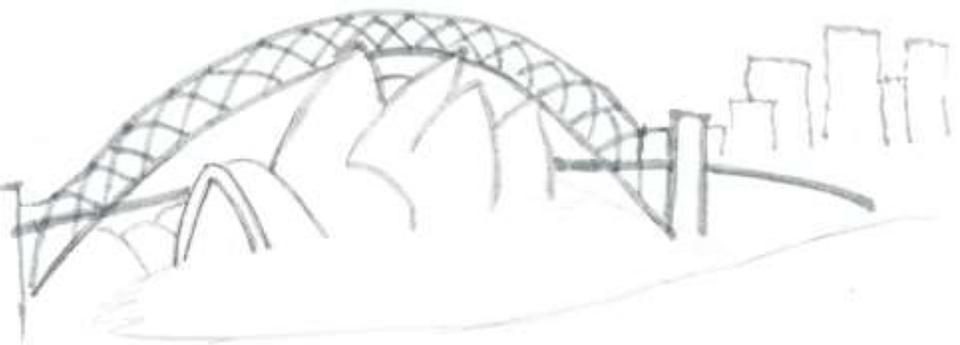


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
APRIL 2014 NEWSLETTER



SPRING YARD + GARDEN SALE
SATURDAY MAY 10TH 9:30AM - 1PM



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 in near the end of May. 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 **Please note the change in email address**



Walk for Wildlife

The Williams Lake Field Naturalists and Young Naturalists Club present a FREE family event, Saturday April 26, from 1:00-3:00pm at Scout Island Nature Centre. For more information contact Julianne at Info: 398-8532 or J_Trelenberg@hotmail.com

The Walk for Wildlife is a national campaign that encourages all Canadians to get outside for a walk and experience the wildlife and natural spaces in their backyards. Wildlife Biologist Becky Cadsand will lead a discussion and walk to look at different habitat niches. We'll be citizen scientists and enter all our sightings into the Canadian Wildlife Federation database. Of course no explorer day is complete without some games! All families are welcome; kids need to bring an adult.



Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Saturday May 10th at Scout Island Nature Centre

Saturday Sale time is from 9:30am until 1:00pm. It is that time of year again and I am hoping you will be able to help. The Spring Yard and Garden Sale raises money for a bursary for a graduating secondary school student and education programs at Scout Island. If you need small stakes to identify your sale plants we have several environmentally friendly wooden stakes available at the Nature Centre.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- 1) Please clear out some closets, cupboards, garages and basements. Garden Plants and related items are popular. People come for tomato plants, herbs, bedding plants, berry and rhubarb plants, trees and shrubs. Outdoor and camping equipment and souvenirs from around the world or just the corner shelf are of interest to shoppers. You probably have things that you never use that others are happy to buy and take home. Baking, cookies, snacks are treats people enjoy.
- 2) On Friday afternoon May 9th bring your contributions to the Nature House. If you can price them for us that will be helpful.
- 3) Maybe you can spare a little time to help? Some helpers are required on Friday evening for set up and pricing, Saturday for the sale and Saturday at 1PM for cleanup. If you can help please call (250-398-7724) or email me (Margaret Waring) at the Muskrat or mewaring@hotmail.com

4) Any questions or ideas please contact me too!

Birding as a Tourist in Australia

Thursday April 24th Scout Island Nature Centre evening program by Kath VanSpall starts at 7:00 pm

In November of 2013, my partner Dex Porter and I went on a three-week long vacation which spanned three different states, and several different ecological zones, of Australia. Binoculars and bird-book in hand, I initially thought I would just casually watch birds in hotel parking lots and on the beach at sunset. However, after I spotted five life birds during our first day in downtown Sydney, it occurred to me I could see over 100 new birds if I kept up that pace! We had several travel days on our itinerary, so I didn't know if it would be possible... But after a few more days of casual birding, that became my goal, and my obsession: to observe 100 species during our 21 day trip – without driving my partner mad! Come learn about Australian birds and find out how I did, on Thursday April 24th at 7PM.



