

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
FEBRUARY 2013 NEWSLETTER



BANQUET
FRIDAY
APRIL 5th

EVERY ONE
EVERY DAY
PLAY
OUTDOORS
IN NATURE



POTLUCK
+
AGM
FRI MARCH 22 6PM

WED MARCH 6th 7PM
SEA TURTLES



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, muskratexpress@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 muskratexpress@midbc.com

Sea Turtles in Uruguay - Volunteering overseas

Another evening program presented by Roy Argue
March 6th at 7:00pm at Scout Island Nature Centre
(Please note the earlier than usual start time)

For a variety of reasons, Sea Turtles are doing poorly in all of the world's oceans. In Uruguay an organization consisting of passionate locals, fishermen, researchers and foreign volunteers, are attempting to take some of the pressure off local populations. In 2012 Williams Lake resident Roy Argue spent 2 months volunteering with this organization called Karumbe.



Roy will be at Scout Island to share pictures and stories of his time spent volunteering in La Coronilla, Uruguay, 22 km south of the Brazilian border.

Field Trip Planning Meeting

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

Help us plan another year of great field trips. New ideas and leaders are always welcome. If you cannot attend and you wish to lead a trip or have a trip in mind for someone else to lead please contact Jim or Fred before this date.



Martin Lake May 2012 Field Trip

Spring Social and Annual General Meeting

Friday March 22nd 6:00pm at Scout Island Nature centre

The evening will begin with a pot-luck supper starting at 6:00pm. Our pot-lucks are always treats of delicious casseroles, salads, desserts... that are enjoyed by all. The AGM will begin around 7:00pm and Fred promises to keep the business as short as possible. Find out about the Eagle Lake Bagels during the show and tell that will follow the AGM. We invite you to bring along a favourite rock, plant, fossil, slide.... to share with the group. (Please have slides on a memory stick for easy access)

Once again we encourage all of you to attend this very important annual event. Some of our grants do depend on a very good turnout for the AGM. An important part of the AGM is the election of next year's executive. Sue wrote the following when she was describing her experiences working with the executive.

"Lots of work, but it feels good at the end because a lot has been accomplished and there is a lot to show for the efforts. I really enjoy these meetings because I am working with a group of people who are friends sharing a passion for our natural history and willing to work to protect it and share it with others. Besides, there are always Fred's treats to look forward to."

Does it sound interesting to you? Directors are always looking for input and help. Perhaps you want to try being a director or if not a director, perhaps there is a specific topic you want to be part of. Be sure to come to the AGM on March 22 to share ideas."

We are very fortunate to have an executive with a wide variety of expertise and interests and it is important that this continues. If you have the time and the interest to join the executive please contact Fred or discuss it with another executive member.

Annual Scout Island Nature Centre Fund Raising Banquet**"Nurtured by Nature: Why we Need Time Outdoors"**

Friday April 5th at 6:00pm held at St. Andrews United Church Hall

Guest Speaker: Briony Penn

Tickets: Adults \$35 16 and under \$15 available from the open book, Scout Island Nature Centre or from a director.

Ex-Chilcotin cowgirl and naturalist/writer Briony Penn shares her stories and the science on why getting trapped inside has made most of us blue.

Spending more time outside in nature makes us happier and the studies prove what we already knew intuitively—being inside looking at a screen all day is really bad for us and is impacting the life expectancy and quality of life for our children. It is also making the next generation less resilient to the upheaval caused by climate change. Briony brings some of the best success stories from leaders in this field on how to turn this juggernaut around. Supporting but going beyond outdoor schools and youth summer immersion camps to envisioning a restoration economy. A



Having fun outdoors

restoration economy is one where nature is valued properly and where meaningful interesting outdoor work—not just temporary spade-ready grunt work—is once again a choice for our kids.

Briony Penn: PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

- Innovative teacher devoted to interdisciplinary learning and community outreach in geography, environmental studies, ecological restoration and natural history.
- Award-winning broadcaster, columnist and media specialist in natural history, environmental education and issues.
- Award-winning author, artist, cartographer and videographer in environmental education.
- Popular workshop leader in community mapping, media, and natural history
- Naturalist with various ecotourism companies, including Maple Leaf Adventures.
- Founding Director of The Land Conservancy of BC, leaders in developing grassroots conservation models.
- Leader in collaborative community museum design and implementation in both Europe and British Columbia.
- Adjunct assistant professor at the School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria; collaborative projects include coastal sandhill cranes project; currently working on biography of Ian McTaggart Cowan
- Recent publications: Kids Book of Canadian Geography released September, 2008 by Kidscan Books, Toronto. For the Love of Nature, released 2010 by Columbia Institute.

