

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

NOVEMBER + DECEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER





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@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 muskratexpress@midbc.com

Scout Island Nature Centre Fund

We are pleased to announce that the Scout Island Nature Centre Fund (Fund) is now available for use by club members and the general public. This Fund has been developed to allow people to financially support the Scout Island Nature Centre (SINC) through bequests and donations. The Nature Trust of BC (TNT), owners of the SINC properties, has agreed to manage this Fund, as a separate account, within their substantial provincial investments. The TNT has a special financial committee to wisely manage all of its investments. They will also provide charitable receipts.

In this edition we have included information about the Fund and sample donation forms. A donor could also provide specific directions about the use of their donation if the sample forms do not meet their needs. While this Fund is for long term financial assistance of the Nature Centre, we will also continue with the one year donations for which charitable receipts are issued.

The Nature Centre presently receives two large longer-term financial supports. Jean Waite left a substantial bequest to the Cariboo Foundation with the direction that the annual income be provided for the operation of the SINC. Secondly, a significant donation by an anonymous donor provides \$4000/year, until the principal is used up, to provide children with opportunities to learn about nature.

We will be advertising the availability of the Scout Island Nature Fund as a positive way for Field Naturalist members and the public to contribute to a strong future for the Nature Centre. Please help us by spreading the word about this Fund.

45th Annual Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count

The Count takes place on Sunday Dec 16th and I'll be contacting the regulars over the next week to confirm your participation. If you haven't been on the count – or haven't participated for a while and would like to again, please give me call.

The count is jointly organized by the National Audubon Society and Bird Studies Canada and will be the 113th year these counts have taken place. Last year there were a record number of counts conducted throughout the Americas with 410 in Canada, 1739 in the US and another 99 throughout the Caribbean and Latin America

Our count takes in a standard 24 km circle centred in Williams Lake encompassing most of Wildwood, Fox Mountain, Sugarcane to the Onward Ranch, Dog Creek Road past Flett Road, Hwy 20 beyond Stafford's Ranch and parts of the Meldrum Creek Road across the Fraser. Last year we were behind the 10 year average with 49 species but up on the total birds counted with 4603 - 600 above the 10 year average. We had 36 people in the field making up 18 parties. One area where we seem to be falling short is with the number of feeder reports. If you have friends or neighbours with feeders, please let them know.

Some highlights from last year's count were our first Eurasian Collared-Dove, our second Spotted Towhee and count highs for Merlin (4), Black-capped Chickadee (372) and European Starling (264). On the negative side, we had the fewest Juncos since 1984 with only 19 birds counted (some correlation with fewer feeder reports?)

So what can we look forward to on Dec 16th? (Other than Williams Lake is likely to freeze over on Dec 15th) There may be good opportunity - with a bit of luck, to record our first ever Snowy Owl. They are currently being recorded in unprecedented numbers in Prince George (est. 25) and Quesnel (5), with another 4 being seen west of the Fraser at Becher's Prairie and Hanceville. How long this dispersal will continue for is hard to say but we are long overdue. Also as part of the Christmas Bird Count tradition, all are invited to the post-count pot-luck at Fred McMechan's at 1225 Moon Ave (392-7680). Feeder reports can be phoned to Fred after 6:00 pm on count day. For more information on this, or the 4th annual Soda Creek count on Jan 5th, contact Phil at 398-7110 or ranson1@telus.net



Snowy Owl Photo by: Peter Zwiers

Mushroom Workshop with Bill and Louisa Chapman.

January 22 7-9pm at the Nature House

Participation in this event will be limited to 15. Please phone the Nature Centre at 398-8532 to register. If Sue and Jenny are not there please leave a message.

One wonderful warm September Sunday, Bill and Louisa and 15 other fungi lovers met at Sue and Jurgen's to go mushroom hunting. There were all ages involved and the youngest (aged 4-9) were the best at spotting the mushrooms. Bill identified the mushrooms for us and explained

their importance to the forest ecosystem. The only disappointment was that we could not find any mushrooms to cook up and eat. Bill introduced us to an online mushroom key, and we all wanted to learn more. So Bill and Louisa have agreed to do a workshop for us to help us learn more. They will cover:



1. How to distinguish mushrooms based on the macro and some of the microscopic features normally used to describe mushrooms in keys.
2. How to use the Matchmaker electronic key, which can be downloaded here "<http://www.svims.ca/council/matchmaker.htm>" for those who want to practice ahead. For those who don't want to be electronic, I would recommend David Arora's "Mushrooms Demystified".
3. What, when and where to collect mushrooms for eating in the Cariboo area and we will talk a bit about cooking mushrooms, and hopefully show how to prepare some commercial mushrooms, all in preparation for a spring foray

The Scout Island Nature Centre Fund held by The Nature Trust of British Columbia

The Scout Island Nature Centre in Williams Lake is a unique treasure that has served children, adults, families, and tourists since 1972. It consists of 10 hectares of ecologically diverse lakefront property owned by The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNT) where visitors can experience the wonderful natural features and the large variety of nature programs throughout the year. The interpretive building, the Nature House, has a wealth of educational displays and materials where visitors can learn about nature of the Cariboo Region.

