

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
MARCH-APRIL 2007 NEWSLETTER

6:30  
FRIDAY NIGHT  
APRIL 13

WE ARE ON OUR WAY  
TO  
THE BOWRON LAKES



CHRIS HARRIS  
SPEAKER FOR  
SPRING BANQUET

REMEMBER SPRING GATHERING FOR YARD SALE



The newsletter for the:  
Williams Lake Field Naturalists  
1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC, V2G 5K5

**Membership fees:** Family (\$27) or single (\$22) memberships can be mailed to the above address. Please include your address and phone number with your membership fee. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail [Fred\\_McMechan@telus.net](mailto:Fred_McMechan@telus.net)

**Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists:** president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Kris Andrews, treasurer *unknown at this time* and directors Ordell Steen, Anna Roberts, Rob Higgins, Rick Dawson, Nola Daintith and Cathy Koot

**Editors:** If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the Muskrat please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3636) or e-mail [simsj@telus.net](mailto:simsj@telus.net)

### **Scout Island Nature Centre Spring Banquet**

A reminder that the 2007 Spring Banquet will be on Friday, April 13<sup>th</sup> at St. Andrew's United Church Hall. The featured speaker will be Chris Harris, well known Cariboo-Chilcotin outdoor photographer and guide. His presentation will include imagery in his most recent book "The Bowron Lakes: A Lifetime Journey". The banquet will begin at 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:00. Tickets are \$30.00 for adults and \$15.00 for those under 16 years of age. Tickets will be available at the Open Book or from any member of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists executive. The ticket sales will end April 9<sup>th</sup> so don't delay any longer.



**Bowron Lakes**

### **Alkali Lake Field Trip**

The first field trip for the season will be our annual field trip to Alkali Lake. The day trip will take place on Sunday April 15<sup>th</sup>. Please meet at the Nature Centre at 9:00am. Bring a lunch as well as your binoculars and bird book. This is an opportunity to see and identify the variety of waterfowl that return to Alkali Lake each spring. We will also be looking for many of the early grassland species as well. There will be very little walking on this outing as most of the

observations will take place from the road. A full list of the rest of the field trips for 2007 can be found at the end of this Muskrat.

## **Spring Garden and Yard Sale**

Saturday May 5<sup>th</sup> is the day! Sale is 9:30am to 1:30pm at the Nature House at Scout Island.

Please start gathering, growing and planting and even pricing your stuff/treasures! I recently spoke to Gloria and her tomatoes are growing quickly. Help add to our collection of plants for sale. Please label your plants. Check your basements for that sport and camping equipment and clothing that you never use anymore and pack it up for the sale! Maybe you would be able to make some cookies, bread or muffins to sell? Have you any old toys or tools that take up space and you want to clean out and donate to a worthy cause?

Goods for the sale can be dropped off at the Nature House on the afternoon of Friday May 4<sup>th</sup> starting at 4:30.

Helpers are needed so please give Margaret Waring a call (398-7724) if you are available for the Friday or Saturday or if you have any questions about the sale. We are doing this to fund raise for a bursary for a graduating high school student. Any extra funds will be used for summer programs at Scout Island.

I hope you can help...even a bit!

Margaret Waring (telephone 398-7724 or [mewaring@hotmail.com](mailto:mewaring@hotmail.com))

## **Annual General Meeting Report**

Our AGM was a great success again this year. The pot luck supper was a big hit with lots of food. Thanks to all of you that provided a dish. Once again Fred kept the business part of the meeting to a minimum. Your new (old) executive members are Fred McMechan president, Jim Sims vice-president, Kris Andrews secretary, Anna Roberts, Rob Higgins, Ordell Steen, Cathy Koot, Nola Daintith, and Rick Dawson are directors. Nola has stepped down as the treasurer after many years of exceptional service to the club. She was thanked and presented with a book to recognize her outstanding service. We are currently looking for a replacement and hope to fill the position soon.



**Nola, Roger, Cathy, Pat and Rob Fill their plates at the AGM pot-luck supper**

The program on Chile presented by Anna, Sue, Jurgen and Kris was one of our better slide

programs. The slides of the flowers and scenery were outstanding. The stories behind the pictures were equally interesting. Thanks to all of you for your program.

Thanks to all of the members that made the effort to attend and make the AGM a success again this year.

