

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

MAY + JUNE 2013 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, 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

The World Wide Nest WEB - studies of cavity nesting birds from Riske Creek to South America and Africa

An Evening program presented by Dr. Cathy Martin from UBC
Scout Island Nature Centre – Monday July 15th at 7:30pm

At least 10% of the ~10,000 bird species and many mammals use tree cavities for nesting or roosting. Kathy Martin's 17 year study of the ecology of cavity-using bird and mammal communities started in Williams Lake in 1995, and today her studies have extended to five continents.



Field Trip Changes

The Voyageur Canoe paddle on Rose Lake scheduled for June 19th has been cancelled for 2013. If you are hoping to participate on the Niut Backpacking trip it is very important that you contact Jim Sims (296-3638 or muskreatexpress@midbc.com) within the next 2 weeks. Before we proceed with further planning we need to know who and how many plan on attending. There is a possibility that the date of the trip will be changed away from the long weekend. If there was interest but you had a conflict with the date please contact Jim. If there is no interest the trip will be cancelled for 2013. Don't forget to participate in our other summer field trips. For dates and descriptions please refer back to the April newsletter or watch out for the email reminders.

Field Trip Reports

Moon Road Bike Ride By: Margaret Waring - Wednesday evening May 8th was a clear warm night and about 12 of us, most with bicycles and including two guests from Nature Vancouver cruised along Moon rode to the base of Doc English Bluff. After a short and steep hike we had views of the Fraser River and benches across. Some went a little further to look at the limestone caves. A Flammulated owl was heard at the bottom of the Bluff on the return hike.

Chilanko Marsh Field By: Jim Sims - On the Victoria Day weekend we enjoyed another successful day of birding at the Chilanko Marsh complex. Over the 24 hour period starting on Friday afternoon we identified a total of 77 bird species. We have now accumulated 30 years of data from the marsh with a total of 157 bird species, and average annual number of 73 species. Highlights included a flock of Red-necked Phalaropes on the pond in Puntzi Ville for

only the 2nd time and a single Greater White-fronted Goose for the 3rd time. Also of note was the absence of a Redhead, a duck that has been observed on 25 of the counts. We noted that the songbirds were very quiet and also seemed to be few and far between. Often only one bird of the species was observed. We also felt that the waterfowl numbers are continuing to decline. The only place we found decent concentrations of waterfowl was on the Puntzi Ville pond. The trip to the new Provincial Park at Patterson Lake was very worthwhile. The views looking across the lake and down the West Branch are worth the trip and if you are in the area this summer consider it as a possible outing for the day.



Patterson Lake Provincial Park

Colpitt Lake by Cathy Koot – On the cold morning of June 1st we encountered 48 species of birds along the marsh, lake and forest edge. Activity was subdued and quiet in the beginning (the cold meant that there were no mosquitoes). As the sun got higher and the air temp rose, activity really picked up. Right at the south end of the lake, where there is extensive sedge marsh and the point at which we turned around to head back, we heard a yellow rail! Peter and Kae tried to catch a glimpse by getting close, but the bird remained elusive, as is their norm. I haven't heard a yellow rail since I lived in Ontario in the early '90s so I wanted to check my recordings to double-check. What we heard matched exactly with the recordings for yellow rail on Dendroica (<http://www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/> a great free bird song/photo reference resource. Pretty neat! There is only one other record of Yellow Rails in the Cariboo Chilcotin when a group of them were found in a marsh near Anahim Lake in 2010.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale 2013

