

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
SEPTEMBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

Fall is coming
enjoy the season



I am going for a
Salmon Walk on
River's Day
Sept 25
with Mary

Remember to go visit the Sheep on
Oct 22 - Final Field Trip of year



I am very busy thinking!
I will enter the
Nature Trust Contest.

I need about 200 words to
tell you about my favourite secret
places on SCOUT ISLAND



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, muskrat@midbc.com or the web site below. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail Fred_McMechan@telus.net

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Website <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>
Scout Island Nature Centre Website <http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca>

Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Rob Higgins, Rick Dawson and Cathy Koot

Editors: Thanks to all of you who have made contributions to this month's Newsletter and we look forward to more for the next edition near the end of October. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the Muskrat please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at muskrat@midbc.com We do prefer to send out electronic versions of the newsletter so if you currently receive a paper copy and don't need one please contact Jim or Margaret (reduce your carbon footprint and save us some time and money).

Celebrate Rivers Day and Spawning Pink Salmon Sunday September 25 2-4 pm

Take a river walk along the Williams Lake River with Mary. Learn about the salmon and the river. Meet at the lowest parking lot (take Frizzi Road down) at 2pm. Bring water and good walking shoes. All ages welcome. For more information call 398 8532 or 855 8443



Hooray for Scout Island Nature Centre!

What do you love about this natural treasure right in our city? We want to hear what Scout Island Nature Centre means to you, so we're announcing a writing contest, open to everyone.

Express your thoughts celebrating Scout Island Nature Centre and you'll be eligible for some delightful prizes, provided by The Nature Trust and



Get writing!

Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

In honour of its 40th anniversary, the Nature Trust of BC (TNT) is partnering with us in this project. Any written format is welcome: poem, story, essay, illustrated or not.

The contest topic is open to your imagination, but here are some ideas: What do you like to do there? What secret places or special walks do you treasure? Do you have a favourite memory? What animal or plant have you connected with? What do you think about the people and the history that have made Scout Island Nature Centre what it is today? You might write a note inviting to a friend to visit Scout Island Nature Centre with you, describing what you'll do and see, what the best part will be, etc.

TNT and WLFN are offering prizes in the following categories:

- Primary (grades K-4) Suggested simplified topic: Why Scout Island Nature Centre is a happy place for me and for wildlife
- Intermediate (grades 5-7) Suggested simplified topic: Why Scout Island Nature Centre is a happy place for me and for wildlife
- High School (grades 8-12)
- Adult

Contest deadline is 5 p.m. October 15, 2011. Maximum length 250 words.

Please send submissions to neptune@goldcity.net or mail to Scout Island Nature Centre, 1305A Borland Rd, Williams Lake, BC V2G 5K5. Include your contact information and age (if under 18).

Annual Final Field Trip of the Season

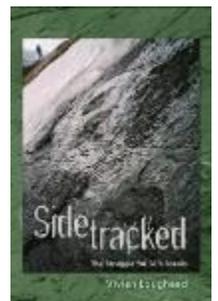
Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park October 22nd Fred McMechan (392-7680)

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.



Sidetracked: The Struggle for BC's Fossils

The book, *Sidetracked: The Struggle for BC's Fossils*, focuses on the people and politics behind some of the most important paleontological discoveries in the province. Author Vivien Lougheed from Prince George, is planning to tour the province through the fall. Vivien Lougheed has confirmed that she will be coming to the Williams Lake Library to read and discuss Sidetracked on the evening of Thursday October 27th. The time has not



been confirmed at this time so watch for further announcements.

Sidetrack is a new book release from Creekstone Press

What began as a hunting trip to Kakwa Provincial Park in British Columbia's northern Rockies turns into one of the province's most important fossil finds. It also sets off a chain of events that highlight how the pursuit of scientific understanding can go very, very wrong.

In *Sidetracked: The Struggle for BC's Fossils*, Prince George writer Vivien Lougheed tells the fascinating tale of the discovery of the Monroe Dinosaur Trackway and weaves in stories of other major fossil finds in British Columbia and across North America, many of which demonstrate how egos, turf wars and a lack of resources diminish the science of paleontology.