### **Community Workshop 2007**

All Welcome. The Williams Lake Field Naturalists are helping to host this event on the May long weekend. Please have a look at the workshop description and registration package by accessing the following URL. You will see that there are a wide variety of workshops on the Saturday, a great dinner and dance (Outlaw Social is playing) Saturday evening, and field trips on the Sunday. Total cost is \$35 if you register by April 20 (dinner dance on Saturday is an additional \$5). The registration package can be retrieved by hitting the link called Workshop Brochure and Registration. <http://workshop.pskf.ca/2007/index.html>

### **Western Toad Breeding Sites**

The Ministry of Environment out of Victoria is establishing a database of western toad breeding sites in the province. Have you ever encountered a big emergence of tiny, black toadlets while adventuring outdoors? If so, please let Cathy Koot know where specifically and the approximate date and she will pass the information on. Plus, any other sites and dates you know toads bred at (i.e. you've seen them in the act, heard them singing, or saw eggs/tadpoles) would be appreciated. Here is a link to the ministries web site where you will find some interesting facts about the Western Toad.



<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frogwatch/whoswho/factshts/westtoad.htm>

Thanks and happy spring!  
Cathy (392-4250 or tomcat@midbc.com)

### **Dance As A Healing Art Workshop**

Dreaming of spring? As spring awakens our world, we are renewed and inspired to share what lies within us. Join dream guide Jenny Noble and dancer Claire West Mattson in a creative celebration of body, mind and imagination.... REALizing the energy of our dreams through the magic of rhythm and movement.

- Where: Child Development Centre \_ 690 N 2nd, Williams Lake
- When: Saturday, April 14 12:45 \_ 4:00 pm
- What to bring: a dream that depicts or inspires movement. This dream can be from any time in your life, as long as it has energy for you. It could even be someone else's dream, a scene from a book or movie, a waking fantasy, or an event from life...here is where the creative process begins.
- Cost: a donation (profits go to Scout Island Nature Centre)

- Whatever shall I wear?: anything loose, comfortable and, if you wish, beautiful. Layers suggested.

Please pre-register at Sta-Well Health Foods, The Hobbit House or by email to [neptune@goldcity.net](mailto:neptune@goldcity.net) Water will be provided For more info please call 396-7248 or 747-8535 or reply to this email. To learn more about South Cariboo Movement Arts and see a bio of Claire, visit [www.movement-arts.ca](http://www.movement-arts.ca)

## **Scout Island Nature Centre News**

The spring break program for children ages 6-13 was fun for children and staff. There was full enrollment and we had to turn some children away. Hopefully, we can expand the program next year. The weather was cold, but the children were “hot.” They all dressed warmly which meant we could be outside for over 2 hours each day with no complaints. We explored all parts of the Nature Centre looking for signs of spring. There were birds to identify and watch, bugs under boards, and tree and shrub buds to touch and smell. Inside, we did observations of animals in the tanks, learned to identify shrubs from their twigs, and found out whether meal worms prefer dark or light. Thanks to Ian Higgins (spring staff) and Marc Antonne Nicoll (Katimavik volunteer) for helping out with this. The Boys and Girls Club also visited during spring break as did a number of people who came in whenever we had the door open. We do wish we could be open more often, so if you would like to be a Nature House host, call Sue. We will try and be open weekends starting in April.

It is time to hire summer staff. Krysta Thomson will be returning from last year’s staff, which will be a great help. We need two more university students (at least one year of university completed), with an interest in natural history and a willingness to learn. This is a great job for someone thinking of becoming a teacher or going into the biological sciences. The pay is now \$12/hour for 40 hours a week and the job lasts 16 weeks. If you know of a student who would be interested, please have them email their resume to Sue at [shemphill@wlake.com](mailto:shemphill@wlake.com) by April 13.

The Marsh Festival will be June 9. There will be bird and plant walks, games, art, and natural history programs for families and just maybe canoe rides (I am working on that one). If you would like to help out with this day please contact Sue. We are also looking for someone with computer skills and creativity, to transform the famous Scout Island Nature Centre Wet Sock Guide into a format that will be easier to use in the field.

Finally, don’t forget the silent auction that is part of the Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet. If you have items to donate, you can drop them off at the Nature House or bring them early to the banquet.

Looking for a great vacation this summer? There is a lodge on Thetis Island run by the Lambs. Andy Lamb is life-long marine naturalist and co-author of Marine Life of the Pacific Northwest. For more information look at the website [www.cedar-beach.com](http://www.cedar-beach.com). This place comes highly recommended by Doug Swanston, the person who supplies us with the marine creatures in the

tank at the Nature House.