Spring is Coming, Time to Prepare for the Yard Sale in early May

Early reminder: It is time to start thinking and preparing for our annual yard sale. Hoping you will remember to start some extra garden seeds or transplant a few of your favourite house plants and gather some of your outdoor plants when you soon start to garden outdoors. Please keep adding to a big box where you can collect what you do not want or need so it can become someone else's treasure and our fund raiser to support student education.

Notes from the Executive

By: Fred McMechan

This report from the executive provides a brief summary of the business carried out during the February executive meeting.

Williams Lake Field Naturalists:

- 1) We are proceeding with a meeting with the City to consider the construction of a board walkway to cross the small pond on the Cattail Trail in the Williams Lake River Valley.
- 2) The Midterm timber supply report from the BC Government has been released to the public. We may have to address the possibility of the Government wanting to access timber from Old Growth Management Areas, ungulate winter ranges and visually sensitive areas
- 3) We are receiving ongoing information from the Panel of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency on the proposed New Prosperity Mine Project. We expect that the Panel hearings will start in the early spring and with “Interested Party Status” our club will be able to make a submission to the Panel.
- 4) The program on mushrooms by Bill Chapman was very popular – 20 participated in the workshop and 50 were placed on the waiting list. Hopefully Bill will be able to put on additional workshops.

- 5) Plans for our club's AGM were developed. It will be held at the Nature House on March 22. Further information is provided in this newsletter.
- 6) Plans for a meeting to develop the field trip list for this year were made.
- 7) We decided to send a letter of support for the application by the City of Williams Lake and the Williams Lake Indian Band to establish a Community Forest.

Scout Island Nature Centre:

- 1) For the investment account with The Nature Trust, two decisions were made:
We decided to change the name from the "Scout Island Nature Centre Fund" to the "Scout Island Nature Centre Endowment". This name was accepted by The Nature Trust. Secondly a pamphlet will be produced to provide information about this account.
- 2) We are in the process of renewing the land reserve around the Scout Island Nature Centre. This reserve was established in 1984 for a period of 30 years. Hence it will need to be renewed in 2014.
- 3) We are continuing to work on obtaining funds for the energy upgrade for the Nature House. The upgrade involves replacing the old oil furnace with a new heating system and also increasing the insulation in the ceiling
- 4) BC Hydro is planning to install an underground power line at the Nature Centre. We have been consulting with a BC Hydro technician on the details for the construction. We expect that the project will be carried out sometime this year. The underground line will start at Borland Road and will go along the causeway road to the Nature Centre. It will serve the nature house, caretaker's house, block house and the City pump houses.
- 5) A report on the completion of the new footbridge was given. Thank you letters and certificates of appreciation to the engineering firm, Celtic Engineering, and the subcontractors were sent out
- 6) Plans for the Nature Centre fund raising banquet were made. We are fortunate to have Briony Penn as our guest speaker. Details are provided in the newsletter
- 7) We have been working on trying to improve the solar irrigation system which involves the use of the solar panel, the solar pump and the water from the river. We will explore options and have a report for the next meeting.
- 8) Sue Hemphill also gave a report on the educational activities and other issues at the Nature Centre. She generally outlines this news in her own report in the newsletter

Be Wild this Spring Break

March 19-21 at Scout Island Nature Centre

Nature Exploring and Art in Nature for Ages 6-13

Don't sit at home bored and Nature Deprived ---Join us for the Spring Break Program that will have you outside exploring, playing games and having adventures every day. Indoors, nature will guide our art. Join us between 9:30-3:00 each day

The cost is \$15 a day or \$40 for all three days Call 398 8532 or shemphill@midbc.com to register

Scout Island Nature Centre February 2013

By Sue Hemphill

Julianne and I have been having fun with classes out in the snow. The weather has been perfect both for exploring tracks and for sledding (on our bums) and building snow forts. The focus is animal and plants surviving winter but the best way to learn about this is to be out in the snow—and we are. If you enjoy guiding children in nature, why not join us? Julianne and I always need an

extra mentor with classes. Let me know days you are available and I will let you know when we will have a class visiting.