While professional and amateur paleontologists, commercial fossil hunters, scientific societies, professors, museum curators, bureaucrats and politicians spar in an ancient arena, erosion, theft and resource development threaten Earth's fossil record and with it our ability to decipher the geological past.

According to Dr. David Raup, internationally acclaimed paleontologist and a former curator of Chicago's Field Museum, *Sidetracked* is "a triumph of investigative journalism ... and should be required reading for all amateur fossil collectors and, especially, the professionals."

From a 23-metre-long marine reptile (the Pink Mountain ichthyosaur) found near Fort St. John to a carnivorous, flying reptile found on Hornby Island, Lougheed introduces us to the stories, the people and the politics behind some of BC's most important fossil discoveries.

And tying it all together is the story of Garnet Fraser and Bryan Monroe, the two men who discovered the Kakwa trackway and then ran afoul of the professionals and the government in their quest for scientific understanding. In *Sidetracked* Lougheed chronicles their growing passion for paleontology and issues a plea for cooperation, not competition, in the pursuit of that arcane science.

A resident of Prince George since 1970, Vivien Lougheed has written extensively about her travels in Central and South America and the Yukon. She has several books to her credit, including a guide to Kluane National Park, and hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles.

Contacts:

Creekstone Press
info@creekstonepress.com
250-847-3663

Vivien Lougheed
chickenbus@shaw.ca
250-561-7099

Scout Island Nature Centre Report September 2011

By Sue Hemphill

The Nature House seems so quiet now. Summer staff (Ian, Monica, Kacey and Connor) have returned to university. It was a great summer with these young people. By the end of June they had lead 2,450 students out to explore nature at the Nature Centre or at their schools. That doesn't include the 270 students who

took part in the fry release or the 6 classes from Marie Sharpe that spent half the day in the River Valley with all of us on their "Go Out and Play Day." They also spent time in the River Valley with Jenny Howell from the Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society to support the Water Wise program. The staff and students and teachers found ways to enjoy the outdoors despite the cold wet spring.

Before staff could take a breath, children were coming in the door for the Nature Fun program. To quote staff: *What a busy, cold, rainy summer it has been! With two programs a day for 3-8 year olds, we took over 482 children on nature walks and various other adventures. Each 2 hour session included a walk, an experiment or a craft using recycled or natural material, and games. As in the past there were twice daily programs for 3-8 year olds.* Parents and grandparents really appreciated the programs these young people offered. The children ran in the door and often refused to leave when it was pick up time. By switching the all day program for older children (8-12) to Fridays we attracted more of this age group. The staff also helped me run the Nature Explorers Camp in July. This is a 5 day program with one overnight (thank-you Anna for letting us camp at your place). Despite the cold rainy weather, we explored and studied plants and animals in more detail than is possible in the Nature Fun program. The children were brave enough to swim in the lake at Anna's. Gina helped them observe bats in the evening. Despite all the "nature" adventures, the favorite activity was bash ball.

The staff led two family evenings-Rivers to Oceans Night and Treasure Hunt Night. The last family night in August was a real treat. Jim Sims and other WLFN volunteers took people out on the lake in two Voyageur canoes and then Anna fascinated 45 people with information about bats while we watched and listened to them.

In addition to Fisheries and Oceans BC, Scout Island Nature Centre would like to thank School District 27, the City of Williams Lake, the Province of British Columbia, Canada Summer Jobs Program, and the individuals and businesses that helped fund our 2011 spring and summer programs.

I want to express another thank-you to all those that volunteered this summer to fight weeds, plant more trees, and many other jobs that constantly need to be done. A special thanks to Roger Hamilton for all the work he has been doing planting, weeding, watering, and fixing the protective fencing on the north marsh.

Yes it is quieter at the Nature House, but I didn't say quiet. Tiegen along with volunteers have been hosting on weekends (open to the public 1-4 until Thanksgiving). Jenny and I are busy inside thinking up new programs and writing proposals. The new fall programs for schools and community groups have started, and we had our first all-day session with the SD 27 Home School group. They got very wet dipping for bugs as we wanted to take advantage of this wonderful summer like weather we have been having. The preschool led by Margret and Barb is in full swing and I am offering workshops to preschool parents this fall on taking your children outdoors. I hope to do more of these programs at schools also for teachers and parents. We want to "leave no child inside."