Work crews have been busy replacing the weir with loafing logs for the ducks and geese to rest on near the outflow of the lake. New loafing logs were also located in turtle bay for the turtles to rest on when the water levels drop. Two loon nesting

platforms were also constructed. One was located on the West end of the little island and the other can be found on the east side of the causeway near the mainland. If you are boating please stay clear of these two potential nest sights from mid May to late June.



**Fred and Cathy prepare to move the Loon platform to the west side of the little Island**

Some tiny video cams have been purchased for Scout Island. Several nest boxes have been modified so a camera can be mounted over a hole in the roof of the box. Visitors to the Nature Centre will be able to watch the live action that is happening inside of the nesting box. The transmission can be recorded. If you are interested in finding out more about this you can contact Pat Teti (398-4752) or Jim Sims (296-3638).

**Bird Sightings from the Williams Lake Area      April 4, 2007**

The spring season is well under way now. The ice will be leaving the lake any day now. It is a great time of the year to get out your binoculars and go for a walk around the Nature Centre. New bird species are arriving daily.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> an early White Pelican was on the San Jose sand bar at the east end of Williams Lake. It was seen again the next day when it flew over Scout Island several times while a work crew was setting out more loafing logs. Another was on Alkali Lake on March 25<sup>th</sup>.



**American White Pelican**



**Cackling Goose**

On March 10<sup>th</sup> the first nine Canada Geese landed on the ice at Felker Lake.

Can you locate the smaller Cackling goose in this photo taken by Kris on March 21<sup>st</sup>. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> Kris sent us this photo of a pair of Green-winged Teal taken where the city well water is discharged into the lake. A pair of Wood Ducks was observed on the settlement pond



**Green-winged Teal**



**Eurasian Widgeon**

about 300 Canada Geese, and a lone Swan. The Cinnamon Teal was reported at Scout Island on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Kris took this photo of a Eurasian Widgeon on March 15<sup>th</sup>. It was near the outlet to Williams Lake. Don Piller provided the photo of a pair of courting Common Goldeneye on March 18<sup>th</sup>.

near the highway 20 bridge on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> it was reported that seven males in beautiful breeding plumage are making daily flights to a south lakeside feeder at 6:00pm. This is when Hans arrives home from work and fills their feeder. What makes this more interesting is the lake is still frozen solid at this time so the ducks are all landing on the ice. Squadrons of Northern Pintails were reported as a sign of approaching spring on March 10<sup>th</sup>. They were found along the Mission Road. Also along Mission Road and Sugarcane Flats were a few Widgeon, Green-winged Teal,



**Courting Common Goldeneyes**

On March 14<sup>th</sup> there were at least 15 Eagles in Cotton Ranch area. Four of five were Golden Eagle.

Six Sandhill Cranes were reported in the Meldrum lake area on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

A Say's Phoebe was photographed by Kris at the Cotton Ranch on March 14<sup>th</sup>. It was busy catching insects around the house and apparently nests under the eaves at the Huffman residence every year.



**Say's Phoebe**

Horned Larks were singing their soft tinkling song at the Loran 'C' site on March 11<sup>th</sup> and a few small groups of Lapland Longspurs were overhead.

On March 18<sup>th</sup> a lone Tree Swallow skimmed the ice briefly at Scout Island and then disappeared. It's not unusual for the first Swallows back to be treated to an icy blast of winter, which Phil supposes is nature's way of getting even with queue jumpers.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> the Big Lake Blue Jays were establishing territories at Big Lake again this Spring. There are four birds in the area so perhaps there will be two nests this year.

Six Chestnut-backed Chickadees are still present at the Forest grove feeder. It is hoped that a pair will stay and nest in the area.

The first Ruby-crowned Kinglet was reported at Scout Island on March 31<sup>st</sup>. The next day a mixed flock of Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets was feeding in the willows and gleaning insects from the snow along Riske Creek. The first report of Mountain Bluebirds came

in on March 10<sup>th</sup>. A pair were found on Mission Road. On March 18<sup>th</sup> large flocks of Robins had moved into the area. The reports of Varied Thrush have been numerous this year. Early reports came in from Alkali Lake and Rose Lake on March 10<sup>th</sup>. The Rose lake Thrush has recently been eating sunflower seeds on the feeder. Normally they would forage on the ground below the feeder. Bob Steventon provided this photo of a Varied Thrush in his Prince George yard.