By: Margaret Waring our yard sale CEO

Thanks to all of you, we successfully raised about \$960 this year for our bursary that will soon be given to a local graduating secondary school student who plans to go on to study biology and related sciences. Yard sale planning started with a phone call from Audrey Stromberg who had many valuable treasures that she generously donated. Katharine Van Spall prepared a cash float and on sale day our chief cashiers were Sandra Stuart and Betty Donahue. As well as donating her well known tomato plants Gloria Atamanenko was at the sale taking care of the garden section, sharing her knowledge with our customers. Sue Hempill and Jurgen Homburg, Jenny Noble and others had left plants. Friday night Fred McMechan Rick Dawson, Jim Sims, Connie Hausler, Jenny Noble, Moya and Rick Stokes and some of the Summer student employees helped with set up and pricing. Saturday morning we had a crowd outside the door before we opened the door, waiting to shop, especially for plants. Lorelee Sutton came to help with the sale and was part of the cleanup crew. Rick Dawson, Betty Donahue and Sandra Stuart also did cleaning and final tallying. Thank you very much to all I have mentioned, those I missed and everyone who donated plants and other articles and who went shopping too. Thanks everyone for your contributions to the success of the 2013 sale. I end with my usual reminder: It is never too early to prepare for next year! Please label a box and start gathering!!!!

Notes from the Executive

By: Fred McMechan

This report provides a brief summary of the business carried out during the last two meetings on April 24 and June 3.

A. William Lake Field Naturalists Club business

- 1) New Prosperity Mine Project: We are still waiting for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) to accept the Environmental Impact Statement from Taseko Mines Ltd. After this step happens the CEAA Panel will proceed with planning for the public hearings. Having Interested Party Status we will be able to consider presenting a submission to the Panel during the hearings.
- 2) Guidance was given to Jim Sims, editor, on the length and preparation of the newsletter so that the expenses for the distribution of the newsletter would be acceptable. It is getting expensive to mail it when the number of sheets is large. Generally the newsletter will be limited to 10 pages on 5 sheets.

3) New programs and field trips were discussed and updated. This information is provided in other parts of this newsletter.

B. Scout Island Nature Centre business

- 1) Heating System Upgrade Project: Our application to the federal government to receive funds from Western Economic Development Canada was turned down. We have decided to firstly fund raise for the heating upgrade part and at a later date proceed with fund raising for the insulation upgrade part. We are presently doing a fund raising campaign to help pay for the project. The cost of the heating upgrade system is \$14 750. This week we wrote a letter to the City Council requesting a meeting to discuss the financial situation on this project. The City Council will consider our letter at the council meeting on June 18
- 2) BC Hydro underground line project. We have been in contact with the Environmental Manager for BC Hydro about environmental requests such as seed selection. We have not been informed on the starting date of the project.
- 3) We have been informed by Front Counter BC that the License of Occupation for the Scout Island Nature Centre needs to be renewed. This License allows for the use of five structures on Crown property, including the Otter Point bridge the board walkway at Otter Point, the two dipping docks and the viewing platform along the Bulrush Trail. The License expires in 2014 but as a part of the application process we are required to present a new Management Plan by the end of June, 2013.

Bird Banding in Tatlayoko Valley

By: Peter Shaughnessy

The Nature Conservancy of Canada's Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory will be operating again this year from August 4 to September 29. There are still openings available for one-week stints as a Conservation Volunteer as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Week 1 August 4-11 | Week 2 August 11-18 |
| Week 5 September 1-8 | Week 7 September 15-22 |
| Week 8 September 22-29 | |

Come out and give our bander-in-charge, Avery Bartels, a hand with the project. Our new evening sessions calling in Saw-whet Owls are especially fun. We can accommodate up to two volunteers each week. If anyone is interested in participating please contact Peter Shaughnessy at

peter.shaughnessy@natureconservancy.ca or at 250-476-1170



Ready for banding

Scout Island Nature Centre News

By Sue Hemphill

Summer staff has been working hard for a month now. Thanks to members, Gina Roberts, Cathy Koot, Kris Andrews, and Rob Higgins, they received natural history training that helped them become “experts” for leading school classes.

Laura Ulrich (returning from last year) is a biology student going into her 5th year at Simon Fraser University. Once she completes her undergrad degree, her plan is to become a scientific illustrator, thus combining her loves of science and art. As an aspiring Biology teacher, **Caitlin Langford** looks forward to her second summer at Scout Island full of teaching, bugs, birds, and marsh creatures. She is going into her third year of her Biology degree at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George and plans on becoming a teacher after she finishes her degree. **Paula Laita** is a Spanish Translator and Interpreter just arrived from Northern Spain and doing her PhD in Languages and Intercultural Communication. She loves wildlife and photography and enjoys learning more about the local plants and animals and



Left to right Laura, Caitlin, Paula and Patrick

passing the knowledge to others. **Patrick Newsome** loves to immerse himself within nature and to work with others. He is going into his second year of sciences at the University of British Columbia Okanagan Campus in Kelowna and loves chemistry and biology.

