

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
DECEMBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

Flying South Soon



BIRD COUNT

SUNDAY DEC 18
+ Pot Luck Supper too!



NATURE HOUSE
PROGRAM
JAN 17 2012!
7:30 PM

*mmm
Cranberries
are ready*

JOY + PEACE TO ALL



The MUSKRAT EXPRESS

DECEMBER 1, 2011

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: 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

Membership Fees for 2012 are due January 1st

Yes it is just one short month before your membership in the Williams Lake Field Naturalists will expire. This is your friendly reminder to complete membership forms and submit them before the end of the year. Hopefully we won't need to send out not so friendly reminders to you. For those of you with email, forms will be emailed to you. For those who rely on snail mail only, forms will be enclosed along with the newsletter. Forms can be downloaded from our website (see above) and can also be picked up at the Nature Centre.

When you write your membership cheque, why not take care of someone on your gift list with a second cheque making a donation to Scout Island in their name? We depend heavily on our individual donors to keep the Nature Centre lively and available for all to explore and enjoy. People are more and more appreciating the non-materialistic gift that shows you understand their priorities.

This year we're offering a lovely incentive for any donation of \$100 or more. Jurgen Hornberg has made wooden vases that you or your gift recipient will enjoy displaying dried flowers in. We will also supply a Scout Island greeting card to announce your gift. Donation form is attached to the end of the newsletter.

Don't forget we are also a good source for nature books, both children's and general interest, which make great gifts. The new Scout Island t-shirts are very spiffy and come in a variety of colours. Bird houses and feeders, inexpensive bug viewers and stocking-stuffer bird checklists too! Stop by on your next visit if you want to check these ideas out. (It's a good idea to phone first to make sure someone's there – 398-8532.)

44th Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count – Sunday December 18th, 2011

By: Phil Ranson

These Christmas Bird Counts are rolling around a lot faster than they used to. Last year's CBC was something of a disappointment with only 37 species tallied, our lowest total since 1995 while the average since that time is nearly 53 species with a high count of 62 species in 2008. The late November freeze-up and the lack of water birds was undoubtedly a major factor. But there is always a silver lining. We had the highest number of House Sparrows in 43 years of counting!



Don't forget your mitts and tuques and stay warm

The count this year is on Sunday, December 18th (first Sunday in the count period). I'll be contacting the regulars who have participated over the last few years and we'll try and maintain the same boundaries – subject to any better ideas you may have. We are unlikely to get complete coverage of our 24 Km circle so there is always room for more participants. There's obviously a correlation between number of observers, area covered and birds seen so we're always hoping for a good turnout.



Watch your feeder and report

Bird feeders in the count area contribute a significant proportion of our totals so if you have a feeder and you can watch for a while and provide an estimate of the birds, then we'd love to hear from you. If you have friends or neighbours with feeders, please contact them and let them know about the count and who to contact (see below). Counters can drop by and do a count and help with identification if that would help.

If you'd like to help or have any questions about the Williams Lake count, please give me a call at 398-7110 or email ranson1@telus.net. The post count gathering and pot luck will again be at Fred McMechan's at 1225 Moon Ave., (392-7680) where feeder watchers can phone in their reports after 6:00 p.m.

Summer Rambles to Nuk Tessli and the Flathead River Valley

Tuesday January 17th, 2012 a slide presentation and talk by Kris Andrews

This summer Kris Andrews was fortunate to join a group of birder/hikers at Nuk Tessli for 4 days in July. She will show slides of this scenic place even though her camera got moisture in it from the rain.



Boundary Lake Charlotte Alp lands



Looking west across the Flathead River

Later this summer Kris travelled to the amazing Flathead River Valley to retrace her father’s ascent of Trachyte Ridge, which he climbed in 1930 to photograph the valley topography for one of the early Flathead Forest Surveys. Kris, her sister and a friend then drove to Waterton Park in Alberta to hike to Akamina Ridge near the south-eastern boundary of the Flathead watershed, the end of season termination point for the 1930 Flathead Forest Survey. The weather, wildflowers and mountain scenery were spectacular.

