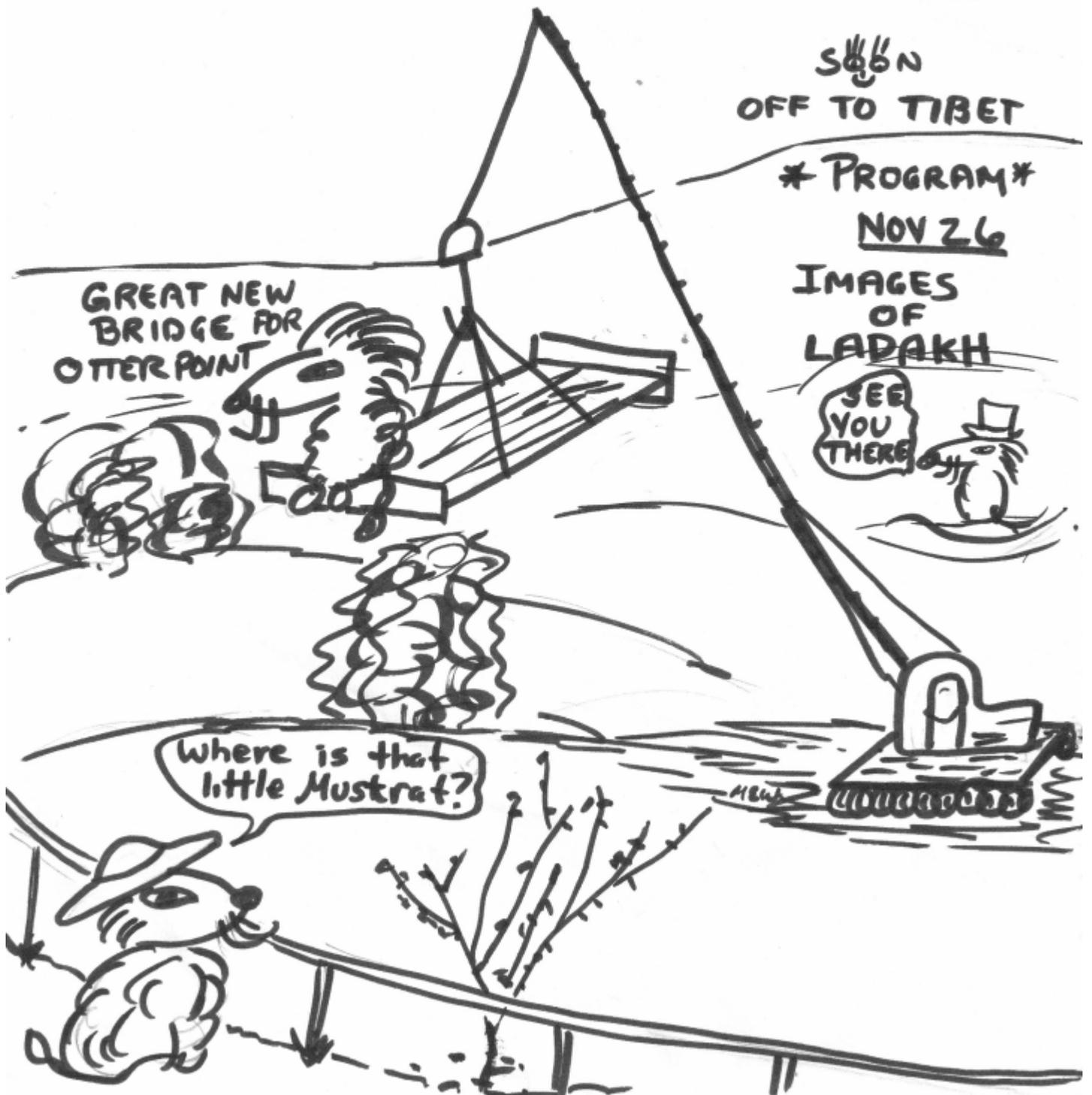


MUSKRAY EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

NOVEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER.





