

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2016 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@shaw.ca 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, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Christie Mayall



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter by the middle of April. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at muskratexpress@shaw.ca



FREE FAMILY ASTRONOMY AT SCOUT ISLAND

Saturday March 5th 7pm-9pm

Join local community astronomers Steve and Lynn Capling at the Scout Island Nature House for stories and Stargazing. There will have plenty of stellar stuff to gander at with your naked eye, binoculars or a telescope.

If the weather outside is inappropriate for stargazing, the event will be moved indoors with games and activities.

EVERYONE AND ALL AGES WELCOME, NO REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

WARM clothes (and gloves!),
Binoculars (Scout Island has some available to borrow),
Lawn chairs or something to lie down on
PLEASE DO NOT BRING A FLASHLIGHT OR HEADLAMP



A very large telescope is provided but you are welcome to bring along your own.

More telescopes make this event even better!

Call Scout Island Nature House if you have questions about this special event 250.398.8532 or email themaryforbes@gmail.com

Cruising North America's Great Loop and the Bahamas

With Roger and Mary Packham

March 7th 7:00 pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

Recently Roger and Mary Packham returned from a 13 month boat trip cruising the Great Loop and the Bahamas in their 27 foot power boat TA TA. The Great Loop is a 6000 mile trip that includes the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico, the Intra-Coastal Waterway from Florida to New York City, and the Trent-Severn Waterway. A 1000 mile 2.5 month side trip to the Bahamas was also completed. All at 7 mph.



What is in Mount Polley's Tailings?

7:00pm on March 17th at Scout Island Nature Centre

One of the most frequently asked questions about the Mount Polley tailings spill has been "What is in the tailings?" Dr. Lyn Anglin, P.Geo., Chief Scientific Officer with Imperial Metals, will give a presentation on Mount Polley's tailings, including an overview of the geology, mineralogy and geochemistry of the tailings and how they are produced. This presentation will answer the questions: what are tailings, where do they come from and what are they made of? She will also present results of some recent laboratory research on the geochemical stability of the spilled tailings.



Dr. Lyn Anglin

Field Trip Planning Meeting

March 22nd

The meeting to plan for the field trip schedule for this year will be held on Tuesday, March 22, at the Scout Island Nature House, starting at 5 pm. Please come and participate in this meeting if you wish to be a field trip leader. If you cannot attend and can lead a field trip, or if you wish to suggest a field trip please contact Jim Sims at muskratexpress@shaw.ca or phone 296-3628. Fred and I already have some great new ideas for this year's list and we look forward getting yours

Annual General Meeting – Williams Lake Field Naturalists

Our club's AGM will be held on **Friday, April 1**, at the Nature House. The program will be as follows:

- 1) Potluck supper starting at 6 pm
- 2) AGM meeting to receive reports, elect the directors for the following year and to receive input from you on the transition model for operating the Scout Island Nature Centre. The draft model will be circulated in the early part of March to the membership so that it can be reviewed before the meeting.
- 3) Member's Show and Tell: This is your chance to share a found item, photograph(s), or short tale that encapsulates an experience or observation you have made during you rambles as a naturalist. No need to be an expert on the subject and participation will be voluntary. To give everyone who wants to an opportunity to contribute, please plan for a couple/few minutes each and a maximum of 5 photos (on a memory stick) if using them. We're counting on you to help us make this a successful event!

Please join us for this evening The AGM will be short but significant. We do need a reasonable attendance to have a quorum for the meeting. We have appreciated the good attendance in past years. If you wish to serve on the executive please contact Fred McMechan.

BC Nature Conference and AGM

A reminder of the BC Nature Conference and AGM which will be held on May 12 to 15 at Courtenay BC in the Comox Valley. This conference is hosted by the local naturalist club, Comox Valley Nature. They have planned an impressive program of field trips, workshops and guest speakers. To obtain information about this event go to their website, www.comoxvalleynaturalists.bc.ca and link to “BC Nature AGM” Registration forms can be obtained from this website or from page 30 on the BC Nature magazine, winter 2015 edition. Please be aware that to register and pay the preferred fees you need to register by March 15. The fees increase slightly after this date.

Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet

Featuring: Jared Hobbs and “BC’s Grasslands: their beauty and amazing biodiversity”

This fund raising banquet will be held on Friday, April 15th, at the St Andrew’s United Church Hall. There will be a pre-dinner social starting at 6 pm, followed by the banquet dinner. The dinner will be catered by the caterers from the United Church and Joanne Wright will provide her wonderful desserts. During the evening there will be a silent auction on a wealth of items to bid on. After the dinner our guest speaker, Jared Hobbs, will give a presentation titled “BC’s Grasslands: their beauty and amazing biodiversity”.

This year the price of an adult ticket will be \$40, an increase of \$5 from last year, and the student price will remain the same at \$15, Tickets will be available at the Open Book, or from members of the executive, starting at the end of the first week of March.

Please obtain your tickets at least one week before the banquet date so that we can inform the caterers about the number of tickets sold.

Information about our guest speaker, Jared Hobbs, and his presentation:

Jared is a Registered Professional Biologist and wildlife photographer, based in Victoria, BC. He has worked throughout the province on many of BC’s rarest species and was the recipient of the international Shikar-Safari conservation award for his dedication to the preservation of species and ecosystems.

Jared has been studying and photographing endangered species since graduating from UBC in 1994. Jared continues to strive to increase his knowledge of North America’s flora and fauna, using unique images of wildlife in their natural habitats to increase public awareness. Jared’s client base has grown steadily to include clients such as “Canadian Geographic”, “British Columbia Magazine”, government agencies and environmental groups. His images are represented by All Canada Photos and Getty Images. His interesting website is www.hobbsphotos.com.



Presentation:

This presentation begins by acquainting you with some basic information about our collective understanding of BC’s biodiversity. BC’s diverse terrain and climate create a multitude of niches for species to explore but this diversity presents us with its responsibilities and challenges. We will touch briefly on what’s been done to date before we begin the focus of the evening’s presentation.

Next we will delve deeper and take a closer look at BC’s dry-interior ecosystems. We go on a visual journey that will stimulate your senses and acquaint you with the subtle, understated beauty of these areas. We will see intimate images of some secretive species and we will hear first-hand stories of the amazing species that live in our dry interior grassland habitats. We will learn about the world’s fastest bird, how salamanders survive in a hot arid environment, how a woodpecker became a flycatcher and why an owl had to learn to live underground. In short we will hear many fascinating tales of ecological adaptations as we follow Jared along our visual journey to explore BC’s dry interior habitats.

Jared will share a new perspective by introducing you to these habitats from the eyes of the animals that live here. You will take away a strong sense of why we should care and why we need to be the voice for wildlife that, without our empathy, may become a ghostly whisper in the wind.

Bluebird Routes

The snow is disappearing quickly and it won't be long before all of us with Bluebird Routes will be busy cleaning out the nest boxes in preparation for this year's broods. Over the next couple of weeks Jim and Fred will be busy building replacement boxes. If you are starting a new route or you know you are going to need more boxes than normal please let Jim or Fred know so we can provide additional boxes.

SHORELINES OF THE CARIBOO-CHILCOTIN

Virtual Art Gallery Exhibit and Competition

By: Marg Evans Education Coordinator/Executive Director Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society

In Partnership with *Baker Creek Enhancement Society, Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society and the Community Arts Council of Williams Lake.*

Presenting a competition integrating environmental stewardship and education with the visual arts to inspire protection and healthy shoreline practices. Shorelines provide a wealth of bio-diversity. Let's raise awareness of this crucial ecosystem through our creativity:

Art with a Message!

Create a painting, tapestry, pottery scene, or photograph a shoreline and send us the results. Upload an image of your creation at <https://www.facebook.com/bakercreeksociety/app/451684954848385/> or email it to us at williamslakearts@gmail.com

and we'll put it up onto our Virtual Art Gallery. Entries will be adjudicated by local and professional artists. (Number of entries per person are not limited, but must be within reason.)