The staff has been able to lead groups using the programs they have become “experts” on. They all had to become experts on Chinook salmon as eleven classes released their Chinook fry in May and June. These classes watched a fish dissection, caught invertebrates in the marsh, got up close to the salt water creatures in the intertidal tank (thank-you to DFO for “buying” new creatures for the tank this spring—everyone loves the sea squirts), and walked in the riparian edge to learn more about the Chinook that they have so carefully raised for 7 months.

There has been good progress on the first part of the new trail and habitat restoration on the north side of the marsh. Working with the Williams Lake Indian Band a trail was cut through the shrubs. Then volunteers worked hard at clearing the trail of glass and other debris. Just last week, 2 sets of stairs were built. The city loaned us a back hoe and operator for a day to prepare planting spots behind



Students checkout the new stairs

Kal Tire and Peter Opie set up a drip system.

Last week, Steve Dicken’s grade 7 class came and planted 44 Douglas fir trees with Peter, Sue and summer staff guiding them all in a drizzle. We were tired, muddy and happy. The students had just enough energy left to slide down the hill and walk/run the new trail. Of course, they came upon Fred busy clearing the trail of burdock (did you know the leaves and roots are edible). The trail and restoration work will continue for another year, but you still can come and enjoy the views, sounds and smells.



Planting and watering trees behind Kal Tire

Weed Warriors Needed It’s been raining and the weeds have been growing. Need some exercise? Come help control the Burdock and Thistle at Scout Island. Adopt an area and it is yours to weed when you want. Contact Sue for more information shemphill@midbc.com or 398 8532. (You are most welcome to take all the burdock home with you to use in a favourite 100 Kilometre dinner.)

Summer Programs at SINC: Summer is approaching and we are planning for the Nature Fun programs. Last years “Art in Nature” Wednesdays were so popular that it will be offered again this year. Tell all the children you know to come and enjoy nature with us this summer.

Nature Fun - Scout Island Nature Centre - Discovering Nature Up Close

A New Program Each Day

Weekdays July 2- August 22

Ages 3-8
Mornings 9:30- 11:30am
Afternoons 1-3pm
\$10 per session

Ages 8-13
Wednesday 1-3 (\$10)
Or 9:30-3pm (\$20)

This day will include art activities lead by our resident artists

For more information or to register: Call: (250) 398- 8532 or scoutisland@midbc.com

Williams Lake Young Naturalist Club update.

By Julianne Trelenberg

On April 27th, 2013 the Williams Lake YNC visited Gold Trail Recycling in 100 Mile House, BC where everything is recycled except Styrofoam. Leslie Glen (owner) gave the club a tour complete with power point presentation and demonstrations of all the big machines. The young naturalists got to see firsthand how recycling can keep mountains of garbage out of the land fill, and the neat things that can be made out of said garbage. On May 8th, 2013 the YNC planted some trees as part of the Osprey rehabilitation project. This project will be on going, as the YNC has adopted the area and will remove invasive species as the season progresses.



Leslie Glen (of Gold Trail Recycling) giving a tour of her facility to the Williams Lake YNC

Our next field trip is planned for June 22nd to Farwell Canyon where we will spend the afternoon exploring and playing nature games. Later in the summer (tba) we will be doing another voyager canoe trip.

How do Crabs Mould?

By: your SINC staff member Caitlin Langford

Moulting, or ecdysis is the shedding of the exoskeleton. It is a very important process because it must be done in order for the animal to grow larger. For crabs, growth is the main reason for moulting but they will also do it if there is sand or some other form or irritant inside their shell.