I have been busy visiting all of the classes that are raising salmon. The alevins have become fry and are up and eating. I go to each class to talk about habitat needs, what a watershed is and what each of us can do to help the fry survive in our watersheds. I had the great fun of doing dissections with 4 high school classes. The students really took care cutting apart the salmon and finding each of the organs. It was exciting to see how involved they were in the process.



Is that a stomach or a heart?

We have a new young person helping with care of the Nature House animals and doing art work for us. Some of you may remember when Jamie Crego (she was 12 then) won the T Shirt design contest. We still have some of the shirts she designed. Jamie called to offer her help and I am pleased to have her. Her art skills are wonderful and soon will be highlighted on the front of our salt water tank.

We can feel spring in the air or at least the red winged blackbirds singing outside the Nature House can. Our summer staff (3 are returning from last year and I am busy interviewing for the fourth position) will start in May. But we like to open the Nature House to the public in April. That means we need people to act as hosts Thursday and Friday afternoons (2-5pm) and Saturday and Sunday 1-4pm. If you would like to be a volunteer host, please contact me. It is enjoyable work helping the visitors understand the displays. I would be pleased to train you so that you feel comfortable with what you are doing.

We are waiting to hear from the Western Diversification Community Infrastructure Improvement Fund to find out if we will receive a grant to help pay for the energy upgrades (new furnace and new insulation). If we succeed in getting this grant it will pay for ½ of the costs so we are working on raising the other ½--\$19 000. So far we have raised \$3000. Any donation of \$50 or more earns you a beautiful wooden chickadee (thank-you to Jim for these) to welcome spring with.

If you want to see more action shots of the 2012 fall Salmon Trip, go to the scout island website—school programs page—high school programs—salmon trip 2012. There are some wonderful shots of the students in action.

Great Back Yard Bird Count 2013

By Julianne Trelenburg

The Williams Lake Young Naturalists participated in the Great Back Yard Bird Count on February 16, 2013. The weather was beautiful for a short walk led by birding enthusiast Cathy Koot: 8 species and 47 individual birds were sighted. This is up from 4 species and 21 individual birds sighted last year. Our results will be forwarded to Cornell University for inclusion in their international bird studies.

After the walk we made origami beaks to explore the functions of different beak shapes.



Alexis McCombe, Ella and Timu Kruuz, Wayne Tilford and Jessabelle Atkinson-Trelenberg test out their origami beaks on different food types.

Gyr Falcon: (*Falco ruscicolus*)

Research by Jim Sims

This past winter the Gyr Falcon (pronounce “JER-falcon”) has been reported on the Cariboo-Chilcotin-Birds Google Group (CCBirds) several times along with some great photographs. I thought I would share some information about this falcon that visits our region most winters. These 2 photos were taken by Steve Smith at the Junction of W. Fraser and Glassford Road in Quesnel. This location has been a wintering spot for probably the same bird for the last 2 winters (note the comparison of a juvenile and a first year bird - presumed). The breast of a juvenile will be streaked and more heavily marked than the adult that will have a spotted or barred breast. This location was favoured due to the Mallards which feed in the local grain fields.



Quesnel Gyr Falcon photo by Steve Smith

Last week Phil made a CCBirds report of one on Mission Road: “The falcon was on the light pole in the Mission Road feedlot this afternoon and stayed long enough to be identified as a Gyr Falcon, probably a juvenile. I was wondering what it might be feeding on given there are no ducks or pigeons; until I came upon freshly plucked Short-eared Owl remains on a snow bank on the side of the road.” This was the 3rd one reported from Mission Road this winter.

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The “Cariboo Chilcotin Checklist of Birds” frequency graph describes the Gyr Falcon as occasional (more than 6 sightings but not every year) from late October to late March. In the comments the Checklist describes the Gyr Falcon as a migrant species but more recently it has been a winter resident.