Wreathed in Smiles

Apparently, Williams Lake was ready for a greener, gentler way to prepare for the holidays. We didn’t get an exact head count on Nov. 26, but the Nature Centre was busy all day with lots of young families at “creation stations” throughout the upstairs. The McMechan Room floor all but disappeared under cedar and fir branches, as wire-wrapped bicycle rims were transformed into nearly 30 gorgeous, extravagant wreaths. Big sheets of newsprint spread on the floor of the main classroom were popular with the little ones, as they got to stamp and colour it for giftwrap. Bigger hands wove strappy iris leaves into delightful heart and deer ornaments. Parents glued jigsaw puzzle pieces onto small wreath forms, under artistic supervision from their children – very colourful and ingenious re-cycling idea! A white elephant table held lots of great books, CDs, packets of garden seeds, etc. and we saw people carrying away many treasures. All the while, delicious local-ingredient soups and homemade buns from the Growers’ Co-op lured crafters into the library to re-fuel and socialize. Hearty congratulations to all the participating organizations: Growers’ Co-op, Conservation Society and Field Naturalists. The feedback coming in makes us pretty sure it will become a new green tradition.



Nature Centre Guest Prepare for a Greener Christmas

Bulrush Boardwalk Completed

By Fred

The new boardwalk on the Bulrush Trail has now been completed and the compliments for a job well done have been coming in. The major funding was provided by The Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment Foundation. Funds also came from the SINC Trust Fund. Volunteer work consisted of clearing the trail of the old walkways, marking out the trail for the location of the



Boardwalk Volunteers Frank, Sandy, Rick, Phil, Jim, Roger, Tucker and photo by the CEO Fred

posts and the construction of the two walkways.

A big thank you from the many Scout Island Nature Centre users goes out to the volunteers and the funders.

WLFN-Nature Trust Writing Contest Results

The response to the writing contest jointly sponsored by Scout Island and The Nature Trust brought smiles to the faces of the judges who got to read them all. It is truly heart-warming to know how much our gem of nature in the city means to people. We got entries from near and far, from little kids to grandmas. Here are the winners.

ADULT – First prize Maggie Ranger / Second prize goes to Monica Lamb-Yorski / Third prize is shared by Jennifer Thuncher and Chris Hornby.

HIGH SCHOOL – First prize Sam Delacherois

INTERMEDIATE - First prize Mia Leblanc / Second prize shared by Karter Vallerga and Maia Vitoratos \ Third prize goes to Cory Mapson

PRIMARY – First prize Candice-Rose Mapson / Second prize Tyana Ross / Third prize

Heartfelt thanks to all who entered our contest and shared their appreciation of Scout Island.

Many people do not realize that we might not have this place that means so much to our community, without The Nature Trust’s foresight all those years ago. By purchasing the land in 1973, TNT’s forerunner The Second Century Fund made possible all the enjoyment, wonder and memories that are reflected in these writings.

Congratulations to all the winners! We will include some of the winning entries in this and future newsletters for all of us to enjoy. Here is Maggie’s winning adult entry.

What Scout Island means to me.....
by Maggie Ranger (Adult 1st prize winner)

After living out at Rose Lake for 18 years, moving into town (Williams Lake) was quite an adjustment. Traffic sounds, more people, driving in town everyday were some new things that my daughter Lacey and I needed to deal with.

AAAAaaa some relief, Scout Island. We had the privilege to move into a tiny one room cabin right on the shores just down the road from the Island. And who was there to greet us that fine spring morning...the Loons. So great to be connected again.



Maggie, Grandson Ryver and Bill

Lacey and I walked every morning and evening. We had this magnificent backyard with so much exploring to do. There were countless discoveries with a flower or critter. The otters are quite a delight to watch, deer and her fawn, geese, ducks and the list goes on. One of our friends lent us a paddle boat and we had many a fine day paddling around the Island.

We have also attended many different talks and they have always been informative and interesting. The folks there have always been kind.

After living in our cabin on the banks of the lake we moved to another location in town, however, Scout Island has become a part of our life. Every spring I check and see if I can hear the Red Winged Blackbirds, I check and see if I can spot the Loons and watch the magnificent return of thousands of birds on their migration. What a splendid event to witness. This year my partner and I managed to sneak up to a group of Pelicans with the Cormorants...and no camera. Some things are meant for the heart only.