**Varied Thrush**

A Yellow-rumped Warbler was reported at Scout Island on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. A Spotted Towhee was reported at a Forest Grove feeder on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. On March 10<sup>th</sup> the numbers of Snow Buntings were in decline at the Fox mountain feedlot. A flock of fifteen was still present.

Three female Pine Grosbeaks are still coming to the Rose Lake feeder on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. A few (rare) Common Redpolls have been reported. At Rose Lake four or five were still visiting the feeder on April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Jim Sims

## **Field Trip List 2007**

*Note: unless specified you must be a member of the Williams Lake Field Naturalist to participate on these outings.*

**Alkali Lake** April 15<sup>th</sup> trip leader Fred McMechan (392-7680)

Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 9:00am to arrange car pooling. 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.

**Chilanko Marsh** May 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> trip 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 species count conducted on the marsh and the surrounding riparian zone. The marsh provides an opportunity to see most of the water fowl 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. There will be a pot luck supper Saturday evening and a pancake breakfast Sunday morning. Please call Jim for more details if you plan on participating.

**Stewardship Workshop 2007 Field Trips** May 20<sup>th</sup> You must register for the stewardship workshop to participate on these field trips. More details are provided with your registration.

- Birding in the River Valley
- Ants on Plants
- Forest Walk at Minton Creek

**Marsh Festival (Early Morning Birding) June 9<sup>th</sup> Cathy Koot (392-4250)**

Meet at the Nature Centre at 8:30 am and join Cathy for a morning walk around the Nature Centre and an opportunity to identify the many different species that will be nesting there. This trip is part of the Marsh Festival and is open to the public.

**Birding in the Williams Lake River Valley June 17<sup>th</sup> Phil Ranson (398-7110)**

Meet at 8:00am in the lower parking lot. 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.

**Flammulated Owls, Poorwills and Bats June 22<sup>nd</sup> Anna Roberts (392-5000)**

Meet at Scout Island at 9:30pm to arrange car pooling for a trip to the Deer Park Road. This is a late Friday night outing to hear the call of the Flammulated Owl from the hillsides above the road, to listen to Poorwills that lay on the grasslands near the road and to hear the Bats as they emerge for their nightly forage.

**Moffat Lakes Canoe Outing July 8<sup>th</sup> Cathy Koot and Tom Foley (392-4250)**

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Enjoy a paddle in your canoe or kayak and explore nature on these lakes east of 150 Mile House. Be sure to bring life jackets and other safety gear, plus water and a hearty lunch. Hopefully a bathing suit and sunscreen will be needed. There is one short portage depending on water levels. Be aware that the road is a good gravel logging road, but that it might have truck activity.

**Eureka Peak July 28<sup>th</sup> Sue Hemphill and Jurgen Homburg (398-8532)**

Meet at the Horsefly Bridge at 8:00am. Join Sue and Jurgen for a hike into the alpine on the north end of Eureka Peak located in the Cariboo Mountains near the headwaters of the Horsefly River. There will be an elevation gain of close to 1500 feet so be prepared for a healthy hike. This trip is planned to coincide with the peak of the alpine flower season so bring your plant book to help with identification. The steeper East side of the Eureka ridge is home to a large mountain goat herd and they can often be seen from the top of the ridge. Be sure to pack a hearty lunch and trail mix as well as good rain gear as you are in the rain belt of the Cariboo Mountains. Streams on the hike up as well as the plateau are dependent on snow melt and rain fall so you should bring a water bottle. Good foot wear 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 is over rough logging access roads so high clearance vehicles should be used. Car pooling will be arranged at Horsefly. If you wish you are welcome to camp over Saturday night but your guides will most likely be returning home Saturday evening.

**Pit Houses of Churn Creek** August 26<sup>th</sup> Ordell Steen (398-5017)

Meet at Scout Island at 7:00am. Join Ordell for this day-long walk in the grasslands of Churn Creek. The outing will include a steep climb down to the river and unfortunately you must come back up.

**Big Creek Ecological Reserve** September 16<sup>th</sup> Ordell Steen and Jim Sims (296-3638)

Meet at Scout Island at 7:00am. Join Ordell and Jim for a hike into the grassland ecological reserve near the confluence of Big Creek and the Chilcotin River. Bring your lunch and water bottle. This trip will also include significant elevation loss as we drop down into the valley bottom.

**Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park** October 21<sup>st</sup> Fred McMechan (392-7680)

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