourists wishing to view this part of the Nature Centre. The new elevated viewing platform completed this fall allows visitors a wonderful outside view of the marsh and the wildlife present in this area.

The construction of this new asset is due to many contributors and we wish to thank each for their help. A significant grant from the Garfield Weston Foundation was a major factor. Organizations and businesses who provided financial assistance included Mo O’Hara of Bobb Inn Ranch Construction, Scott Zimonick Construction, Stampede Glass, Cariboo Electric, Mill on the Move, Williams Lake Lions Club and the Williams Lake & District Credit Union. Volunteers who helped with the construction included Jim Sims, Fred McMechan, Roger Hamilton, Ray Hornby, Rick Nelson, Ron Scheck and the father of Mary Forbes.

A Feather (Bird) for Victor’s Hat

By: Jim Sims

This summer my neighbour Victor was out fishing on the far side of Rose Lake. He was trolling a wedding band on one rod and a trout fly on the other when a bird landed on his hat. When it did not immediately fly away he decided to return to my other neighbours dock so they could get a picture of the bird and hopefully identify it. On the way he caught a nice 14 inch rainbow trout and landed it. At the same time a second trout grabbed the fly but it pulled the rod out of the boat before victor could get a hand on it. Through all of the commotion the bird remained unruffled on the top of the hat. Eventually the appropriate pictures were taken. Victor then decided to show off the hat decoration to others who were down by the water enjoying the sunny warm day. The Bonaparte Gull remained perched on the hat shuffling now and again when Victor moved his head so it remained facing into the wind. In all, the Gull adorned the hat for well over an hour.



Victor Stobbe and Friend Fishing on Rose Lake

Scout Island Nature Centre Report September 2010

It was a great summer at the Nature Centre despite all the smoke. There were two Nature Fun programs a day for 3-8 year olds and a program for older children on Mondays all day and Wednesday afternoons, and 523 children went on nature walks, caught bugs and played games. Each program included a walk, games, an experiment or a craft using recycled or natural material. We also provided full morning programs for Botaino Day Camp. This year at Nature Fun, we implemented a new program to encourage waste reduction. Prizes were drawn at the end of each week for children who brought snacks with no garbage (composting was accepted). The program was very successful, and most of the children who attended regularly made sure to pack

no garbage snacks.

Thank-you to Anna and Gina Roberts for once again helping people get up close to bats during one of our summer evening programs. This is always our most popular evening program just as the Bat Cave is the most popular display in the Nature House.

The summer staff was eager to offer a week long nature exploring camp for older children (7-13) so that they could build on what children learned each day. The last week of July found 12 eager explorers hiking, observing, hiding, practicing owl eyes, drawing, and more. The last day included an overnight at my house. For all but one, it was the first time they slept in a tent or climbed down a cliff to play below a water fall. We couldn't have a fire because of the fire ban, but we could make ice cream. I am not sure who had more fun the children or the summer staff. I do know that everyone was very tired by the morning.

It is much quieter now, with the summer staff off to new adventures. Milana and Ian returned to university and Monica is traveling in China. Celine has moved to Vernon and that leaves Jenna taking care of all of the animals. It is great to have one of these energetic young people still available to help.

When you visit the Nature House next, take time to enjoy the new McMechan Activity room and the beautiful paintings that Kathy Steen did for the grasslands display. They complete that display perfectly. Thank-you Kathy!



It is not as easy as it looks to release the sockeye from the net. They are very slippery.

Fall has been delightful, the weather and the programs. Last week, I had great fun with 22 high school students, their teachers, (Nara Riplanger and Laura Storochuk), Roy Argue (DFO), and Christine Braun (a great volunteer) out on the Quesnel and Horsefly Rivers. We spent 2 nights at the Quesnel River Research Centre, and I want to thank the

Research Centre and Rick Holmes for helping to make this program

possible by giving us reduced costs. The first day, we were on Quesnel River early despite the cold and rain trying to net Chinook to harvest eggs and sperm for the Salmonids in the Classroom program. We had no luck as the sockeye were displacing the Chinook (first time this has happened). The students were disappointed but they did get to handle the sockeye.