The MUSKRAT EXPRESS

NOVEMBER 6, 2008

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

Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Kris Andrews, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Ordell Steen, Anna Roberts, 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 (296-3636) or e-mail simsj@telus.net Please expect the next Muskrat in the first few days of December in time to distribute the Christmas Bird Count information. If you wish to submit an article, please email or phone Jim before the end of November.

Images of Ladakh

November 26th talk starts at 7:30 pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

Seb Mankelaw will present an illustrated tour of Ladakh, a remote high altitude region of northern India sandwiched between the Himalaya, the Karakoram and the Tibetan Plateau. Having visited the area almost annually since 1994 Seb's presentation provides an insight into life above 3500m, the regions' history and cultural heritage; flora and fauna; and contemporary issues surrounding development in the face of rapid modernization.



Come early and enjoy a “**Winter Dessert Potluck Social**” at 6:00 pm (before the talk). Sue will put the coffee and tea on. Bring a dessert to share.

Christmas Bird Count

Our traditional date for the Christmas Bird Count is the first Sunday in the Christmas count period. This year's count will take place on Sunday December 14th. Try to plan your pre-Christmas events so you can be available to help make this years count another big success. More details will be provided in the December newsletter. If you want more details before then

or to reserve your usual birding route you can contact Phil Ranson our bird count coordinator at (250)398-7110 or ranson1@telus.net

BC Nature Request for Funds

This fall we wish to encourage you to donate to BC Nature. In the mailing of the recent BC Nature magazine there was an enclosure containing a letter from Bev Ramey, the president of BC Nature along with a donation form. The letter outlines the need for funds for BC Nature to operate in 2009 and a request for members to donate at this critical time. Please fill out the donation form and donate the amount you wish to give. If you do not have this form you can send your donation to BC Nature, 1620 Mount Seymour Road, North Vancouver BC V7G 2R9. If you wish a copy of the letter, or further information please contact Fred McMechan at 250 392 7680. (A donation form is attached to the end of this newsletter.)

Fred McMechan

Scout Island Nature Centre Notes

The Chinook salmon eggs arrived at the Nature Centre October 24th. I have been busy going to schools with the pink/orange treasures. The students watch fascinated as the eggs drop into the redd they made in their tank for them. Then we read about Sumi and her life story, look at eggs up close, and discuss what they will need to do to keep their eggs, alevins, and fry healthy in the tank. Finally, we talk about what they (children) can do to make sure Sumi and all her friends have cold, clean, moving water, places to hide and food. Each of them can turn electric things off when they are done and they can pack garbage-less lunches. I will visit the classes throughout the year as the fish change stages.

Let the children in your life know about the art program planned for the fall school not in session days.

Fall school programs ended just before the eggs arrived. We used birding to help students enter into the world of nature and to understand the energy pyramids at the marsh work. I want to thank, new members Seb Mankelow and Stephanie Bird (she is also our caretaker) who helped with the classes. It is more interesting for the students if they can be in small groups and Seb and Stephanie made this possible.

Sue Hemphill

Nature Journeys Memories

“The human child in nature may be the most important indicator species of the future sustainability.” Richard Louv, author of [The Last Child in the Woods](#)

Walking barefoot in the mud, marveling at aquatic insects, discovering recent “chews” on willows (evidence of



Kids in front of shelter they built at Nature Journeys

“logging” beaver-style), finding empty snail shells, making animal track casts, helping Sue feed the toads and salamander larvae at the Nature Centre, and building a personal survival shelter: these are a few of the memories that linger on as I reflect on this fall's six week session of Nature Journeys. We had a great response to the program, which ran four times a week, 2 hours per week. We had four groups with a maximum of 6 children, and most of the groups were full.