Come Enjoy Fall at Scout Island Nature Centre

Animals and Plants getting ready for winter-how and why (grades k-7)

Includes observing, walking, and games

High School students can investigate first hand the ecosystems they live in and use the experiences to practice and understand Life Science concepts covered in Grade 8 -10 Science and Grade 11 Biology, and Science and Technology 11

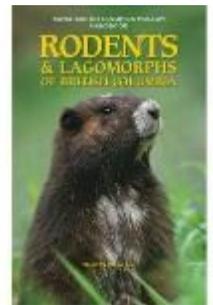
Family Saturdays with Mary Return

Mary will have a program for families the last Saturday of each month starting in October. We will send out notices as each one is planned.

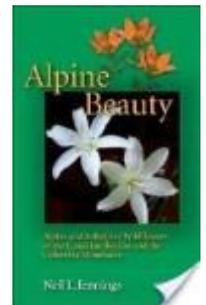
From Our Library

By: Jenny Noble

Rodents & Lagomorphs of BC (Volume 4 of The Mammals of British Columbia): This 2005 handbook from the Royal BC Museum aims to “promote an awareness of these often misunderstood mammals and stimulate more research on their biology”. In its 410 pages it discusses general biology of these two groups, including their relations with humans and conservation status. Keys by Orders, Whole Animals, and Skulls will help you identify specimens, while precise descriptions of 52 species include measurements, skull and dentition drawings, natural history, distribution, taxonomy, conservation status and general remarks.



Alpine Beauty (Alpine and subalpine Wildflowers of the Canadian Rockies and the Columbia Mountains): Very clear photographs, arranged by flower colour, make this a useful field guide, if not a scholarly work. Interesting bits on the origins of genus and common names included; did you know “delphinium” derives from the Greek word for dolphin?



If you have suggestions for other adult or children’s books that might appeal to our members and visitors, please let Jenny know at neptune.noble@gmail.com

Give Your Crisper a Makeover

By Lindsay Coulter, David Suzuki Foundation

A timely topic for all of us gardeners.

Yesterday, I threw a bunch of green onions into my backyard composter. They were buried at the bottom of the crisper drawer, just on the verge of disgusting. No big deal, right? At least they made it into the compost and didn’t end up in the land fill.

But every time we throw out food, whether it’s destined for the compost bin or not, all the resources it took to grow, package, produce, and ship it are discarded too, including massive amounts of water. In fact, over half of all food produced world-wide is wasted – discarded in processing, transport and grocery stores. Then when the food makes it to the fridge the average Canadian household chucks one in four produce items.

You can reduce food waste in your home by sharpening your food storage skills. Fruits and vegetables are still breathing even after they have been picked. They give off ethylene, a colorless, odorless, gaseous hormone that, among other things stimulates ripening. Some produce emits high levels of ethylene gas; others are sensitive to it. Most fridges have two crisper drawers to keep them separate. Some produce is also cold-sensitive and refrigeration can accelerate spoilage. Use this handy guide to organize your produce.

Gas Emitters

Apples	Cantaloupes	Honeydews
Apricots	Figs	

Keep These Gas Emitters Out Of the Cold

Avocados	Peaches	Plums
Bananas (unripe)	Pears	Tomatoes
Nectarines		

Keep these away from Emitters

Bananas (ripe)	Cucumber	Peas
Broccoli	Eggplant	Peppers
Brussels Sprouts	Kiwi	Summer squash
Cabbage	Leafy Greens	Sweet potatoes
Carrots	Parsley	Watermelon
Cauliflower		

Store These in a Cool, Dry, Dark place (Not The Fridge)

Garlic	Potatoes	Winter Squash
Onions		

Pantage Lake – A birding location of significance

By: Phil Ranson

A bird checklist is usually out of date the moment it's printed. And such is the case again with a new species added to the Cariboo Chilcotin Checklist this summer when a Pacific Golden-Plover was found at Pantage Lake, north-west of Quesnel. This was about a year after the American Golden-Plover was confirmed to be breeding in the region in the Itcha Mountains, the southernmost breeding location yet discovered. Pacific and American Golden-Plovers were once considered a single species, the Lesser Golden Plover, but research found that each had distinctive plumage, calls and breeding and wintering areas.