In the afternoon, we planted trees and collected aquatic invertebrates. That night, all went out side for a fast game of flashlight hide and seek (watching for bears of course). The next day, we traveled to the Horsefly River Spawning Channel. Students were able to count eggs left inside of spawned out females and then do a dissection.



Reese Kowalski is dissecting his very dead sockeye

The day ended perfectly with lunch on the edge of the river watching a bear fishing. The students were exceptional in their energy, interest, and care. They are presently working on projects of their own choosing related to the trip.

Home schoolers have had their first all day program at the Nature Centre. We focused on aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates getting ready for winter. They will be taking part in nature programs every other week. We are offering fall programs now for schools and community groups. As well, Mary will be leading family programs the last Saturday of each month.

Young Naturalists

By: Mary Forbes

September means we are dusting off The Young Naturalists Club for another Season of fun at Scout Island Nature Centre. Our free family events happen the last Saturday of every month, November until May, and then we offer free family events throughout the summer months.

September's event is the last Sunday of the month to celebrate BC River's Day
Sunday September 26th 12 to 2:00 pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

Join us at Scout Island, bring warm clothes and be prepared for rain (just in case). If it does rain we will mostly be doing indoor activities. The day includes games, catching bugs to feed critters in the nature house and discovering why the seasons change for our special "Fall for BC River's Day" event.

Topics coming soon to the Young Naturalist Club include Archaeology in October and Astronomy in November ***events may change due to weather conditions****. Do you have a topic you would like to experience at Scout Island? Write Mary and share your thoughts!

Please register for this free event (contact info below)

BC Rivers Day is a province-wide event, held every year on the last Sunday in September. Established in 1980 and coordinated by the Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC), it has been proclaimed by communities across BC and attracts over 75,000 people to more than 100 events each year. The success of this event in BC has also recently led to the establishment of a "National Rivers Day" - and as part of the UN Water for Life Decade starting in 2005; a new "**World Rivers Day**" will be celebrated each September. This will use BC Rivers Day as a model and concurrent river-related events will take place in a number of different countries.

Contact Leaders: Sue Hemphill & Mary Forbes yncwilliamslake@gmail.com
Or 250.398.8532 (Nature House)

Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area Summer 2010

By: Phil Ranson

Back to business after a smoky busy summer. Atlassing in the Chilcotin provided some significant records for the region. A party from the lower mainland Atlassing from Bella Cooola to Anahim Lake found the first breeding evidence for both Least Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs in the Heckman's Pass area of Tweedsmuir Park. Also new and presumed breeding were multiple singing Gray-cheeked Thrushes in the same area. This provides the first record for this species for our checklist area. But they weren't finished! They also discovered Yellow Rails in an extensive wet meadow north of Anahim Lake. This is quite a range extension from the only other known site in BC which is east of the Rockies in the Peace region.

Spurred on by these sightings, the Wood's expedition set forth on horse back in early July to atlas squares in the Itcha Mountains. At least 2 Gray-cheeked Thrushes were heard at the camp on the first night out. Horses don't make the best platforms for viewing birds but we did manage to confirm breeding for American Golden Plovers when we found at least 7 adult birds and 2 chicks in an alpine meadow. This is probably the most southerly breeding



Itcha White-tailed Ptarmigan



The Wood's Gang

record for this species. Golden-crowned Sparrows as well as Fox Sparrows were quite common in sub-alpine habitat. We didn't spend as much time as we would have liked in the higher alpine areas but Horned Larks and Savannah Sparrows were also quite common. Ilgatchuz next year?

Another new species was also added to the checklist this year although it was spotted in Barkerville in 2000. Guy Monty found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher singing from a tree on Main Street and

although I had heard rumours, it was only recently confirmed with Guy. Shortly thereafter, the second record appeared in the nets at the Tatlayoko Lake banding station (<http://tatlayokobirds.wordpress.com/>) on August 19. Among the other unusual sightings at Tatlayoko were the second Indigo Bunting for the region and an early Gyrfalcon. 3 Vaux's Swifts on Sept 24 extended the latest date for the area by a couple of weeks. Recent rains have flooded the banding area.