Choose your bike instead of your car!

Bike to Work & School Week, May 26th - June 1st

Improve your health and the air quality by cycling to work, school, and where ever you need to go! Whether you are a first time or avid commuter, register online to log your kilometres, learn how much Greenhouse Gas you saved from going into the environment, and how many calories you burned! Chance to win great prizes - categories for child, youth and adult.

Sponsor: www.breatheasywilliamslake.org Williams Lake Environmental Society/ Williams Lake Air Quality Roundtable “Recognizing the value that clean air brings to our health & environment”

Why Honey Bees Swarm

Dianne Dunaway will be presenting an evening program on Thursday, June 5 at 7pm at Scout Island. More details in the May newsletter.

Murray Cabin Backcountry Trip

Report by Katie McMahan

On April 5th a group of six women headed up to Wells to take part in an overnight backcountry ski and snowshoe trip into the Murray Cabin. The goal of the trip was to promote involvement of younger members in the WLFN, and three non-members took part. While it was not planned to be a “girls-only” event, our evening in the cozy cabin with chili, fresh cornbread, and home-baked desserts was very relaxing and social. The trip was also an introduction to backcountry travel and safety – some members of the group were using backcountry skis and avalanche gear for the first time. Fortunately there was not too much trail-breaking to do on the way in, and approximately five inches of snow overnight made for fun skiing the next day on the way out! Apart from a few blisters, the trip was enjoyed by all, and the group is keen to plan more adventures together.



Frances McCoubrey, Kiera Dixon, and Paula Laita in front of the Murray Cabin



Annual General Meeting, Williams Lake Field Naturalists

By: Fred McMechan, president

On March 28, 2014 our club had a successful AGM. We appreciated the large turn- out of members for this event.

The evening started with a wonderful pot luck supper. Thank you to all for bringing a delicious variety of food dishes.

The formal AGM took place after the supper. Reports from the directors were presented and then the election of directors for the executive was carried out. Your new executive is comprised of the following: president-Fred McMechan, vice president – vacant, treasurer-Katharine VanSpall, secretary-Ordell Steen, directors at large- Brian Chapman, Nola Daintith, Ray Hornby, Cathy Koot, Don Lawrence, Christie Mayall and Peter Opie. Jim Sims and Rob Higgins resigned after serving for many years on the executive. The new directors elected to the executive are Brian, Don and Christie.

After the AGM Ray Coupe did an interesting presentation on the natural history of southern Arizona. Other friends and he visited this region in the earlier part of 2013



Scout Island Nature Centre News

By Sue Hemphill

It is spring—muddy trails, we can dip again, there are birds everywhere singing and posturing, the first green shoots are out and the geese are incubating. That means a lot of teachers have already called to book their May and June visits and the summer staff hasn't even started yet. The good news is that we did get a Summer Jobs Grant and will be able to hire 3 university students full time for the summer. Caitlin Langford and Patrick Newsome are returning and the new person on the block is Breanna Haws. Paula Laita will join them to help with the school programs. That is if she has enough energy left as April has been very full for both of us as a number of classes decided to enjoy early spring with full day programs at the Nature Centre.

We also took part in the Earth Challenge. This is the second year for this event. We teamed up with the Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society, Air Quality Round Table, and TRU to engage students in the challenge. The four classes were visited by the leaders in February to give them plenty of time to study for the contest. Friday, April 11, was the gathering at TRU for fun events all morning (scavenger hunts, lab experiments...) and the contest in the afternoon. Here are the final results and the prizes they chose:

1. Homeschoolers (magical mystery tour –Sue and Frances McCoubrey have to come up with this one)
2. Mountview- Maas (Scout Island overnight stay)
3. Cataline- Kellam (Day at Gavin Lake)
4. Mountview- Fawcett/Bowers (Litter pick with Mary)

Many of you enjoyed Jackie Hildering at the banquet on April 11. What is amazing is that she had spent 2 days teaching grades 7-11. She taught 6 classes twice (once on each day) and one block of grade 11. She even spent one lunch hour talking to the Greenologists. I have never seen high school students stay so engaged even for the last hour on a Friday. It helped that she was throwing a small earth at them to make sure they all took part. For these sessions, she focused on Orcas and how our attitudes have changed, how Orcas are doing now in the wild, and what each of us can do to ensure these magnificent creatures have a future in the oceans around BC.