The largest falcon in the world, the Gyr Falcon breeds in arctic and subarctic regions of the northern hemisphere. It preys mostly on large birds, pursuing them in breathtakingly fast and powerful flight. The plumage ranges from almost pure white to very dark brown or black with variable barring or

streaking. The most common form is a gray colour. It has broad pointed wings and a long barred tail. Its preferred prey is Ptarmigan but also feeds on many other bird species and some mammals. Female falcons have been observed caching prey during the breeding season but there is no evidence of this behavior at other times. Breeding sights are often near rivers or coasts. The adults will not build their own nests instead they use a bare rock ledge or occupy old nests of ravens or Golden eagles, often located on cliffs. The winter habitat is similar; at lower latitudes, open country and especially near water. A Gyrfalcon will not fly into trees like the similar and smaller Copper's hawk.



Mission Rd. Gray Morph
Photo by Phil

For hundreds of years the Gyrfalcon has been a precious hunting bird. In falconry the male bird is called a Gyrkin. In medieval times it was known as the Royal bird reserved for kings and queens. I was very seldom seen on the hand of a man of lesser rank. It is the official bird of Canada's North West Territories. If you wish to join Cariboo-Chilcotin-Birds Google Group contact Phil Ranson at ranson1@telus.net

Our View of the Night Sky – March - April 2013.

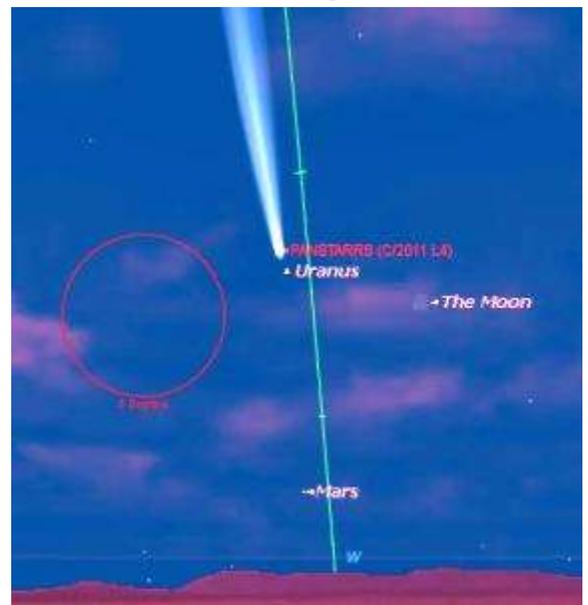
By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Venus is disappearing into the sunrise. Saturn is now visible near midnight low in the south. Jupiter is visible overhead in the early evening in the constellation Taurus and is moving lower to the southwest and west in the later evening.

Comets!

Comet PanSTARRS, only discovered in 2011, will be closest to the earth on March 5th and the sun on March 10th. If it is visible, it will be in view in the evening sky near the sun as the sun sets over the next few months. It may be visible to the naked eye – no one knows yet. Comets are agglomerations of ice and cosmic dust and their reaction to the heat from the sun can vary widely and unpredictably. But if you observe the comet on no other night, be sure to check it out on the evening of March 12-13th. The comet will have just crossed the ecliptic, and will be joined by a slim crescent Moon just over a day old. If you've got binoculars or a telescope, you might just be able to spy the planet Uranus at 6th magnitude less than a degree from the head of the comet on March 12th. (From SkyNews & Universe Today). Find more on Comet PanSTARRS at:



<http://www.universetoday.com/100169/comet-panstarrs-how-to-see-it-in-march-2013/#ixzz2M1IZ4r2T>

Looking west at dusk on the night of March 12th for North American viewers. The red circle shows a 5 degree circle.

- Astronomers measure angular separation of objects in degrees. There are 360 degrees in a circle. And the angular separation of any point on the horizon and the point directly overhead (the zenith)

is 90 degrees. Halfway from the zenith to the horizon is 45 degrees.

• Smaller angles are a little trickier. But your hands and fingers are a remarkably accurate (and convenient) measuring tool. When you hold your hand at arm's length, you can estimate angles like this:

- Stretch your thumb and little finger as far from each other as you can. The span from tip to tip is about 25 degrees
- Do the same with your index finger and little finger. The span is 15 degrees
- Clench your fist at arms length, and hold it with the back of your hand facing you. The width is 10 degrees
- Hold your three middle fingers together; they span about 5 degrees
- The width of your little finger at arms length is 1 degree.

