

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
FEBRUARY 2012 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 Website <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>
Scout Island Nature Centre Website <http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca>

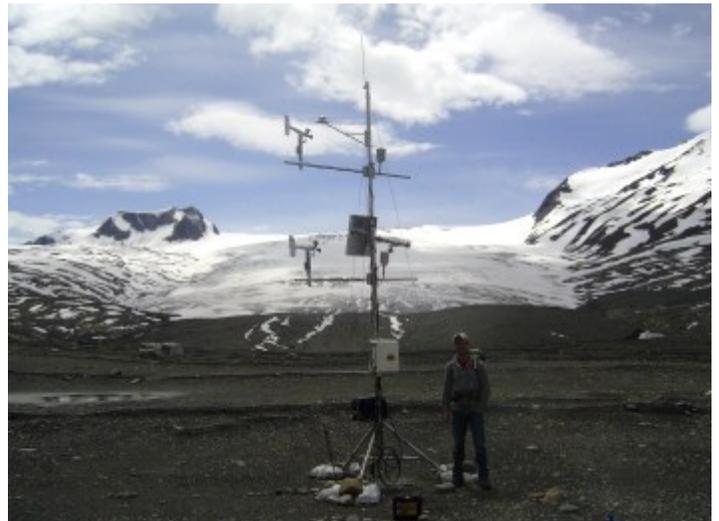
Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Rob Higgins, Rick Dawson and Cathy Koot

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

Climate Change in Northern BC and its Impacts on Water Resources

Presented by: Stephen Déry (*Environmental Science and Engineering Program, UNBC*)
Tuesday March 13th 7:00pm (*Note the earlier than usual start time*)
Scout Island Nature House

Global surface air temperatures have risen by about 0.5°C during the twentieth century, and the temperature increase is expected to be greater this century. The temperature rise in the polar and alpine regions of the Northern Hemisphere is projected to be greater than anywhere else on Earth. This talk will review some of the recent impacts of climate change on air temperature, precipitation and water resources in northern BC. This will be followed by some of the projected trends in these quantities during the 21st century. We will then examine and discuss some of the implications of climate change to Northern BC's environment, including possible consequences on snow accumulation, on the occurrence of hydrological extremes (floods and droughts), and on fauna and flora.



Meteorological station at Castle Creek Glacier in the Cariboo Mountains, about 40 km west of McBride, BC

Annual Field Trip Planning Meeting

Tuesday March 27th - 5:00pm - Scout Island Nature House

If you are planning on leading a trip this year please attend this important meeting. You are also welcome to attend if you would like us to have a trip to one of your favorite places but you don't want to lead the trip. We will try to find a leader for you. If you cannot attend please contact Fred (392-7680) or Jim (296-3638) before the meeting, this will help us prevent date conflicts. We are looking for help with leading or suggestions of children friendly field trips so please help us out if you can,

Annual General Meeting (Williams Lake Field Naturalists)

Friday March 30th - Scout Island Nature House

The evening will begin at 6:00pm with our traditional pot luck supper and social that is always a grand feast. Fred assures us that the AGM portion of the evening will be very short and painless so don't let this keep you from have a great evening. Following the AGM there will be a "Show and Tell" hour of entertainment. Bring along a few of you best slides (on a memory stick?) from a favorite outing, something you picked up on an outing or maybe an interesting story.

Colombia's Diversity through a Biologist's Eyes**Annual Fund Raising Banquet**

Friday April 20th United Church (MacKinnon Hall)

Tickets will be available from Executive members,

The Nature House and The Open Book

Presented by: Dr. Thomas E. Dickinson, PhD

Tom is the Dean of Science at Thompson Rivers

University in Kamloops and his specialty is

ornithology.



Colombia is a country of magnificent beauty and is one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth. This talk will provide a snapshot of Colombia's rich cultural and ecological diversity as it was revealed to me during a brief visit in 2011. My travels centered on what is called the Coffee Triangle—an area bounded by highland rainforests of the Western Andes and the towering peaks of the dry Central Andes. In my talk I will share some insights I got while birding in this area about the agricultural practices that give rise labels such as 'bird-friendly' and 'fair-trade' to the coffee from Colombia and I will show some pictures of spectacular avifauna of the region. The economy of Colombia is and changing rapidly as it changes an essential role is being played by a network of Important Bird Areas and small NGO stewardship groups. There are many ways in which we in North America can help them in their important work.