And here is Paula showing Joe Englebert and others aquatic invertebrates from the marsh. Photo by Kiani Evans

The annual report will be posted on the website this week. In it, I highlight that there was 4357 hours of volunteer effort in 2013. The place couldn't run without all the help from our members. There is of course plenty of opportunity in 2014 to help if you want to join the happy crew at the Nature Centre. Here are some ideas

- If you have a particular natural history skill (birding, know a lot about plants...) you could help train the summer staff or join staff when they are leading
- Do you like to clean windows—a regular spring and fall job that needs doing
- Fight weeds!
- Develop information booklets for children or adults
- Make a photo/picture book about spring or summer that we can use with our young participants
- Paint some benches
- Or do you have an idea of your own?—contact Sue 398 8532 shemphill@netbistro.com if you want to take part.

This is Still Not About Birds—Why and How to Grow Alpines

By Jurgen Homburg (typed by Sue)

Alpine plants seem to have acquired an aura for being difficult to grow. This is not true at all. A lot of alpine plants are easy to grow in most gardens. Most of them need only a minimum of care once they are established.

Climate change with drier summers is part of our lives today. There are many alpines which are very drought resistant, after being established and flower freely. Especially with smaller gardens, a wide range of smaller alpines could be grown in limited space. You can even grow them without a rock garden- in a sink, trough, on a patio, or even between paving stones.

Now to the nitty-gritty. In the site you choose for alpines, you should strive for a soil that has good drainage but is moisture retentive with a neutral pH and only moderate fertility. This can best be achieved by mixing together 1 part fine gravel for drainage, 1 part loam and 1 part leaf mold for moisture retention and fertility. A crush sized 3/8-3/4 provides the best type of drainage. You should have a depth of 12 inches of your mixed soil in the spot you have chosen. Then, tramp down the soil with the full weight of your body. It needs to be really firm before you plant.

Finally, add 1-2 inches of stone chips (3/8 crush) over the whole surface. This will keep the crown of the plants dry, keep the soil cooler, and help retain moisture. Also, windblown weed seeds won't germinate easily—keeping weeding at a minimum. Take the time to prepare your spot for alpines as this will result in very little care needed later.

Here are some drought busters for hot sunny places (height and width in cm):

- Rock cresses *Aethionema pulchellum* 10x10
- *Aubrieta deltoidea* 8x40
- Hawks beard *Crepis incana* 10x20
- House leeks *Semper vivium*
- *Thymus azoricus* 3x20
- Atlas mountain daisy *Anacyclus depressus* 5x40
- Fairy fox glove *Erinus alpinus* 5x5
- Speed wells like *Veronica gentianoides* 15x15
- Any sedums

Move the surface stone chips aside when placing the plant and water thoroughly when planting. Then, replace stone right up to the stem of the plant and presto-- Bob is your uncle. You will have flowers that will warm the cockles of your heart.



Fairy fox glove

If you want a demonstration of how to mix the soil, have questions where to access the stone, or want to see some of these plants in action, call me (620 3498) and come for a visit.

The photo in the last Muskrat was incorrectly labeled. It was not *Silene acaulis* but *Androsace incana*

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

Researched by Jim Sims

Margaret recently found a pair of Wood Ducks on a small pond in the Williams Lake Creek Valley while on a walk with Rocky. Like all of us she was taken by the stunning colours of the male, perhaps the most colourful of the male waterfowl. Currently Anna Roberts is reporting at least 16 on the small sliver of open water in front of her South Lakeside home with 7 on the feeder at one time.