There are many experiences that we have had over the years and it has been such an amazing Grace to have this special sanctuary right in the middle of our town. I now take my grandson Ryver to go for walks on the Island. He says, " geese! ducks!" and that is his way of asking to go there. A few weeks ago, Ryver and I were walking there and we heard thunder. Ryver asks, "rain?" I said, "Yes, rain." Then he rubs his fingers together (like snapping his fingers) and makes a kissing sound (like calling the kitty). He says "rainbow, rainbow...kiss, kiss kiss." Lo and behold, we turn to walk back to the car and there is the most vivid, spectacular, rainbow I have ever seen...magic...yes years of magic...thank you Scout Island.

Scout Island Nature Centre Report November 2011

By: Sue Hemphill

There is a bit of snow outside of the Nature House, the marsh is frozen and the edges of the lake are covering up with ice too. I did see a beaver out but he/she was going to have to take a long dive to get into the lodge which was surrounded by ice. The weather has been great though for the late fall programs. The SD 27 home school group is again having a full day of nature programs two times a month. There are children 6-10 taking part with their teacher Martin Kruus. It was so warm for the first one, we were in the marsh dipping for invertebrates. The students are building on their observation skills using the "wildlife" in our tanks and even learning how to fill in tables. But the favorite activity so far was building shelters outside and the favorite game continues to be Eagle Eye. Speaking of games—I have compiled a long list of outdoor games that are lots of fun to play. They are all nature based. The various hide n seek games are one of the best ways to help children learn to sit quietly and concentrate in an outdoor setting. If you would like the list of games emailed to you let me know. And note, I have a new email address shemphill@midbc.com.

Jean Wellburn is back at Scout Island playing with preschoolers! We received a grant from United Way and the Success by Six program to guide other preschool teachers in developing outdoor programs for their classes. She and Mary Forbes host the classes at the Nature Centre twice and I go to each school and give them ideas on how to use their own space. Of course, with these two leading, there are costumes and music as well as exploring the outdoors.

I have been busy setting up tanks and delivering Chinook eggs to 11 schools as part of the Salmonids in the Classroom program (DFO funding). There are a number of new classes taking

part. Kasey Stirling, who helped collect the eggs as part of the Students Working and Learning in Their Watersheds program in September, is now leading the classroom program at Nesika with Shelly Barber. The alevins are just starting to wiggle out of their eggs. If you have never seen alevins, stop by for a visit at the Nature House.

The holidays are fast approaching. Jenny has been building up our supply of children's books on natural history and there are the great scopes and small magnifiers available. Another great idea for a gift for a child 5-13 is a membership in the Young Naturalist Club. Membership includes the best nature magazine for children that I know of that comes 6 times a year and additional activities to encourage children to become accomplished naturalists. We have the membership forms at the Nature House or you can go on line to join (www.ync.ca). If you want a good nature magazine for children 3-6, try "Your Big Back Yard" which is a publication of the Canadian Wildlife Federation. There also will be bars of Camino, organic chocolate, organic nuts, and honey available at the Nature House. Would you like a small live tree as your Holiday tree this year. We have some small Douglas firs and spruce that you can decorate for the season, then mulch outside for the winter and plant in the spring. Contact me if you are interested. Happy Solstice from all of the creatures at the Nature House.

Interesting Information Fox and Magnetic Fields

Foxes that tend to jump in a northern direction when hunting in high grass and snow have more success (74% vs 18%). They are using magnetic field lines to be more accurate in measuring distance. Ears tell the fox approximately where prey is. Magnetic field lines guide them to exactly where it is. Migratory birds detect magnetic field lines with their right eye. Fox may have similar system that allows them to see lines and helps to pinpoint where the mouse is.

November Birds

By: Phil Ranson

Most of our summer migrants have moved on. Even the White Pelican that tempted fate and remained on Williams Lake, departed on Nov 12. A notable exception to this is three Mountain Bluebirds still being seen on Signal Point Road. The replacement by our regular contingent of winter arrivals is in full swing. The arrival of owls from the north is always eagerly anticipated and this year appears to faring better than most.

Hawk Owls reports were quite plentiful in early November but seem to have eased off lately. Three were seen on Becher's Prairie with others at Lee's Corner, Stafford's Ranch on Hwy 20, one at Forest Grove and one photographed by Don Piller at the Hillside trailer park on Dog Creek Rd.