Our time together would always start with a mystery, where the children would try to identify an unknown insect, animal skull or coniferous tree branch, for example. Then we would go out exploring, and each day would have a particular focus for our wanderings: hazards, insects, reptiles and amphibians, plants, mammals and trees. Sensory awareness and observation skills were developed by playing lots of games such as Eagle Eye, Firekeeper and Sleeping Fawn. Stories of famous trackers and naturalists would also be included to help inspire the kids. Each day would end with a closing circle where children shared their “highlight of the day” and something they felt thankful for at the time.

I miss the kids already and look forward to our Spring Session! I am deeply thankful to Scout Island Nature Centre for hosting the program and to all the parents who volunteered their help each week.

Nature Journeys is based on a mentoring model developed by the Wilderness Awareness School near Seattle, Washington.

Patricia Spencer, Earthwise Ventures

Tracking Club

starting Saturday, Dec. 13th, at 10:00 am at Scout Island Nature Centre (about 1½ hours)

Who made this track? (hint: it was not a Muskrat)

Open to children (ages 8 and up) and adults; children need to be accompanied by adult.

All experience and skill levels are welcome.

This is the first in a series of tracking experiences and will be lead by Patricia Spencer. There will be more opportunities through the winter. Come out and enjoy winter!

Participation is by donation.

For more information call 250.398-8532 or 250.791-1901

Art in Nature for Children

Scout Island Nature Centre

Nov. 10, 12, and 13

12 noon-3pm

Kathy Faulkner, well known art teacher, will lead this experience for children 9 to 15. Each day will begin with a walk at Scout Island to engage children in observing nature. Then Kathy will work with them to create their own art using a variety of media.

Sign up for 1,2 or all 3 days \$10 per day

Call 398 8532 to register or for more information

New Otter Point Bridge

The old bridge that was sadly in need of replacement has been removed, taken apart and distributed around the Nature Centre as course woody debris. Thanks to a great effort by many volunteers and donors the new bridge was put in place under the capable directions of Fred on October 21st. The railings were completed and the bridge was walked for the first time by the day-care class on October 23rd.



Ordell and Ron Guide the new bridge into place

The replacement of the bridge was only possible through a number of donations. We recognize the following business that made donations of materials and supplies;

- 1) **Ernie Krajczar** - engineer who designed the bridge
- 2) **Grosso Precast** - provided the concrete blocks
- 3) **West Fraser Timber**- donated the log stringers
- 4) **Pioneer Log Homes** - developed the bridge base
- 5) **Cariboo Interior Crane Service** - provided the crane service to remove the old bridge and replace it with the new one.
- 6) **The Public Conservation Assistance Fund/Habitat Conservation Trust Fund** - gave a grant

Equally important were the many hours of volunteer labour provided by the following Fred McMechan, Jim Sims, Ordell Steen, Ray Hornby, John Kowbuz, Rick Nelson, Frank Kika, Jim Bachmeier, Ron Scheck, Dick Schut, Stephen Walker

Conservation Notes

As you know the Conservation Strategy was completed last winter. It has now gone forward to the government as part of the total strategy from Cariboo Chilcotin Beetle Action Committee. Through the process of developing the **Conservation Strategy** the need for a **Regional Sustainability Coordinator** was identified. Funding for this position for 1 year was received by the Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society and Carla Glessing was hired as the Sustainability Coordinator by the Sustainability Coordinator Advisory group. Carla has a degree in Forest Management and is a Registered Professional Forester. She is a regional coordinator and is working with people from Quesnel south to 100 Mile House.

The Sustainability Coordinator Office in Williams Lake is located in the Community Arts Center (across from Kiwanis Park on 4th Avenue), Room 145. Carla's work will align with the Conservation Strategy, Urban Issues Section.

Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area

The potential formation of a “Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area Society” was discussed at a recent meeting in Williams Lake, organized by the Grasslands Conservation Council of B.C. (GCC). Participants included representatives of the GCC, BC Parks, Williams Lake Field Naturalists (Jim Sims) and Cariboo-Chilcotin Conservation Society as well as previous staff of BC Parks. The purpose of the meeting was for a small group of people who have been involved with the Protected Area and its management planning to discuss the need and roles of a “Friends” organization and to initiate the process of forming a Friends of Churn society. The principal purpose of the society would be to support achievement of the goals stated in the Management Plan for the Protected Area. The organization would be an independent public group working with BC Parks and others to encourage sound and innovation management, conservation, and awareness of this gem in British Columbia’s protected area network. A steering committee was formed and a meeting with broader participation will be organized for next spring. For further details regarding the formation of a Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area, contact Ordell Steen (oasteen@shaw.ca).

Nature Notes from the Williams Lake Area

Snow Bunting

Our first featured bird of the month is an appropriate reminder that winter is not far away. On the Thanksgiving weekend this year I took this photo of a **Snow Bunting** at Eagle Lake. It was staying a few hops ahead of me as I walked along the shore of the lake. I was very surprised to find it there and also to find it alone. I usually associate this bunting with a cold winter day when I might see a flock of “Snowflakes” floating in the breeze along the roadside beside a hayfield. Another Name for the Snow Bunting is the "Snowflake".



Eagle Lake Snow Bunting

This bunting is sporting its new winter coat that displays cinnamon on the crown, flanks and rump. During the late winter it will molt back to black and white plumage with an ivory head and belly. The back and tail are black while the black wings have white patches. The female is similar in colour but has dark streaking on the head. In our area the bunting can be locally fairly common with flocks of up to 30 birds found from mid October to mid April. A good place to find them is at the Williams Lake airport. In fact Phil reported seeing a flock of eight at the airport on November 3rd. They will frequent fields with low vegetation as long as seed heads are not covered with snow. Once the snow covers the seeds they will leave.

The Snow Bunting winters in southern Canada and the northern and central United States. It inhabits open areas: tundra, beaches and barren fields. During severe winters large flocks

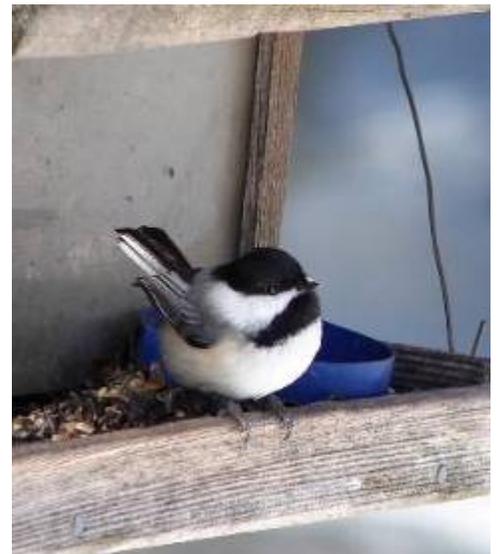
descend to the northern states. In North America, the Snow Bunting breeds from northern Alaska, Prince Patrick Island, Northern Ellesmere Island and Northern Greenland, Northern Quebec and Northern British Columbia usually on high mountain tops. The Snow Bunting breeds farther north than almost any other land bird.

The male Snow Bunting returns to the high Arctic in early April, when temperatures can still dip below -30°C . Snow usually still covers most of the ground. The female does not return until four to six weeks later. Early arriving Snow Bunting males establish and defend territories that include good nesting sites. They will still come together in flocks to forage, and usually roost in loose groups of from 30 to 80 birds. The nest can be found deep in cracks or other cavities in rocks. Such nest sites are relatively secure from predators but the rocks are fairly cold. Therefore thick nests lined with fur and feathers help to keep the eggs and nestlings warm. Because the climate is so harsh the female must remain on the nest for most of the incubation period. During this time the male feeds her.

Black-caped Chickadee

For the next species I have selected one of our most common bird feeder visitors, the Black-caped Chickadee. By the way I hope you all have your feeders set up and that they are well stocked with sunflower seeds. Setting out suet is also a good idea. Doing this early in the fall is a good idea as our winter birds will search out reliable food sources once the breeding season ends.