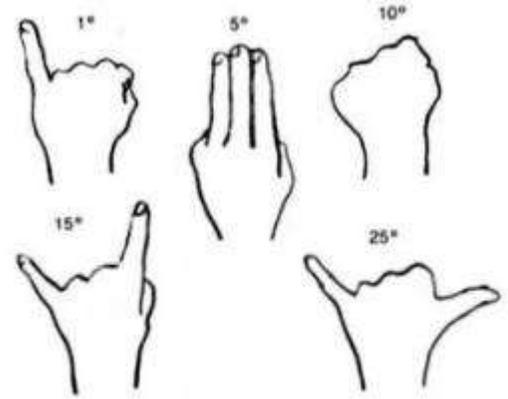
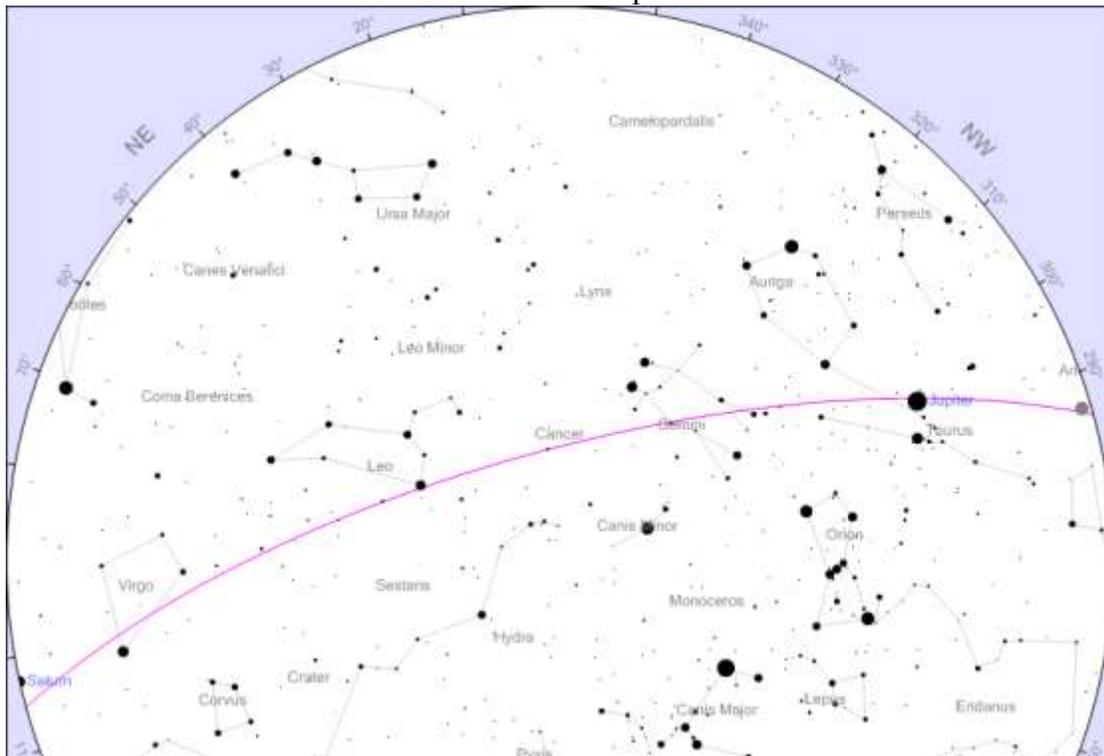