Deadline April 30, 2016

Prizes:

- Adult Category 1st Place \$200 2nd Place \$125 3rd Place \$75
- Youth Category 1st Place \$75 2nd Place \$50 3rd Place \$25
- Group \$75
- Viewer's Choice \$150

Include your name, address and contact details including pricing for your work (if for sale).

Please contact Venta (CACWL) williamslakearts@gmail.com

Or Marg Evans (CCCS) at 250.398.7929



Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Saturday May 7th 2016th

Spring is on its way. The date for the Spring Yard and Garden Sale has been set. We need your help to make it successful.

I am hoping that Spring means it is time for cleaning out your cupboards, shelves, basements, cabins and garages. Please bring out a few boxes, mark them for the Scout Island Yard Sale and start loading them with unused items that someone else might like to buy. We can sell your home baking too. Gardening items are popular. People look for outdoor, back yard, sport and camping equipment. We have a section for books, cds, dvds and even vinyl records. Tools for the workshop or kitchen, toys and pictures, unique or "retro" clothing and anything you think someone else might want are items we will try to sell. It is always interesting to see what is popular and what sells first!



Start some extra bedding plants today!

Plants, for indoors and out, including raspberries, strawberries,

rhubarb, cacti, shrubs and trees are proven top sellers. Seedlings and bedding plants are very popular. We are known to have a great selection of plants, we are especially famous for our tomato plants and before we open the door on the sale morning we have a line up waiting to check them out.. We need you, especially your plants to make this happen!

Starting some seeds? Please start a few or even lots more for the sale. When you get into your garden and are dividing or thinning or removing plants I bet we will have someone wanting to take your extras home. Tomato plants are always a best seller and I bet this year cauliflowers could be a hit!!

I hope you can come and shop and bring your friends and before that I hope you are able to donate items for us to sell. Every little bit helps! The money we earn is for a bursary awarded to a graduating secondary school student in Williams Lake. If we earn more than we need for the bursary we contribute to the Scout Island Education Programs.

Any question? Please contact me (Margaret Waring) at mewaring@hotmail.com or the Muskrat email, muskratexpress@shaw.ca or by phone 250 398 7724.

Your help is truly appreciated and very much needed. Watch for requests and details in the next/April edition!

An Interesting Research Project Requests our Help

From Krista Roessingh

My research partner Dr. Ruth Joy and I have been working on a genetic study of Sandhill cranes, comparing cranes east and west of the coast mountains. I collected moulted feathers from breeding sites on the central coast, and we were given blood samples from SE Alaska and eastern Canada (collected during earlier research projects) for DNA extraction at a lab at UBC. The coastal cranes are thought to be part of the subspecies *rowanii*. Previous genetic studies have shown there isn't a *rowanii* subspecies, but none of those studies included samples from the west coast.

We are looking for some more samples from breeding cranes east of the coast mountains. To this end we are currently applying for a grant that could provide for fuel costs and "subsistence" for fieldwork. We are looking for potential project partners with knowledge of SACR breeding areas (we also have Breeding Bird Atlas locations to work with), who would be willing to go out and collect feathers during the breeding season.

I would be very grateful for any help or suggestions you might be able to offer.

Krista Roessingh wolfwillow@gmail.com (250) 957 2920



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

The Snow Programs lasted through mid-February despite the fast disappearing snow at the Nature Centre. One day was perfect for tracking another day for adding details to the great snow houses that had been built earlier in the year. The primary students really enjoy learning about mammal survival skills in the winter especially when it includes touching the fur specimens we have to share. Then they are eager to go outside and be their animal. Hare Island continues to be the favorite spot for playing hiding games. With the snow almost gone, we are turning our attention to the spring birds.

**Be Wild this Spring Break at Scout Island Nature Centre
Nature Exploring and
Art in Nature for Ages 6-13**

**March 14-17
9:30-3 each day**

**\$30/day
or \$100 for all 4 days**

Call 398 8532 or shemphill@explornet.com to register

Did You Know This About Our Winter Birds?