Before a crab start's its moult, it will eat and drink more than it usually would in order to save up energy while it's waiting for its new shell to harden. After it has finished gathering food and water it will dig a hole where it will hide while it moults. The crab then bursts open its shell so that the top opens out. The tricky part is backing out of the old shell; the crab risks losing limbs or an eye or being stuck and not being able to molt at all, resulting in death. After the crab has removed its shell it remains hidden to allow time for the new shell to harden. When the shell is sufficiently hard then the crab will start to eat and drink again.



Cool Facts About Crab Moulting:

- ❖ If they lose a limb in the moulting process they are able to regenerate it
- ❖ A crab can moult anywhere from 15-20 times in its life
- ❖ Sometimes extra fat and water is held in a "bubble" while the crab is moulting



AWESOME!!! 😊

World Oceans Day

Sunday June 9 from 1 to 4 pm

Join us at Scout Island Nature Centre and Celebrate World Oceans Day. Meet our Marvelous Sea Creatures. Summer staff member Caitlin will have some out for you to see and touch and learn about. The next best thing to a trip to the ocean! (Will we see a crab moult?)

Thank-you to DFO for once again supplying funding so that we can watch the ocean up close right here at Scout Island.

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*)

Researched by Jim Sims

On May 3rd Kris Andrews circulated this awesome photo of a Pine Siskin to the Cariboo Chilcotin birds Google Group along with this comment: “I always thought Pine Siskins were pretty boring little brown birds until I caught them exercising their wings at my finch feeder. They aren’t boring at all.” Kris is not alone in her previous impressions of this LBB (Little Brown Bird).



An LBB Plays Mr. Dressup



The flashes of yellow on the wings and tail appear when the Siskin takes off in flight or flutters around a feeder or the tips of branches. The display is also used during the breeding season. I watched the Siskins at my feeder for a while today and I did see the occasional flash of yellow, often when a bird was trying to land on an over-crowded feeder. Normally what we see of the Siskin is a heavily streaked little brown bird with subtle yellow markings on the wings and the sides of a strongly forked tail. Their sharp, pointed bill is uniquely shaped compared with most other members of the finch family. John Neville in his CD “Beginner’s Guide to Birds of

BC” describes the call of the Siskins as sounding like someone dragging their thumb nail across the teeth of a comb. I can hear the comb everytime I go outside these days.

The “Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin



round species as shown on the to early March it is an **uncommon** per locality. For the rest of the year it is mainly a **common** species with more than 20 individuals per day. The asteritch indicates it is an eruptive species. Siskins like the Redpolls range widely and eratically across the continent in response to seed crops. Some years we will find very few Sikins in the region and in years like this one we will easily have more than 20 around our feeders and we can constantly hear them calling.

Birds” classifies the Sikin as a year-frequency graph above. From November species with 1 to 6 individuals per day

Pine Siskins protect their eggs from cold in well insulated nests and the female remains on the nest throughout the brooding period. She is fed by the male. The Pine Siskin is also susceptible to salmonella poisoning so it is important to keep a clean tray feeder if you have large numbers of them visiting your feeder. It is recommended that you clean the feeder once a month or more often (weekly if you observe weakened birds). A vinegar-peroxide combo can effectively kill germs. Clean your feeder with mild soap, nothing containing fragrance or antibiotic chemicals and then soak it in distilled white vinegar for three minutes. After that, spray it with a 3 percent hydrogen peroxide solution to kill germs. Make sure you rinse well, and let the feeder completely dry out before filling it with birdseed, to keeps fungus from growing on damp seeds. We are also susceptible to Salmonella poising so it is important to wash your hands thoroughly after handling your feeder.

Some Interesting Birding from Eagle Lake

By Jim Sims

This spring I have had some amazing bird sightings from Eagle Lake that I thought I should share with you. First of all, what is it about Eagle Lake that makes it so attractive to these rare bird species such as the Arctic Tern and Semipalmated Plover that nest here each year? The lake is ideally position to line up with the Tatlayoko Lake Valley and the Hormathko River valley that form a major bird migratory route between the coast and the interior. In the past 30 years the lake level has dropped by over 5 metres and this has left a wide muddy/alkali beach near the public access to the lake and at several other locations around the lake. The beaches are a source for insects and a familiar feeding ground for many of these rare bird species that may wander up from the coast. The clear water in the lake also provides easy visibility for the birds to fish for the many small sucker/northern pike minnows in the warm shallow waters of the bay.