Fig E.
The Common Sky Measurements

March 2013 Star Chart
Set for March 15 at 9:00 p.m. PDT



Courtesy of: www.Heavens-Above.com

Zodiacal Light

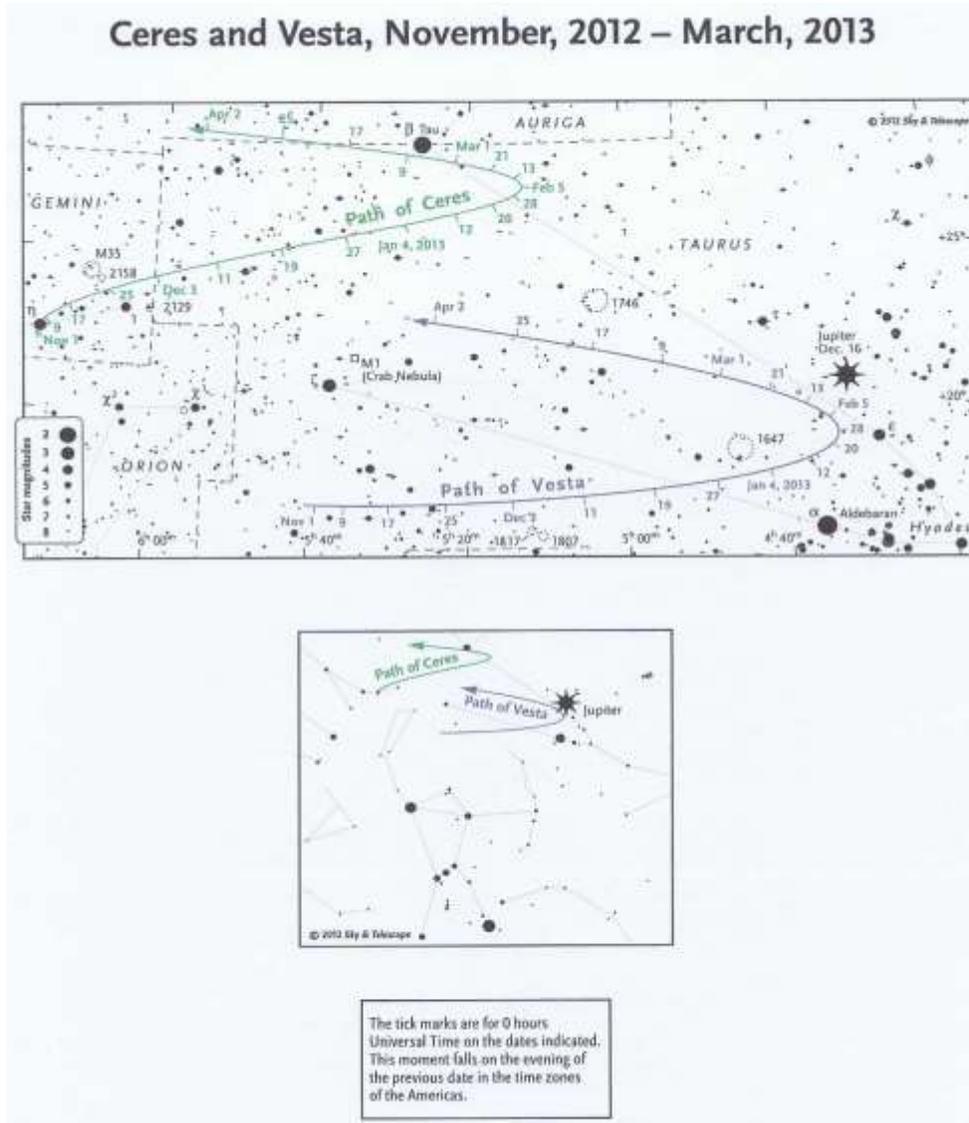
Over the next two weeks the zodiacal light is visible in the west just after sunset. **Zodiacal light** is a faint, roughly triangular, diffuse white glow seen in the night sky that appears to extend up from the vicinity of the Sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. It is best seen just after sunset and before sunrise in spring and autumn when the zodiac is at a steep angle to the horizon. Caused by sunlight scattered by space dust in the zodiacal cloud, it is so faint that either moonlight or light pollution renders it invisible.

Meteor showers

The next forecast meteor shower is the Lyrids on April 22. While not one of the year's strongest showers, and rendered even weaker by strong light from a nearly full Moon, you may see a few meteors per hour emanating from a radiant near the Hercules-Lyra border. This shower puts on a fairly brief performance - one that this year favors observers across North America, especially those on the West Coast.

Asterioids

Asteroids 1 Ceres and 4 Vesta are visible near the constellation Taurus. They are dropping in magnitude but are still visible in binocs. For more info check out: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/observing/objects/asteroids/Ceres-and-Vesta-July-2013-148149915.html>.



Courtesy of: www.skyandtelescope.com

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this issue of the Muskrat Express. A special note of thanks to Margaret for our awesome first ever colour cover. We will be taking a short Spring Break and will publish again during the 2nd or 3rd week of April.