Alpine Pollinators

An evening program by Anya Ried in the Nature House
Tuesday April 24 Tuesday at 7pm (*Note early start time*)

Anya Reid will be sharing her experiences studying plants and pollinators in the alpine of BC. The focus of this research is the interesting and charismatic cushion plant that forms a dense domed shape. Cushion plants are the best adapted plants for surviving harsh alpine conditions. At the upper limit of plant growth, it is interesting to see what pollinators are there and how they interact. From Cathedral Lake to Pink Mountain for three summers she hiked, measured, filmed, collected, and counted thousands of plants and pollinators. She will be sharing her stories, pictures, and findings.



Anya has recently completed her Master's Degree on pollinators of alpine flowers.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Spring may feel far away but I think it is just around the corner so I hope you are considering a little spring cleaning and finding some treasures to set aside for the yard sale. Instead of storing that great junk for another year let someone else use it and make some money for our bursary at the same time. If you start some seeds for plants for your garden please start a few or....quite a few extra as our bedding plants are very popular. If you enjoy studying your cook books you might find a new recipe to create for a baking table. Buyers look for sport and outdoor items, items related to birds and gardening, camping and kitchen items and more!

Win Bennie, a past member of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists started this sale that is now a traditional event. The purpose is to earn funds to provide a bursary for a student graduating from secondary school and aiming for a career in biology or a related environmental science. Any extra money earned is used for education programs at Scout Island. The date is not yet set but it will be a Saturday morning, the last weekend of April or one of the first two of May. Any ideas or questions? Please contact us at muskratexpress@midbc.com or call 250 398 7724.

Scout Island Nature Centre Report

By: Sue Hemphill

The winter weather has gone from deep cold to spring like conditions, making it a challenge to plan "Snow Fun" activities for the classes that have visited. But we have had snow fun. The tracking has been good and students have been able to find hare tracks (poop and nibbles too), mink tracks, and lots of mice and vole. It helps convince them that there is a lot of live action even when it is cold. Yesterday, they even saw an eagle fly over. What is really fun for me is that classes are booking for a full day and that means we have lots of time to explore outdoors, play games, and do quiet observations.

It is also fry up and feeding time. The home schoolers have enjoyed watching the fry go from shy and hiding behind rocks to up at the top and leaping for food. The students at the 11 schools with tanks have watched the same progression. I visited many of the schools and showed them how to tell if a fry is buttoned up as well as what a watershed is and how it is important to their fry. The classes will be coming to release their fry down the Williams Lake River in late May. Rob Manarin's Biology 11 class dissected some Coho Jacks (males that return to spawn a year early). They did a great job of finding all of the important organs and learning a bit more about how habitat and physiology relate.

February 18, Julianne Trelenberg and her daughter Jessabelle (members of YNC) invited other families to join them at the Nature House for the Great Backyard Bird Count. They watched and recorded birds on the feeders and then built bird feeders.

March 3 is the Science Celebration at TRU from 10:30-4pm. There is a lot of action and a lot of people

(1400 last year). It is put on by Science World and a lot of community groups. Stop by for a visit at the Scout Island Nature Centre table and say hi to Allison and Mary. You might even want to help them out in case they need a break.



Julianne and her bird feeder

I am reading a great book called "Wild Play" by David Sobel. It is exactly about that—Wild Play—letting children go out and play in nature. It reminds me of how great it is to be out doors with my grandchildren or the joy I see on the faces of children that come for Nature Centre programs. But what Jenny and I find is that many parents do not encourage their children to go out into nature unless it is as part of a SINC program. David Louv (Last Child in the Woods) has lots of ideas of why this is (fear, lack of knowledge, do not understand the importance, or don't know how). Jenny and I are trying to design ways to help with the "how". The Young Naturalist Club (YNC) is one way, and we will start including 1-2 field trips that are designed for families this year. We thought it would be a good idea to ask members of the WLFN for their ideas. You do go out in nature and many of you have taken children with you and have grown up children that show the benefits.

Why do you enjoy nature?

Do/Did you take children with you?

What are/were the benefits?

What do you do when you are with children in nature?

Where do you go?

You can write us a note with your ideas or maybe you want to join us as a mentor for families that just need help with the first steps—they could tag along with you when you are out in nature. All this because, "In childhood, they need a big dose of exploring and loving the natural world."—David Sobel.