The Nature Trust of BC purchased the property in 1972 and designated it to be a place for nature education for the community. TNT has partnered with the City of Williams Lake and the Williams Lake Field Naturalists so that people can enjoy visiting the Scout Island Nature Centre. For the people in the Cariboo Region and out-of-region, it has provided a place for learning, relaxation and revitalization, and for helping to protect and appreciate the variety of habitats and its wildlife. The Williams Lake Field Naturalists, a non-profit organization, has been operating the Nature Centre for the community since 1978. To be able to operate successfully into the future there is a need for additional funding.

To help provide for an exciting and stable future for the Scout Island Nature Centre an endowment fund for future operations has been established. The endowment fund will be managed by The Nature Trust of BC in accordance with TNT's Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures. The Board of TNT will have the overall responsibility of the fund, with an appointed Investment Committee to implement the policy, make recommendations and provide advice to the TNT Board. The fund will be operated exclusively to provide resources for the Scout Island Nature Centre, and will allow for tax deductible donations and bequests. (Charitable #10808 9863 RR0001).

Attached is a sample "Deed of Gift" in which donors can direct their gift to the Scout Island

Nature Centre Fund. It can of course be revised to suit the wishes of each donor.

Background on The Nature Trust of British Columbia

“Mission: The Nature Trust of British Columbia is dedicated to conserving BC’s biological diversity through securement and management of ecologically significant lands”.

“The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNT) has been a leading land conservation organization exclusive to BC since 1971. We acquire land through purchase, donation, covenant and lease. Then we care for this land in order to protect the natural diversity of wildlife and plants, and their critical habitats”.

“Our success can be attributed in large measures to our partnerships. Since 1971, TNT along with our partners has invested more than \$70 million to secure over 61 000 hectares (150 000 acres).”

“We are scientists, we are business leaders, and first and foremost we are British Columbians who since 1971 have dedicated our efforts to conserve some of British Columbia’s endangered ecosystems and areas of spectacular beauty. BC is our home and one of the most amazing places on earth. We are driven by respect for our province and the desire to conserve all that makes BC such a remarkable place. Our job is to ensure that the natural assets of British Columbia are protected and conserved for today, and for generations to come. Our work and our organization are driven by the core values of respect, trust and integrity. They are the values that not only guide who we are, they shape what we do each and every day”.

“As part of our mission of acquiring ecologically significant lands the Scout Island Nature Centre was the fourth property purchased by TNT.”

You may find information about The Nature Trust of BC at their website, www.naturetrust.bc.ca, and about the Scout Island Nature Centre at www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca

For more information please contact one of the following:

- Fred McMechan, president, Williams Lake Field Naturalists, phone: 250 392 7680, email: fred_mcmechan@telus.net
- Williams Lake Field Naturalists, 1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC V2G 5K5
- Scout Island Nature Centre, Email: scoutisland@midbc.com
- The Nature Trust of BC, #260 – 1000 Roosevelt Crescent, North Vancouver, BC V7P 3R4
email: info@naturetrust.bc.ca

Nature Centre Report

By Jenny Noble

Writing Workshops for Kids -- Sept 25, Nov. 13 & 15

Nature’s Scribes wrote playful, thoughtful, imaginative, observant entries in their nature journals during our three spirited workshops. After we walked the trails with Julianne and played nature-oriented games, they spread out inside the nature house and bent to their work. They all seemed