Phil describes the Wood Duck in the Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds as follows “Has expanded its range significantly and its status has moved from Occasional to Uncommon. Breeds widely along the shoreline of Williams Lake where duck nest boxes have been installed and is expanding to other local lakes. Has been recorded 3 times on the Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count, twice at the sewage lagoons. Rarely recorded in the Chilcotin. A bird at Tatla Lake on June 25, 2011 was believed to be breeding.”. They have successfully nest out here at Rose Lake.

Wood Ducks are cavity nesters, making use of sites that are close to water but may be up to 2km from water. They readily adapt to using nest boxes as has been demonstrated here on Williams Lake. The females will “dump” eggs in the cavities of other females. On occasions, when cleaning the nest boxes in the marsh we have found a nest box with a dozen or more unhatched eggs of several different cavity nesting ducks (Goldeneye, Hooded Mergansers, Bufflehead as well as Wood Duck). The young will climb out of the nest within a day or two of hatching and



will follow the mother to water where they will begin to feed on their own. The young will be raised in marshy areas, small ponds, beaver dams and along small streams. The wood duck has special adaptive feet that allow it to land on the branches of trees.

Sources: *Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds*, *The Birds of BC*, vol. and www.allaboutbirds.org

2014 Field Trip List

Alkali Lake

Sunday April 27st (Leader Fred McMechan 392-7680)

Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 9:00am to arrange carpooling. Enjoy this annual field trip to view bird species along the road to Alkali Lake. Be sure to bring a lunch with hot beverage, your binoculars or spotting scope. Birding will be done from the road so expect minimal walking.

Stars and Birds Bells Lake Marsh

Friday and Saturday May 2nd & 3rd (Leader Sue Hemphill shemphill@netbistro.com or 398 8532 or 620 3498)

Meet at Maggie and Bill's on Bells Lake road (50 minutes from Williams Lake) for an evening of star gazing and a morning of birding. We will start star gazing through Bills 2 telescopes that are part of his observatory at 8pm. Bill is wonderful at explaining the heavens to you. Bring your tent or sleep on the floor in their house for the night. Get up as early as you want to bird watch on the marsh right next to their house. They have 2 canoes and 2 kayaks for our use or bring your own (do bring your own life jackets). Bring your own breakfast --you can use their kitchen for cooking if you need to. Contact Sue to take part and get directions.

Churn Creek – Clyde Mountain

Sunday May 4th. (Leader: Ordell Steen 398-5017).

An easy to moderate hike in Churn Creek Protected Area in conjunction with the Friends of Churn Creek. Meet at



Wood Duck photo by Lynn Peters



Kris Andrews calls this photo: Acute housing shortage

10:00 a.m. at the new park information kiosk near the Churn Creek Bridge or join us Saturday night for an overnight camp at the calving barn campsite. We will walk through grasslands, deciduous and Douglas-fir forests from the calving barn on a trail along the east side of Clyde Mountain. Includes great views of the Fraser River and grasslands. Allow 2.5 hours to drive from Williams Lake to Churn Creek Bridge. Contact Ordell if you need directions.

Williams Lake Creek Valley Bike Ride

Wednesday May 7th (Leaders Rick Dawson 392-3370 & Margaret 398-7724)

Meet at Scout Island at 6PM with your bike, helmet and water bottle. We will drive our cars to the last parking lot going down the Frizzi Road below past the garbage dump. It is an easy and interesting cycle to the Fraser River and back. The road is gravel. On past trips with we have seen Pelicans, deer, high and low water in the river and even flooding of the road.

Chilanko Marsh & Choelquoit Lake

Friday May 16th to May 18th (Leader Jim Sims 296-3638)

Meet at Puntzi Lake Tanker Base at 9:30 am on Saturday morning (allow a minimum of 2 hours driving time from Williams Lake) or contact Jim if you want to meet him at the marsh on Friday night and camp out for the night. This is an annual bird species count conducted on the marsh and the surrounding riparian zone. The marsh provides an opportunity to see most of the waterfowl that are summer residents on Chilcotin lakes and marshes. Join us for a casual day long walk around the ponds as we search out the variety of bird species around the marsh. Following the birding you are welcome to gather at Jim's Eagle Lake cabin for Saturday night. Bring a tent or camper as there is limited space available. (the sauna will be warmed up) There will be a pot luck supper Saturday evening and a pancake breakfast Sunday morning. Sunday we will take a walk along the shore of Choelquoit Lake. You are welcome to stay with Jim for the holiday Monday but you will be on your own for the rest for your meals.