Because they are warm-blooded, or *homoeothermic*, birds that remain throughout the winter must adapt to the cold in order to survive. While an adequate and available food supply is essential, physical and behavioral adaptations are also necessary. One such adaptation is the creation of a “jacket” of insulating air pockets surrounding the bird and sealing in the heat of its body. As a means of combating the fierce winds and subzero temperatures, birds can adjust the position of their feathers with muscles in their skin, puffing them way out on the coldest days, creating these air pockets. It’s not your imagination—birds look much bigger on the cold winter days, because they are. Two other survival techniques used by birds in winter are shivering, and trying to expose as little of themselves to the wind as possible.



A puffed up Common Redpoll



Walking and Wheeling in the Puddle

Please Fill out Our Survey (link provided below)

By: Beth Holden (your Air Quality Educator)

Active transportation is any form of human powered transportation including walking, biking, using a wheelchair, inline skating, and the list goes on. Did you know that the City of Williams Lake has an Active Transportation Committee? It is composed of members from Community Policing, Interior Health, City of Williams Lake, Scout Island / Air Quality Roundtable, the Williams Lake Central Business Improvement Area Association, and community volunteers. Their goal is to improve conditions for active transportation while making Williams Lake a safer and healthier environment for all. Members of this committee volunteered their time securing a grant which will improve the Carson Drive and Hwy 97 intersection with safe active transportation routes and features in mind. On April 9, 2016 the Active Transportation Committee is organizing a forum to work with the community to identify projects and goals aimed at reducing barriers and identifying opportunities for active transportation in Williams Lake. Leading up to the forum we are encouraging all members of the public to complete a short, online survey to develop and focus forum topics, and to clarify community opinions and concerns. A link to the survey can be found on the City of Williams Lake website, or you can follow this link to the survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JRQKG9L>

All members of the community are encouraged to fill out the survey and attend the free Forum. For more information contact airqualityscoutisland@shaw.ca.

Students Visit the Tatla Lake Area

By: Kim Zalay

Field Naturalist Jim Sims joined the grade 7 Outdoor Education class and Columneetza Greenologists in Tatla Lake this past week. Jim taught students how to dehydrate fruit on Sunday, the 10 essentials to have in your backpack on Monday, and was the epitome of patience on Tuesday as students hiked Lincoln Pass. Jim's knowledge of wilderness survival and enthusiasm for the outdoors was greatly appreciated by the students on the trip and they look forward to having Jim, or other Field Naturalists, along on future trips.



Before heading up Lincoln Pass Jim relates the legend of Niut and Ts'y-l-os

Chukar (*Alectoris Chukar*)

Researched by Jim Sims

Sources: Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds, The Birds of British Columbia Vol 2, www.allaboutbirds.org

This winter one of the more common bird reports on Phil's google bird group has been sightings of Chukars from several areas in the dry lands along the Fraser and Chilcotin rivers. I've tried a couple of trips down into Farwell Canyon but the best I could come up with was a lot of Chukar tracks along the trail down to the old Farwell Canyon homestead. They had been feeding on the many seeds from the plants beside the trail.



Chukars at Big Bar
Photo by Kris Andrews

The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds lists Chukar as an introduced year round resident nesting species. It has a rating of rare (1 to 6 individuals per year per locality). With some of the recent observations we may want to change this to expanding in both numbers as well as territory. A flock of 15 found in Farwell Canyon in December of 2011 was the first reported from the Chilcotin Drainage. Liz Twain reported seeing a flock of 50 on January 16th in the Dog Creek area. This is probably the largest group observed in the region.

Chukar are native to Southern Eurasia and is the national bird of Pakistan and Iraq. In North Indian and Pakistani culture the Chukar sometimes symbolizes intense, and often unrequited, love. It is said to be in love with the moon and to gaze at it constantly.