Don's Hawk Owl

Pygmy Owl reports have not been too numerous with one on the Sheep Creek hill and another on the Soda Creek Rd. A great find was a Short-eared Owl photographed by Sharon Henry in Chimney Valley. Short-eared Owls are fast becoming one of those 'species of concern' as numbers continue to dwindle.

Kris Andrews headed out towards Felker Lake in hopes of seeing



Sharon's Short Eared Owl

this bird and was delighted to see it at dusk near the junction with the Dog Creek Rd. It was hunting over the marshes when it was joined by a second owl. These two became involved in harassing a Harrier when a third Short-eared Owl joined the fray. Low light conditions weren't suitable for good photographs but the memories will linger.

The jewel in the crown of winter owls is of course the Snowy. This year had every appearance of being an 'irruption' year with good numbers being reported in the Lower Mainland and neighbouring Washington. Trips to some of their usual local haunts however proved fruitless but then came a report from Huston Rd in 150 Mile House followed by a call of one found in the West Fraser Plywood Mill parking lot. This bird, a young male, was obviously distressed and was captured and taken to the Animal Care Hospital on Cattle Drive. He was stabilized and then taken by 'medevac' courtesy of Pacific Coastal Airlines to the O.W.L. rehab in Delta. Prognosis as of the 29th was good. He was severely emaciated but is recovering.

Cranberries

By: Margaret Waring

December and a fresh dusting of snow have arrived along with thoughts about the upcoming holiday season. I did a little investigation about what seasonal tradition is relevant for the Muskrat and Cranberry is the topic.

Four types of cranberry are found in our area. All are edible and were used by interior aboriginal people. The gathered berries were eaten raw, dried, boiled, pounded and mixed with other ingredients. The tart berries are considered to have significant health benefits and are a good source of vitamin C. There are two high bush varieties and one bog type (and another bog type that is only found near Quesnel). The bog cranberry would be the most similar to the traditional commercial cranberry. This plant is a creeping vine with slender stems and grows in peat bogs, usually on sphagnum moss hummocks. The high bush cranberries do not taste the same as the cranberries you enjoy with your



Viburnum opulus
High bush Cranberry

Christmas Celebrations. I picked and made jelly from the high bush cranberries (*V. opulus*) that grow along the San Jose and ripen in the late summer, early fall. This is known as the American bush-cranberry and is a large shrub typically found along stream banks. The other more common high bush cranberry in our area (*Viburnum edule*) is widespread and grows in moist and wet areas, in forests, swamps and clearings. The high bush cranberries have a distinctive musty odour and the berry has a large flattened seed. I have tried jam, jelly and juice. I have tried dehydrating commercially purchased cranberries from Fort Langley Cranberry Celebrations (for four days!) but for success some preparation is required for treating the skins.

Cranberries are one of only a few fruits that can trace their roots to North American soil. An undamaged cranberry vine will survive indefinitely and could even be 100 years old. The name cranberry could have come from the fact that the flower stalk resembles the head and neck of a crane or heron or because the berries grow in wet places where you often find cranes and

herons. They have also been called grouse berries because grouse like to eat them. I want to thank my information sources about Cranberries: WLFN members Ray Coupe, Anna Roberts and Rick Dawson, the book Plants of Southern Interior of BC and the internet. Enjoy some cranberries this Christmas and think about finding and preparing your own for next year!

High Bush Cranberry Jelly

(original info from Anna and Gina Roberts)

Wash berries and cook berries with a bit of water (maybe 1/4 cup water) and with one tart unpeeled sliced green apple until mixture is soft

Put cooked berry mixture in cheese cloth or jelly bag and allow to drip

If you squeeze the bag you will get more liquid but jelly will be less clear or let it drip overnight and avoid squeezing!