One family told me—"We don't know where to go?" People mention places but can't give us

good directions, and we don't know what to look for when we get there. So that is another idea—make a trail guide book for the Cariboo Chilcotin region with information about how to get there, simple natural history information, and ways other people with children have enjoyed the area. If you would like to help on that—let us know.

Spring Break is coming and so is the Spring Break Program. Tell any children you know.

Be Wild this Spring Break at Scout Island Nature Centre March 13-15

Nature Exploring and Art in Nature for Ages 6-13

Join us between 9:30 and 3:30 each day

We will be outdoors as much as possible actively exploring and playing.

March 13- Be a Detective—skeletons and tracks

March 14- Owls Hoot and Song Birds Sing

March 15 -Spring is Coming-Really—The plants are telling us

The cost is \$15 a day or \$40 for all three days

Call 398 8532 or shemphill@midbc.com to register

Congratulations Sue Our “*Salmon Hero*”

Sue Hemphill reaches new stewards in Williams Lake



At the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program regional meeting in Quesnel, Sue Hemphill was honoured for her work to engage new stewards in the Williams Lake area.

Sue Hemphill received a *Salmon Hero* award for her tireless work to increase citizen engagement in the watershed and other environmental issues. As well as being an Environmental Educator at Scout Island Nature Centre Sue is a Director of The Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society. Sue has developed education programs and materials that she uses at the Nature Centre. She has been a driving force behind Horsefly River Salmon Festival over the past decade. On peak years on the Horsefly, Sue has organized a school program that brings elementary and high school students from as far away as 100 Mile House to the Horsefly to learn about all aspects of salmon biology and ecology.

Sue has named the Scout Island Nature Centre to receive her cash award, where it will be used for natural history and environmental education programs. Thank-you Sue for your generous donations.

"I love helping people touch, smell, observe and play in nature," says Sue. "I find this type of interaction between people of all ages and nature first brings joy to them and then encourages life-long participation in stewardship and a commitment to ecological

responsibility."

Scout Island

By Chris Hornby

Aanother selection from the writing contest

<p>I often go down to the Island Scout Island, that is</p> <p>Where one finds peace and quiet Amongst the bulrushes and bushes</p> <p>Sometimes you hear a beaver slap his tail, Sometimes you think it is a whale</p> <p>If you listen softly you can hear The whispers of the aspens</p> <p>Blowing in the breeze Of the trees</p> <p>The two deer are watching you They often watch the people go by And I'm sure they say, "Oh my, there</p>	<p>go those people again."</p> <p>Upon the bushes the choke cherries and Saskatoons are steady And sometimes little pieces of wood get caught in the eddy</p> <p>In the fall the leaves are yellow and red And the fall has put all the plants to bed</p> <p>The Canadian geese and other birds are gathering And flying to the south And salmon find their way To the Fraser's mouth</p> <p>Once the snowflakes fall there is a hush all over the Island, Scout Island that is.</p>
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Oh Nuts I'm out of Chocolate Bars!

There are still some walnuts (@\$13.25/lb.) and pistachios (@\$12.25) available from our pre-Christmas fundraiser. They are stored in the freezer, so they're still harvest-fresh. Give us a call at 398-8532 and we'll set some aside for you.

Winter Birds

By Phil Ranson

Occasionally during the post-Christmas birding doldrums, there is something to lift the gloom before the spring migrants start to filter back through. Usually it is owl sightings but this year a Gyr Falcon is being seen with some consistency on the West Fraser Road south of Quesnel. The bird was first reported as an immature Goshawk on the Quesnel CBC on Jan 2 and is still being seen, usually perched on a hydro insulator near Glassford Rd, where it scans for an ever decreasing flock of Mallards which have been feeding on grain in the stubble fields and feedlot. Gyrfalcons (pronunciation is generally accepted as "jur") are quite a rarity in winter and oddly the only 3 sightings in the record books for December and January are all from the Quesnel Christmas Bird Count. The two others, from the 2005 and 2006 counts, were of birds seen in the area of Moffatt Bridge



Gyr Falcon Photo by Steve Smith

over the Fraser River where presumably the local Pigeons were the attraction. There are a handful of local records for late February and March when these large falcons return to the Arctic following the migrating waterfowl.