It has been introduced to North America as a game bird. As far as I have been able to determine the first attempt to introduce the species in British Columbia occurred in 1940 at Alkali Lake by A.D. Hitch and the attempt was unsuccessful. Between 1950 and 1955 The BC Fish and Wildlife branch introduced 2500 birds and eggs into several suitable grassland areas in the province. The transplant was successful and hunting of Chukar began in 1972. In more recent times Doug Mervyn of Alkali Ranch released Chukar along with pheasant, quail and wild turkey in the area around their ranch. Liz has daily visits from Chuker in her yard at Alkali Lake so I expect that Doug's transplant was successful. I have not been able to find any research on impacts of the introduction on other species such as the Sharp-tailed Grouse. Hopefully they frequent different habitats and are having little impact.



Dog Creek Chukar
Photo by Liz Twain

Chukars live in arid to semiarid scrubland. They are usually on steep hillsides with rocky slopes—including rimrock, talus, and bluffs—that have a mixture of brush, grasses, and forbs. In most areas, big sagebrush is the dominant plant species and can be an important part of their diet. Chukars are usually found close to a water source, especially during the short, hot summers. Individuals move continuously and range widely, especially during winter when birds move in groups. In tough winters, when snow covers their rural habitat, Chukars may venture into agricultural fields or towns. On November 25th, 2014 a single bird was photographed in Williams Lake on White Road. Their call is a loud chuck-chuck-chukar-chukar; hence the name Chukar



Our View of the Night Sky – March 2016.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury is visible low in the eastern dawn sky. It is close to the Moon on Feb. 6th.

Mars is visible as a reddish 'star' rising around midnight in the east in the constellation Scorpius.

Jupiter rises at sunset and is visible all night long in Leo. It will be close to the Moon on March 22nd.

Venus is barely visible very low in the morning twilight sky & drops from view later in March.

Saturn rises around midnight in the east in Ophiuchus.

Moon

Full moon - March 23rd.

New moon - Mar. 9th & April 7th.

March 23 - Penumbral Lunar Eclipse. A penumbral lunar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes through the Earth's partial shadow, or penumbra. During this type of eclipse the Moon will darken slightly but not completely. The eclipse will be visible throughout most of extreme eastern Asia, eastern Australia, the Pacific Ocean, **and the west coast of North America** including Alaska. However, since the greatest amount of eclipse happens around 4:50 a.m. it will be difficult to see the darkening of part of the moon in the early dawn sky.

The **Vernal equinox** happens on March 19th.

Meteor Showers

There are no specific meteor showers in March.

Zodiacal Light

The Zodiacal light should be visible in the western twilight sky for approx. two weeks starting Mar. 25th.

Solar Eclipse

There is a solar eclipse that will occur in Indonesia and parts of the western Pacific Ocean on Mar. 8/9th. It will not be visible in Williams Lake.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. "March 2016: Northern Edition (PDF)". At the end of the month it changes to show the next month's chart.

Member's Moment from Frances McCoubrey**Wiggle Walk**

With the aid of instructions from Peter Shaughnessy we found this pine tree, a Grizzly rub tree in a wonderful meadow in Lincoln Pass of Tatlayoko Valley. Each time a Grizzly approaches a rub tree they walk in the same foot prints as all other bears that come to the tree. As they approach they twist their feet into the ground to leave more scent than just what rubs off on the tree. A trail of deep footprints is left behind. The twisting of the feet results in a very strange Wiggle of the entire body of the bear. Liam, a member of the grade 7 Outdoor Education Academy mimics the Grizzlies "Wiggle Walk" as he steps in the bear's large foot prints on the path to the rub tree. Note the wrap of barb wire on the rub tree to the left. The barbs caught fur from the bear. This was part of a Grizzly study in the valley. It was an awesome "Moment" for all of us.

"Member's Moment" is an opportunity for you to share a special scene, plant, animal, bird or outdoor activity that you have enjoyed and photographed here in the Cariboo Chilcotin. A chance for you to encourage other members to get outdoors and find their own special moments close to home and perhaps share them with all of us. For each newsletter the editors will select one or two photos for inclusion in the newsletter based on the quality of the photo as well as the interesting paragraph you must provide. We will save all submitted unused moments in hopes they may find a place in a future edition. Please email your full resolution photo and paragraph to the muskratexpress@shaw.ca. A special thanks to Frances for her winning entry.