Bike trip along Moon Road

Wednesday May 21st (Leader Paula Laita 778-883-4191)

Meet at Scout Island at 6:00 pm Wednesday evening. We will do an evening bike trip on Moon Road. We will park at the beginning of Moon road and cycle out past Doc English Bluff parking lot. Highlights include great views of the steep cliffs into the Fraser River, interesting geology at road cuts, many eagles and other birds. Paula and Jon have found a Golden Eagle nest on the bluff and Paula will bring her scope, so that you can watch it. If we are lucky the pair will there with their eaglets.

Farwell Canyon Balsam Root Tour

Saturday May 24th Trip leader Peter Opie 392-1440)

Meet at SINC at 8:00 am to carpool; bring water, lunch and hiking boots. Hike onto rangeland north of Junction Sheep Range. The display of balsamroot is spectacular at their peak with hillsides blanketed in yellow with a sprinkling of blues and other colours. A great trip if the timing is right. Otherwise, still a good trip to look at grassland plants. Short, easy walks from vehicles on road. Suggest high clearance vehicles only because will likely be some rutted areas.

Grasslands, riparian areas and old cabins in Churn Creek Protected Area

*Saturday May 31. (Leader Ordell Steen 398-5017, **please phone** if you plan to come).*

An easy to moderate hike (about 7 km) in conjunction with the Friends of Churn Creek through native grasslands and riparian areas along Koster (China) Creek in Churn Creek P.A. Expect good birding opportunities in riparian deciduous forests and shrublands as well as on grasslands. We will visit three old ranch cabins from the early to mid 1900's and visit two lakes (BC Lake and Browns Lake). This trip will require a lengthy car shuttle. Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:00 a.m.

Frost Creek Birding

*Sunday, June 1st (**morning only**. Leader: Cathy Koot 392-4250)*

Meet at SINC at 7:00 am to organize a car pool. We'd drive about 17 km and walk around the Colpitt Lake area looking and listening for water birds and forest birds until about 10:00 am. This is a level trail and will be at a slow walk. In 2013, we found a rare yellow rail on this trip—let's go find out if he's back!

Williams Lake Paddle

Wednesday June 4th (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)

Paddle the east end of Williams Lake to the San Jose River. Meet at the Grebe Drive (Russet Bluff) boat launch at 7:00 pm. **Approved Life Jackets mandatory**

Mount Polley Mine

Saturday June 7th Meet at Scout Island at 8:15 to arrange carpooling (Leader Colleen Hughes).

chughes@mountpolley.com

This trip will commence with a safety overview and site introduction at the Administration Building at Mount Polley (follow the signs). Following the site overview we will tour the mine site stopping at several areas undergoing progressive reclamation, observe the reclamation methods used, the success of re-vegetation approaches, and the considerations for biodiversity. We will also visit the pilot scale passive water treatment system operating since 2010 at Mount Polley. **Please contact Colleen before the trip if you are planning to attend as she will need to arrange for transportation at the mine site.**

Williams Lake River Valley Birding

Sunday June 15th (morning) (Leader Phil Ranson 398-7110)

Meet at 8:00am in the lower parking lot (Frizzi Road past the transfer site and down into the river valley). Join with Phil for a morning walk in the river valley. Learn some of the bird songs of the many birds that will be nesting in the valley at this time of the year.

Rock Lake Bike and Birding

Sunday June 22nd (Leader Paula Laita 778-883-4191)

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am to obtain directions. Rock Lake is located on Becher's Prairie west of the former Loran C tower. Join us for an easy bike ride on dirt trail of the grassland that pass by Rock Lake. Enjoy checking out the waterfowl and shorebirds on the ponds and look for songbirds in the Aspen Copse. Bring a lunch, lots of water and a spare tube.