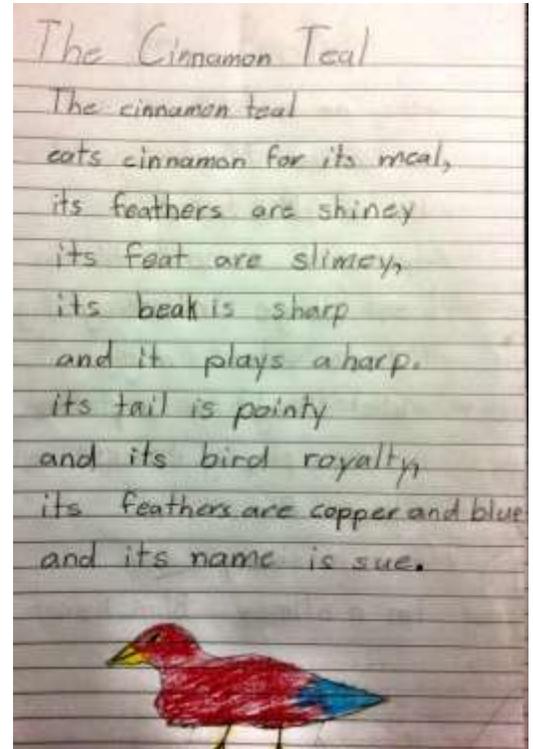
eager to capture their thoughts, as there was very little wiggling or whispering. Those who felt comfortable sharing what they wrote were not criticized or corrected, and most of those who didn't initially want to share became relaxed enough later on to read their pieces aloud.

It was a real revelation for me to witness how playing an active game loosened everyone up. The kids became less self-conscious and more comfortable as a group after a good round of "Wildlife is Watching" (a hide-and-seek game). Sue confirmed that observation; research is showing we're hard-wired for game-playing, and learn better when we play.

The talents of Anne White and Julianne Trelenberg blended wonderfully to involve and inspire everyone. I hope the kids continue to use their journals as a private place to reflect and develop their voices. I also look forward to more art-in-nature explorations.

We're grateful for the support of the Cariboo Regional District and City of Williams Lake through the *Central*

Cariboo Arts and Culture Society in putting on these programs.



A poem by 9 year old Ivy Mackay



Birthday Fun at Scout Island

Julianne's Way Cool Beaver School is making lot of fans for *Castor canadensis*. One young birthday lad even chose it as his theme for a Scout Island party. Mom got right into the spirit with this adorable cake (photo attached to email).

We're booking more parties all the time, so don't forget about this option when planning entertainment for your kid celebrations.

Good-bye faithful ol' bridge – Hello skookum new one



The Crew at Work

After years of carrying uncounted thousands (and how many species?) of feet to the far island, the beloved old bridge has twisted and listed its last. Celtic Engineering's Steve Doucette confirmed that it had to be replaced for the public's safety, so in typical fashion Fred McMechan set about making it happen. With a great deal of support from local companies and WLFN volunteers, the new bridge is complete and ready for your feet. Volunteers

included: Rick Dawson, Ray Hornby, Rick Nelson, Rodger Hamilton, Phil Ranson, Murray Hoffman, Fred McMechan



A class tests the New Bridge

Energy Upgrade Project

As you may know, we're preparing to replace the tired old oil furnace in the Nature House and have new insulation installed. An energy-efficient electric furnace with Energy-Star heat pump will reduce our emissions and utility costs (which the City pays). We have estimates from local companies, and we're waiting to hear on our application for a federal infrastructure improvement grant which would cover half the cost.

A Williams Lake and District Credit Union Community Investment Fund grant has started us on the road to raising the other half, but we have a long way to go. Perhaps you can guess what's coming next.

Yes, we're asking for our members' help once again. If you would like to earmark your annual donation for this project, or you feel moved to make a special contribution toward a more energy-efficient Nature House, we will be very grateful.

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Researched by Jim Sims

During the past month I have had 2 first experiences with Tundra Swans. The first was during a walk to Beaver Bay at Eagle Lake. When I arrived at the bay I found this pair of Tundra Swans feeding at the far end of the bay. Several times I have heard or seen and heard Trumpeter Swans as they flew down the lake but this was the first time I have been able to confirm the Tundra at Eagle Lake. As soon as they saw me, and they realized I was looking for a good photo the camera shy pair swam out of the bay and headed across the lake. I was surprised to find that they chose to swim rather than to fly but my research reviled that Tundras are very good swimmers and this was certainly my experience with this pair. The other Tundra first happened a week ago when a flock of Tundra Swans landed by my dock here at Rose Lake. I have seen swans here before but never close enough to identify which one it was.



The pair of Tundra Swans swimming out of Beaver Bay

It can be very difficult to distinguish the Tundra Swan from its close relative the Trumpeter. The easiest way to tell them apart is from the call. The trumpeter makes a gentle toot like a note played on a trumpet often in a series of 2 or 3 toots at the same pitch. The Tundra call is varied bugling higher in pitch than the Tundra. Not all Whistlers will have a yellow patch where the black of the bill meets the eye like the 2 above have and a very small number of Trumpeters will have a light spot here but if you can make out the yellow patch you can be fairly certain to have observed a Tundra Swan. The Tundra will have a slightly concave bill and forehead with a round top of the head. The Trumpeter head and bill will be straight and the top of the head will not be as round. If you see them both together you should notice the difference in size as the Trumpeter is a larger bird.