The Pacific Golden-Plover breeds across Siberia and into coastal Alaska but is only known to winter in South Asia, Australia and the South Pacific Islands. In southward



**American Golden-Plover
Photo by Rod**

migration, some Juvenile birds wander down the Pacific coast of N. America before making the epic crossing, but very few stray into the interior of this province. This first record was well documented with photographs by Rod Sargent whose weekly visits to Pantage Lake have identified this formerly little birded location as a major migration stopover site for many species that breed in the high north, particularly shorebirds.

Pantage Lake is a large shallow and quite weedy lake located off the Blackwater Rd and draining into the Blackwater River. Access to the lake is difficult and involves boating up Pantage Creek into the lake from the north and crossing the lake to the south end where large expanses of mud flats at low water make ideal conditions for waders. Crossing the lake gets more difficult as the season progresses as the weed beds hinder even kayaks but offer excellent habitat for a wide variety of birds. Eared Grebes have nesting colonies among the expanse of water lilies, a habitat unlike most of the Becher’s Prairie locations where reed beds are used. Pelicans rest and feed at the lake all summer and an estimated 1500 were counted in 2009 for by far the largest tally ever noted in BC.

Other significant finds on this lake were the 3rd Buff-breasted Sandpiper for the region as well as the highest numbers recorded in the region for Wilson’s snipe with over 150 birds seen; large numbers of Dowitchers, Pectoral Sandpipers and Red-necked Phalaropes also congregate in late summer. Other species, difficult to find in other parts of the region, such as American Bittern and Swamp Sparrow are regularly found. Among his many visits to the Lake, Rod notes that photographing migrating Arctic Terns from arm’s length on the Lilly Pads was certainly one of the highlights.



Arctic Tern
Photo by: Rod

Pantage Lake is likely to add more new records and additions to the checklist but with the advent of the ‘electronic’ version built by Jim Sims, updates can be added immediately and printed off without waiting another 15 years for the revised addition. If any club members would like to have a copy of the computer program “Cariboo Chilcotin Checklist Viewer” you could call Jim at 296-3638 and he will arrange to install the software on your PC. The checklist software includes

- all of the information in the printed checklist
- a gallery of local bird photos that you can modify to include your own photos
- the potential to play a bird call
- comments about each species.



Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

by: Jim Sims

This summer my nesting box at Rose Lake was used successfully for the first time. I had several reports from neighbours that a duck was flying in and out of the box but I kept missing it. I did see a Golden-eye and a Merganser around the box on different occasions. Late in the season I decided to check the box and just as I was about to open the box a female Hooded Merganser flew out and landed in the water close to the dock. I left the nest undisturbed. I came back a few days later and discovered the box was empty of young but did have one un-hatched white egg. The sawdust and down nest was also littered with egg shells. A brood of Hooded Mergansers had successfully fledged from my nest box. I was a bit surprised to find that it was the Merganser as I would have expected them to prefer a cavity near shallow water such as in the swamp or along the creek. They are considered to be a duck that frequents small wooded ponds.



In the Cariboo-Chilcotin the Hooded Merganser is fairly common throughout the migration and breeding season. They can be found up to our Christmas bird count as long as they can find some open water. A few can be found through the winter months on the larger lakes that don't freeze. The Hooded Merganser is the smallest North American Merganser and is also the only Merganser that is restricted naturally to North America. Both male and female boast large crests that become more obvious during display in the mating season. The male features a large white oval on the crest. The crest can be expanded or collapsed much like a fan. In the above photo the crest is collapsed. The female has a bushy brown crest.



Hooded Mergansers
Photo by Kris Andrews

After the Mergansers have settled on a suitable cavity and the breeding is over the male Merganser abandons the female and leaves her to do all the incubating as well as caring for the young. Once the young have hatched they leave the nest within 24 hours, often at night. The young chicks are fully feathered and ready to feed on their own. I have yet to see my Rose Lake family as mother quickly dragged them off to the find protection in the marsh.

The merganser feeds on small fish, insects and crustaceans. They find prey underwater by sight. The merganser can actually change the refractive properties of its eyes to enhance its underwater vision. In addition, the nictitating membrane (third eyelid) is very transparent and probably acts to protect the eye during swimming, just like a pair of goggles.