Wide alkali muddy beach near the access

The first unusual sighting was on an evening walk along the shore near the public access to the lake with Fred. This was on May 19th following the Chilanko Marsh Field trip. We observed and photographed a Dunlin in breeding plumage that was feeding with a pair of Semipalmated Plovers and a pair of Killdeer. Dunlin is a rare species at this time of the year with 1 to 6 birds sighted per year.



Dunlin in breeding plumage



2 of the 7 Whimbrel

On Tuesday I returned to see if I could get a better photograph but I could not locate the Dunlin. As I turned to start back along the beach a flock of birds that I initially thought were ducks landed on the far end of the beach. Once they had landed they were clearly a very large shore bird. They soon took to flight but this time they landed much closer and I got some good photos of the flock of 7 Whimbrels. The Whimbrel is a very large shore bird with a long downward curved bill. In the Cariboo Chilcotin they are classified as a casual species with 2 to 6 sightings in total. This sighting of 7 birds is indeed a very rare observation.

On June 1st I was canoing in the access bay near the Tern nesting islet. I was trying to photograph a tern with a minnow in its beak when a Black-necked Stilt flew by me. In spite of an extensive search I was unable to re-located the single bird so I have no photos. The Stilt is a large (it was similar in size to the Arctic tern) black and white shore bird with a long bill and very long red legs (stilts). The long legs are very obvious in flight. The Stilt is classified in the Cariboo Chilcotin as an occasional species (more than 6 sightings but not observed each year).

On June 2nd I photographed this Harlaquin Duck that had been feeding and later resting out in the main part of the lake near my cabin. Harlaquin Ducks are classified as a rare species (1 to 6 sighting each season) in the Cariboo Chilcotin Region. They do nest in the Cariboo Chilcotin usually near fast flowing alpine streams. One of my favourite places to



see Harlaquins is at the Chute at the end of Issac Lake on the Bowron Lakes Chain.



Breeding Arctic Terns

On June 3rd I watched the male Arctic Tern feeding its mate. She remained perched on a small exposed rock near Tern Islet while he flew off to fish. He soon returned and offered the small minnow to her. It was not long before his return resulted in a lot of chatter between the pair and I was able to catch this photo of the pair mating. As you are likely aware this is a very rare nesting sight for Arctic Terns that normally nest in the far north west of the province and further north. This sighting confirms the nesting site for another year.

I continue to be amazed by the exciting bird experiences I've had at Eagle Lake.

Our View of the Night Sky – June - August 2013.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Saturn is visible in the south east at twilight. Mercury, Venus and Jupiter are visible at sunset for the next few weeks.

Meteor showers

The next forecast meteor shower is the **Perseids on August 10-13, 2013 before dawn**. The Perseid meteor shower is perhaps the most beloved meteor shower of the year for the Northern Hemisphere. The shower builds gradually to a peak, often produces 50 to 100 meteors per hour in a dark sky at the peak, and, for us in the Northern Hemisphere, this shower comes when the weather is warm. The Perseids tend to strengthen in number as late night deepens into midnight, and typically produce the most meteors in the wee hours before dawn. They radiate from a point in the constellation Perseus the Hero, but, as with all meteor shower radiant points, you don't need to know Perseus to watch the shower; instead, the meteors appear in all parts of the sky. They are typically fast and bright meteors. They frequently leave persistent trains. Every year, you can look for the Perseids around August 10-13. In 2013, the Perseid meteors will streak across the short summer nights – August 10-13 – from late night until dawn, with little to no interference from the waxing crescent moon. Plus the moon will be near the planet Saturn in the evening hours, giving a colorful prelude to late-night Perseid show. Best mornings to look: August 11, 12 and 13.

Summer Solstice

The summer solstice occurs on June 21. This marks the time when the sun reaches the point farthest north of the celestial equator marking the start of summer in the northern hemisphere.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com. (next page)