You may remember back a few years when the Tundra Swan was known as the Whistler Swan. At that time the Tundra Swan was split into 2 different species, the North American Whistler Swan with a small yellow patch where the black around the bill meets the eye and the Eurasian

Bewick's Swan with a much larger yellow patch. The Whistler did not get its name from its ability to whistler while at worked or from the winters spent skiing on its big feet at Whistler but it was named for the whistling noise it makes in flight.

The Tundra Swan is true to its name and is restricted to breeding in the Arctic. The North American Whistler spends winters along both coasts of North America, on the West coast the greatest concentrations occur in California. A few Tundra Swans will winter on the open waters of Horsefly Bay on Quesnel Lake. There numbers here have been increasing in the past few years, perhaps due to milder winters and several years when the lake has remained ice free all winter.

Our View of the Night Sky – December 2012.

Planet Review by Steve Capling

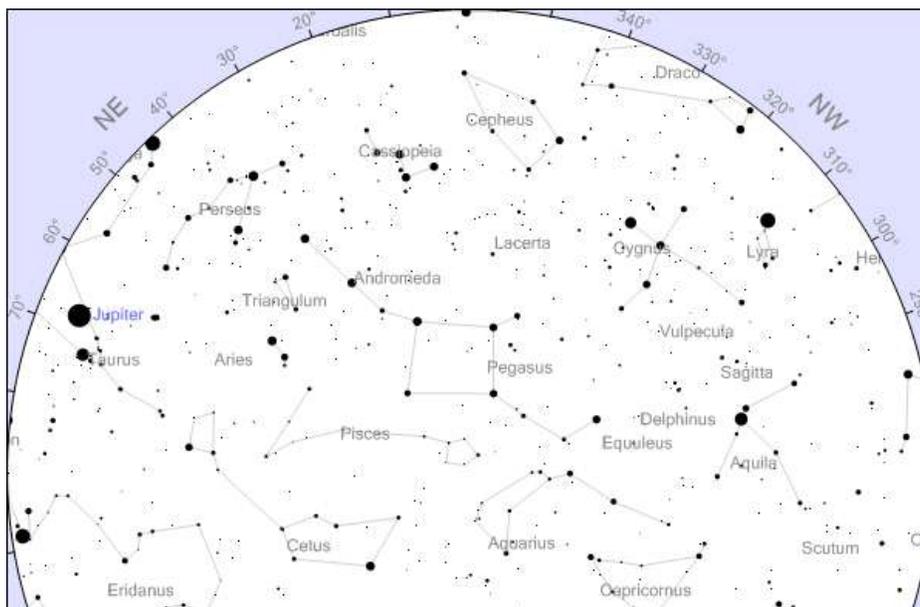
The morning is still dominated by brilliant Venus in the east. Saturn is now visible in the pre-dawn east sky. Jupiter is visible in the mid to late evening in the east to south-east near the constellation Taurus.

December offers a rare opportunity to view two major members of the main asteroid belt on the same night. Both 1 Ceres and 4 Vesta are visible near the constellation Taurus peaking in brightness at magnitude 6.5 in mid-December- binocs or telescope required. For more info check out: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/observing/objects/asteroids/Ceres-and-Vesta-July-2013-148149915.html>.