As for spring, glimmers of light are starting to appear albeit slowly with some of the local wintering birds trying out some territorial songs and the Scout Island Goldfinches looking brighter yellow with the males showing some black feathering on the heads. The patch of open water at Otter Point is enlarging all the time and a Coot appeared briefly, soon followed by Common and Barrow's Goldeneye. Whether these birds are 'true' spring migrants or some movement is occurring from larger open lakes or rivers is uncertain, but the flood gates will soon be opening for another season with large flocks of Canada Geese amassing in the fields along the South Thompson waiting for a break in the weather.

Ruffed Grouse

Researched by Jim Sims



In the last newsletter in my article on tracks I had photos of Ruffed Grouse tracks, unfortunately these photos did not reproduce very well for all of you with paper copies of the Muskrat and I apologise for that. When I was observing these tracks I was reminded of many experiences with Grouse in my travels into the bush of the Cariboo Chilcotin. Many years ago, back when we regularly had heavy snow falls, I recall snowshoeing in the bush out here at Rose Lake. I was making my way through a small opening in the forest. The snow in front of me was deep and soft and completely trackless. All was quiet and the trees were heavily laden with the new fallen snow. Suddenly a grouse burst from the snow less than a metre from where I walked and flew off into a nearby tree leaving me a bit breathless. The Ruffed Grouse is known to dive into the soft snow and remain there overnight even after being completely buried by a new snow storm. This grouse had been buried for a few days as the snowstorm that buried it was at least 2 days early. I recall that it was a very cold time with day temperatures of -30°C. Speaking of snowshoes, did you know that the grouse grows its own set of snowshoes. The toes of Ruffed Grouse grow projections off their sides in winter, making them look like combs. The projections are believed to act as snowshoes to help the grouse walk across snow, something they do very well.

This winter I've been seeing a lot of grouse tracks during my walks and we also have had as many as three of them feeding on cherries from a chock cherry tree beside my house. The Ruffed Grouse populations go through 8 to 11 year cycles of increasing and decreasing numbers. It is thought that the cycles can be attributed to the snowshoe hare cycle. When hare populations are high, predator populations increase too. When the hare numbers go down, the predators must find alternate prey and turn to grouse, decreasing their numbers. Perhaps this is a year with higher Grouse numbers.



Something I miss about the Ruffed Grouse is listening for the males drumming call made each spring as it looks for a mate. Several years ago I lost the ability to hear this frequency of sound, probably due to many years of running a chainsaw without ear protection. Back when I could hear the drumming I tracked down a drumming grouse on my 10 acres. He was using a large log that was lying on the ground. It was obvious that this was his favourite log as the log was covered with his grouse pooh. I made a small blind a few metres from the log and then left to get my camera. He had returned but when I came to the blind he left again. Once I was settled in the blind it was not long before he returned to his perch. He stretched his neck up tall and had a good look around. He took a deep breath and then puffed up his chest. Fanned his tail and started drumming his wings against his chest for me and a mate.

Sometimes we think the grouse are really dumb, they stand in the middle of the road as we approach in a speeding car and only fly at the last second and sometimes will still be standing there after we have past. The grouse is a very large bird and requires a great deal of energy to fly so it seldom does fly and when it does the flights are short bursts of energy. The grouse relies on its cryptic coloration and slow, deliberate walk that makes it virtually invisible in the forest. The grouse to the right was anything but invisible as it was strutting on



the side of the road displaying for a mate on the other side of the road. It never did fly or stop strutting as I took several pictures out the window of the truck. On the other hand this one on the left was nearly invisible and probably thought I couldn't see it. Like the one to the right it also never did fly away and Smedley (my dog) never saw or heard it so it was doing a good job.

The female grouse attracted by the drumming that can be heard at great distances mates with the male and is likely to go off and look for another mate. Once the mating is over the male has nothing else to do with the incubating or rearing of the young. The female will lay her eggs in a nest of leaves and grass on the ground often near a large tree like this one was.



A Big Thanks to all of you who have contributed to another Muskrat Express. We will publish again near the middle of April when we will feature the field trip list for 2012. There are a lot of upcoming important events so please make sure to set the dates aside. And don't forget to visit the Nature Centre and checkout the spring happenings. Thanks also to Rob for his very informative program on fire ants and to Kris for another one of her entertaining slide tours.