Bring 4 cups of dripped juice to boil

Add 3 cups sugar

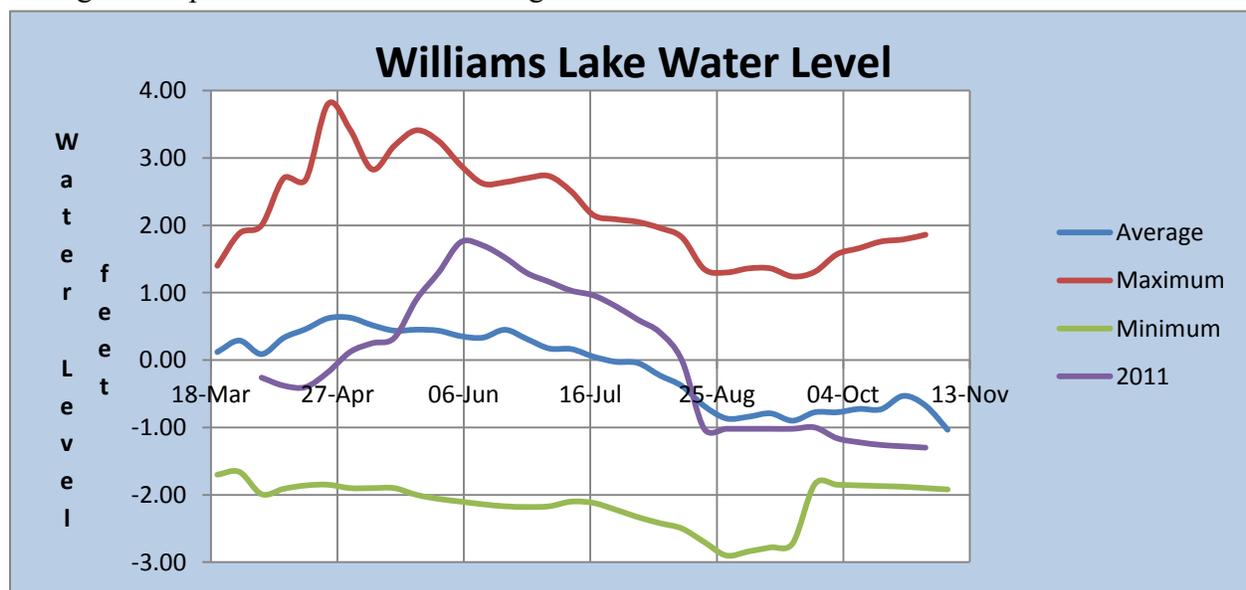
Boil and stir for 5-10 minutes

Process in jars as for jam and jelly

Williams Lake Water Level

By: Jim Sims

Anna Roberts has been monitoring the data collected on the water level of Williams Lake since 1980. She has been helped by other members of the club and our summer staff. The water level is measured in feet using a ruler attached to the outflow end of the culvert under the causeway at Scout Island. The zero mark on the ruler has been set at an elevation of 565 metres. The data shown on the graph below has 4 lines that provide a comparison of the water level this year (2011) with the maximum water level, the minimum water level and the average water level. The highest water level recorded was 3.80 feet, recorded on April 23rd 1997 and the lowest water level of -2.90 feet was recorded on August 26th 1988. Examination of the average water level shows the highest water at the end of April and beginning of May when the low elevation snow has melted. There is another smaller increase in water level in the second week of June when the higher elevation snow melts. Generally our lowest levels occur at the end of August and throughout September. Levels increase again in October.



Thanks to all of you for your contributions to another successful Muskrat and we look forward to more articles for 2012. Your next newsletter will be published in mid January and will feature the results of the Christmas Bird Count. We will also have news on the upcoming Annual Fund Raising Banquet as well as additional winter programs at Scout Island.

Donation Form

By donating to Scout Island Nature Centre, you will help ensure the opportunities described so well by so many of you in our writing contest will continue for years to come. You will also:

- receive a biannual Newsletter that keeps you informed of the upcoming programs and special events at the Nature Centre
- are allowed to borrow books from the Nature House Library
- are invited to suggest programs you would like to see offered
- receive a charitable receipt for your donation

Most important, our Friends ensure that Scout Island Nature Centre can continue to offer the *tonic of wilderness* to all the community (people and wildlife)

I have enclosed a donation of \$30 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ \$200 ___ \$300 ___ other _____

Name _____

email _____

postal address _____

Please send the newsletter by email ___ by post _____

A donation to the Nature Centre in a friend or family member's name makes a great holiday gift! We will send you a beautiful card that you can give to the recipient acknowledging your gift to the Nature Centre in their name.

I am making a donation of _____ as a gift. Please send me a card that I can give to the recipient.

Please make your cheque payable to Scout Island Nature Centre Fund and mail it to

Scout Island Nature Centre
1305 A Borland Rd.
Williams Lake BC V2G 5K5