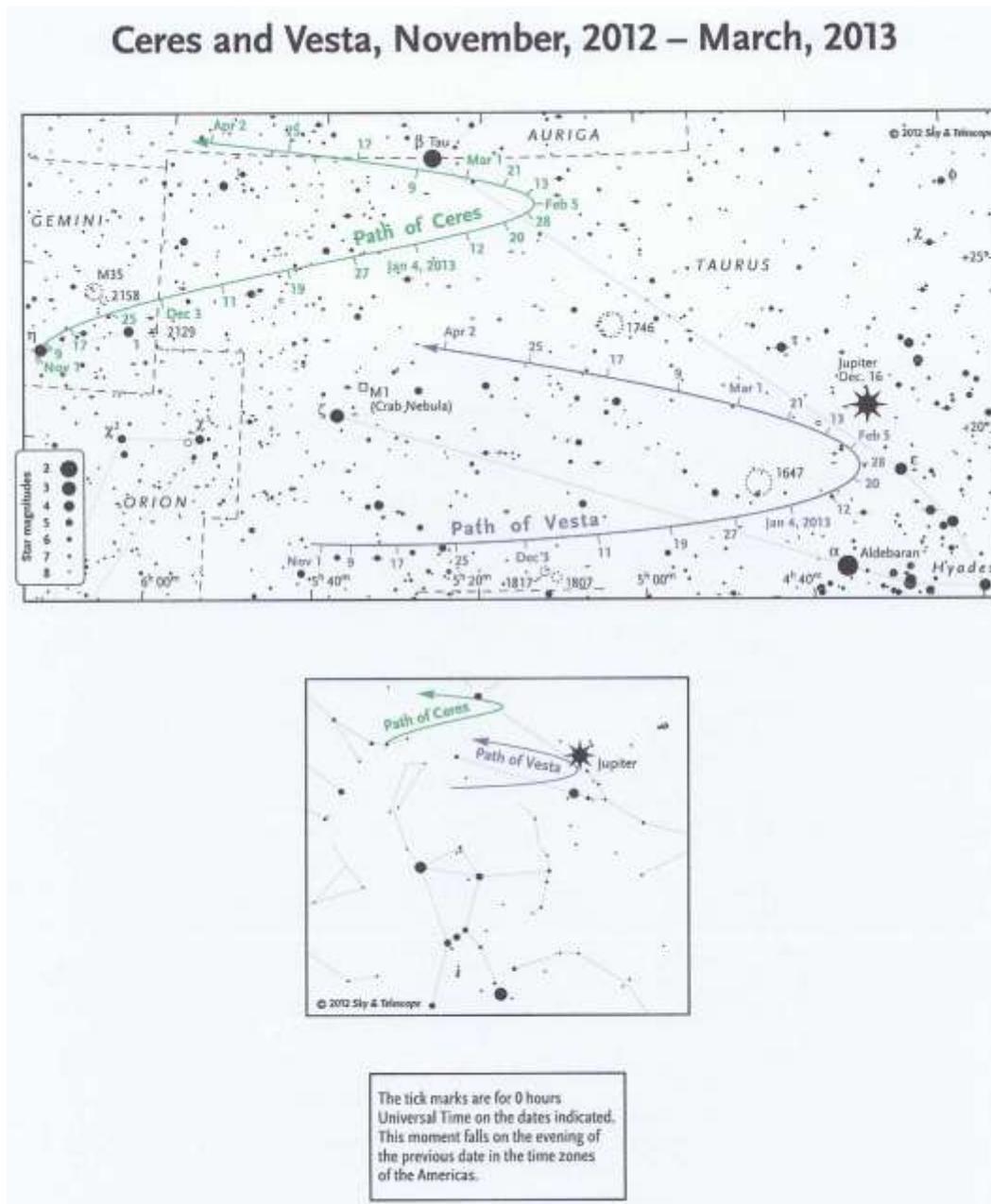
Meteor showers

December 13th – Look for the Geminid meteor shower during a darker, moonless sky.

December 2012 Star Chart Set for December 15 at 8:00pm PST



Courtesy of: www.Heavens-Above.com



Courtesy of: www.skyandtelescope.com

One Final Important Request for Your Money!

Your 2013 membership fees will be due on January 1st, a short 31 days from tomorrow. We encourage you to complete the attached membership forms today and send them or deliver them to Scout Island Nature Centre along with your dues before you forget. It helps us a great deal if we can deal with renewal of memberships in a timely manner. When completing the forms make sure you read it carefully and sign all required parts and check essential boxes. The mailing address appears at the top of the newsletter.



DEED OF GIFT

SCOUT ISLAND NATURE CENTRE FUND

I wish to designate the attached funds to the Scout Island Nature Centre Fund.

The terms of the Fund are as follows:

- a. The Nature Trust of BC will place the funds in the internally restricted Scout Island Nature Centre Fund.
- b. All donations to the Fund will be held in the Fund and invested in accordance with the Nature Trust of BC Investment Policy.
- c. There will be no administration fees associated with this Fund.
- d. The income of the Fund and any disbursements from the Fund will be used for the sole purpose of supporting the operations of the Scout Island Nature Centre.
- e. Donors may direct their funds to be distributed to the Scout Island Nature Centre in two ways:

I want an amount totaling _____ percent of my total donation disbursed from the fund each year to support the operations of the Scout Island Nature Centre until the total amount of my donation has been fully used. I agree that the income earned from my donation will also be annually disbursed.

OR

I want my donation added to the capital of the Fund to be managed in perpetuity with the Fund income disbursed in accordance with the terms described above.

Thank you.

Amount of Donation: _____

Donor Name Signature

Address City Province Postal Code

Telephone Email Address