Meanwhile back in Williams Lake; Anna had a Red-breasted Sapsucker on S. Lakeside on Sept 22nd. At Scout Island this morning; a Towhee and a White-throated Sparrow at the feeder. Another juvenile White-throated Sparrow in the favoured spot at the well overflow and a

Golden-crowned Sparrow and a Rusty Blackbird on the causeway. Rod Sargent has been keeping a close eye on Pantage Lake on the Blackwater Rd, west of Quesnel, which is proving to be a major migration stopover for shorebirds. This is today's count: "A staggering 300+ juv. Long-billed Dowitchers , 100+ juv. Pectoral Sandpipers , 1 American Bittern , 2 Black-bellied Plovers , 5 Semipalmated Plovers , 17 Horned Larks , 2 Peregrines , 6 Wilson's Snipe , 3 Spruce Grouse , and for the first time , there were no Pelicans".

In support of Phil's article above I thought you might want to see the following article from Bird Studies Canada "Latest News" September 24th 2010

www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/bscnews.html

BC Atlas 'Hotspot'

22 September 2010 – The **British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas** 'hotspot' of the year was undeniably the Chilcotin (region 25), which confirmed breeding of northern boreal/tundra species such as Least Sandpiper, American Golden-Plover, and Lesser Yellowlegs, more than 500km from previously-known breeding ranges. The Yellow Rail (a Species at Risk) also surprised surveyors in two locations 500km southwest of its previously-known range in the Peace (region 41). Other highlights from the area included many Blackpoll Warblers, Grey-cheeked Thrush, and a healthy dose of grizzly bears. Previous atlas surveys have also uncovered breeding Semipalmated Plovers and Arctic Terns.

The Chilcotin region seems to be a bit of the 'north' extending into the south. It is a large area of wildly varying habitats, mostly uninhabited and relatively unexplored – a perfect combination for finding rare species! Birders attending the BC Nature AGM in William's Lake next May should consider a trip into the Chilcotin, to see what rare records await!

Eagle Lake Update

By: Jim Sims

Both Arctic Tern and Semipalmated Plover nested again this year. For the first time we have confirmed the Plover young survived to fledge. All four young were observed shortly after they hatched. These two photos were cropped from the same photo I took on July 24th. There were seven Plovers



Adult Semipalmated Plover



Juvenile Semipalmated Plover

feeding on the shore. It shows characteristics of a juvenile bird; dark bill and faded neck band and head. I expect the 7 Plovers were the 4 young and their parents and another adult. In each of the past three years of observing the Plovers there was always a third adult during the breeding season and I expect it stayed in the area. Unfortunately the Terns did not have the same success. The young were observed by a neighbour shortly after they had fledged and following a week of absence the Terns were not present when they returned. A day later the adults were back with no young, (they would not have been old enough to fledge). The

adults were not seen again.

Articles like the one above from Birds Studies Canada have me very concerned about future disturbances to these two very rare breeding species. Their nest sights are very exposed and susceptible to predation. Both Mew and Bonaparte Gulls nest on the lake and if near are quick to survey the area when the Terns or Plovers are disturbed and giving warning calls. A pair of Bald Eagles frequent a roost on a nearby spruce tree that overlooks Tern Island.

Video Cam Report from Scout Island

Following the successful fledging of the Barrow's Goldeneye young the camera was relocated over top of the Pacific-slope Flycatchers nest that was above the main door into the Nature House. The Cam provided wonderful views of the activities in the nest and we have video of the four eggs the incubation, the newly hatched and later on ready to fledge young flycatchers. It was amazing that the adult and the young remained in the nest until the successful fledging in spite of all of the activity passing through the entrance to the Nature house. We are now looking at relocating the Cam's so we can closely observe the activities at the bird feeders through the Fall and Winter months. If you have not had an opportunity to observe the activity captured by these cameras stop by the Nature House during the breeding season next Spring and make sure the monitor is turned on.



Pacific-slope Flycatcher on nest above Nature House Door

Thanks again to all of you for your interesting contributions. I expect we should be ready for the next newsletter late in October so get working on your new articles!

I should warn you that I am switching to a new computer and Windows 7. I am still using the old email list but have re-built a new one for the new computer. If you miss an October newsletter you could email us by mid November just in case you were missed.