Rose Lake Paddle

Wednesday June 18th (Leader Jim Sims 296-3638)

Meet at Jim's home at 3823 Allpress Road at 6:00am for a barbeque supper if you wish (bring your own food). Or meet us there at 7:00 to start the paddle. Jim does have a few spare canoes if you don't have one. Paddle along the shore and into the marshes on the south shore of the lake. Both Canoes and Kayaks are welcome.

Koster Lake – Churn Creek Protected Area

Saturday June 28th (Leader Ordell Steen 398-5017 - **please phone** if you plan to come and Glen Davidson). A moderate, full day hike (about 14 km total) in conjunction with Friends of Churn Creek to beautiful Koster (China) Lake and return. Gentle trails through grasslands, Douglas-fir forests and riparian areas from Hairy Fish Lake. Time permitting; we may walk beyond Koster Lake along Little Churn Creek towards Churn Flats. This can be either a hike or bike trip. We will likely meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:00 a.m. but please phone for confirmation.

Missioner Creek (Dairy Fields) walk

Wednesday July 9th (Leader Ordell Steen 398-5017)

We will focus on history of human occupation of this area within the City of Williams Lake, from earliest evidence of people to Secwepemc village site and burial ground, HBC brigade trail and site of "first Williams Lake". Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 6:00 p.m.

Eureka Meadows

Saturday July 26th. Katharine VanSpall (250-392-4447). **Please pre-register with Katharine so we can be sure enough high clearance 4x4 vehicles will be available.** Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:00am

Join Kath for a hike into the alpine meadows northwest of Eureka Peak, located in the Cariboo Mountains near the headwaters of the Horsefly River. There will be an elevation gain of approximately 700 meters over 5 km (i.e. ~10 km total hike), so be prepared! This trip is planned to coincide with the alpine flower season, so bring your plant book to

help with identification and your camera. Be sure to pack a hearty lunch and snacks, as well as plenty of water. Rain gear is also wise as you are in the rain belt of the Cariboo Mountains. Good footwear is imperative and gaiters could be an asset as the vegetation will be very deep and most likely wet. The last part of the drive to the trailhead is over rough logging roads with numerous water bars, so high clearance 4x4's are required.

Churn Flats – Churn Creek Protected Area

*Saturday September 6th (Leader: Ordell Steen (398-5017 – **please phone** if you plan to come)*

A moderate, full day hike (about 12 km total) in conjunction with Friends of Churn onto spectacular grasslands of Churn Flats. Excellent bunchgrass grasslands are present and the hike will include views into canyons of Churn Creek and Little Churn Creek. High clearance vehicles will be required due to likely rutting of the forest ranch road which accesses the area. Meet at the “Y” (A&W parking lot) at 6:45 a.m.

Dante’s Inferno

Sunday October 5th (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)

Moderate hike to new (2013) Goal 2 Park, 20 km west of Riske Creek. The hike features fabulous vistas from basalt cliffs and a trail to small lake below with a possible extension to the grassland slopes along the Chilcotin River. Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch, lots of water and good footwear.

Junction Sheep Range

Sunday October 19th (Leader Fred McMechan 392-7680)

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch, water bottle and your binoculars for this annual day long drive and hike into the park. This will be at the peak of the California Big-horned Sheep rut so look forward to seeing the sheep and perhaps you will be lucky and see or hear some head-butting.

The trip organizers are a bit disappointed with the lack of field trips during July and August. It is not too late to add more club trips to the list. We are planning 2 more Muskrat editions before the summer break when we can announce these trips. Talk with your friends and let's see if we can add some more great summer activities for the club. If you wish to add a new trip to our list please contact Jim at 296-3638 or muskratexpress@shaw.ca. A big thanks to all of the club members who have volunteered to lead our field trips for 2014. Hope to see you all on the trails this year!