This Chickadee is common throughout the central interior of the province. In coniferous forests it prefers edges and openings along riparian areas, man made clearings and forest fire edges. It is also readily attracted to backyard feeders. Coniferous trees and dense shrubs in your yard will help provide protection. They are mainly non-migratory however in years when food is in short supply there will be a short southern migration. During the non-breeding season they will travel in mixed flocks of birds that include other Chickadee species, Nuthatches, Kinglets and Creepers. The chickadee's simple-sounding calls have been found to be extremely complex and language-like. They code information on identity, recognition of other flocks and food sources as well as predator alarms and contact calls. Recent studies of the call show that the number of *dees* indicates the level of threat from nearby predators. In an analysis of over 5,000 alarm calls from chickadees, it was found that alarm calls triggered by small, dangerous raptors had a shorter interval between *chick* and *dee* and tended to have extra *dees*, usually averaging four instead of two. It is suggested that it is this calling that attracts the attention of the other bird species that follow along for protection and to find food easier. This small bird finds it easier to tolerate the extreme cold winters of the Chilcotin Plateau by roosting at night in cavities or very thick vegetation. It is also able to reduce its temperature by as much as 10 to 12 deg cel below its daytime temperature. In this regulated hypothermia state it is able to conserve energy. If you watch the Chickadees at your feeder you will notice



One of many Black-capped Chickadees that visit my Rose Lake Feeder

that they fly in, pick up a seed and then depart. Other species like finches remain on the feeder and pig-out on the seeds. Once the Chickadee has a seed it will hold it against a branch and peck at it until the seed opens and can be eaten. It will often hide the seed for later recovery. Each item is placed in a different spot and a bird seems to be able to remember thousands of hiding places.

During the breeding season they disperse and become territorial. The higher energy needs of raising young results in a diet change from seeds to a preference for insects that are also more available at that time. They flit along branches in search of these insects, often hanging upside down. They will also catch flying insects. They are a primary nest excavator and prefer crevices in rotting deciduous snags. They will also nest in woodpecker cavities and nest boxes. The nest is lined with moss, fur and in this case some pink insulation. They will usually have six to eight eggs.

There are three other Chickadee species that can be found in the Cariboo Chilcotin. The Mountain Chickadee with its black strip through the eye is also common throughout the plateau with a preference to higher elevations as the name implies. The Boreal Chickadee is the only Chickadee with a brown head and prefers sub-alpine habitat. It is fairly common in the Cariboo Mountains where you will not find as many Black-capped Chickadees. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee, as the name describes has a chestnut coloured back. It is mainly found in coastal forests and is rarely found in the interior.



Black-capped Chickadee Nest

Black-backed Woodpecker

This photo of a female **Black-backed Woodpecker** was taken during this year's field trip to Chilanko Marsh. The female lacks the yellow cap of the male. It is a Medium-sized woodpecker with an entirely black back. The sides are barred black-and-white while the throat, chest, and belly are white. It is similar to the Three-toed Woodpecker and also has three toes on each foot.

This woodpecker is a rare year round resident of the Cariboo Chilcotin. It frequents coniferous forests at higher elevations. There is a preference for recently burnt forests where it can feed on grubs that have infested the burnt forest. They often strip away the burnt bark to expose the grubs. The striped trees in a burnt area can give away their presence. It is suspected that they could be more common than thought as they frequent areas that are not the favourite location for us to go birding. I'm certain that our beetle outbreaks throughout the region have resulted in an increase in their population. I'm also wondering what impact we will observe on this and other woodpeckers as the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation passes. Both male and female will excavate a new nest each year. Their preference is a dead tree. The male will often incubate the eggs during the night.



Black-backed Woodpecker

If you want to know more about a bird that you have seen please send me your photo and a description of you observation and I'll see if I can find any interesting facts for the newsletter. Of course you could do your own research for us. These reports do not have to be restricted to birds, I would be happy to receive your articles on plants, animals,...

Jim Sims



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