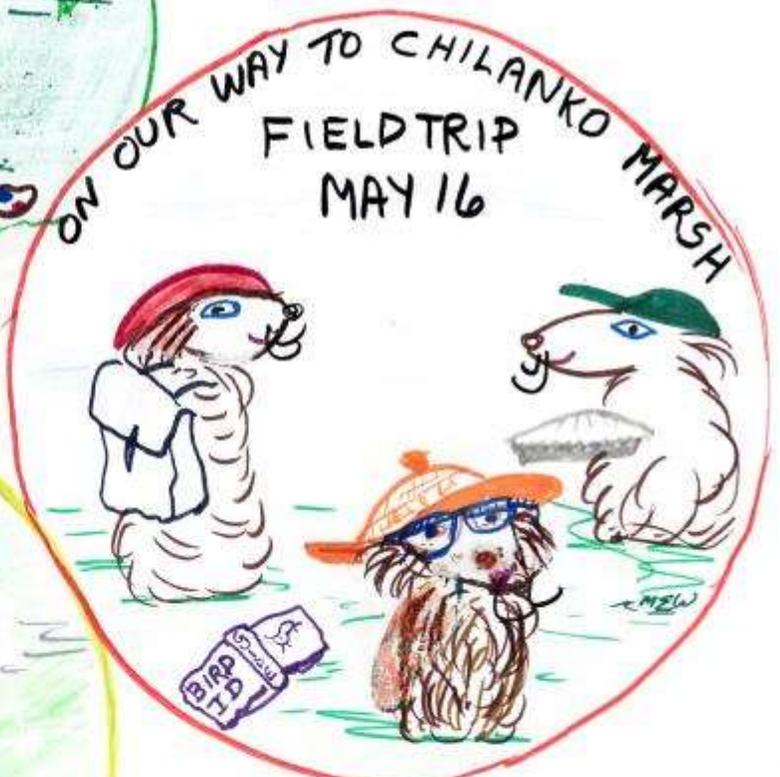


# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
MARCH-APRIL 2015 NEWSLETTER



FIELD TRIP LIST



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@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca) 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](mailto: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, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Christie Mayall



**Editors:** Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in late May. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)



### Field Trip List

Our 2015 field trip list can be found at the end of the newsletter. Check it out today and add your favourite trip to your calendar today. A reminder that these are mainly Williams Lake Field Naturalist outings and membership is a requirement for participation (day memberships are an option). The Churn Creek trips are an exception when members of the Friends of Churn will also be participating.

### Busy Bee with Diane Dunaway

Sunday April 26<sup>th</sup> 1:00pm to 3:00pm A free Family Day at Scout Island  
Join local beekeeper Diane Dunaway for a busy day learning all about bees: Honey Bees, Mason Bees, Bumble Bees. It will be the Bees' Knees! Dress like a bee and play make bee-lieve games. Half the day will be outside observing the local bees and don't forget the honey bee hive that lives inside the nature house at Scout Island! These amazing insects pollinate so much of the food we eat. If there were no bees half our produce department in the supermarket would be empty! This event is going to be sweeter than honey.  
**EVERYONE AND ALL AGES WELCOME, NO REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.**



Contact Scout Island Nature House if you have questions about this FREE special event  
Call 250.398.8532 or email [theforbes@gmail.com](mailto:theforbes@gmail.com)

**Bring** WARM clothes (and gloves!), Gumboots/waterproof winter boots for time outside. Dress like a bee and bring any Bee stuff you have from home for show and tell

### Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> 9:30 AM until 1:00PM

**Everyone can help and your help is needed**

I hope your Spring preparation now includes our annual Yard Sale! Please gather all your unused treasures and share some of the plants from your garden. Donate a few or lots of the plants that you start from seed. Feel free to ask your friends for donations and encourage them to come to the sale too! Try some new recipes for a goodie table, sort

through your stack of books, empty out your sport, camping and toy boxes, kitchen cupboards, or choose a few exotic pieces from your closet, take some cuttings from your favorite house plants, clean out your garages and garden and tool sheds. Reduce your clutter and take all those things you never use anymore to the Nature House on Friday afternoon May 8<sup>th</sup>. It is helpful if you are able to label your plants and price some individual items. It is helpful to label or explain some of your unique items.

Areas where volunteer help is needed are:

1. Donations for us to sell
2. Pricing and set up on Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> between 3:30 & 7PM
3. A few helpers at the sale on Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>
4. Shoppers to buy and provide a new home for all the treasures
5. Clean up on Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> at 1 PM

The proceeds from the sale provide a bursary for a graduating secondary student who will continue further education in a field of biology or earth sciences and any extra earnings are donated for education programs at Scout Island. Items from the sale that are not sold or collected are taken to the Salvation Army, Library, Rotary Club Book Drop, Share Shed, Potato House, etc. You can also pick up your donations that do not sell if you want them back. Margaret Waring will be coordinating the sale and welcomes your contact if you have questions, suggestions or would like to help. Please call 250-398-7724 or email [mewaring@hotmail.com](mailto:mewaring@hotmail.com) or [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)

**Please mark your calendars!**

**Spring Yard and Garden Sale Saturday May 9th 9:30 AM until 1:00PM at Scout Island Nature House**



### **Scout Island Nature Centre News**

From Sue Hemphill

#### **Volunteers Needed:**

It is that time of the year again when we need to open the Nature house on the weekends and Sue is looking for more volunteers. If you can spare few hours on a Saturday or Sunday it would be grand if you could open the centre for us. Training is available. If you are interested please call here at the Nature Centre at 398-8532. Sue is very busy so please leave a message if she does not answer.

It is also time for you to lay claim to your favorite patch of weeds at the Island. New weed warriors are always welcome. To claim your patch of thistle, burdock... check with Sue

I thought you might be interested in this video showing the first steps toward rehabilitating Hazeltine Creek.

[http://www.imperialmetals.com/s/Mt\\_Polley\\_Update.asp?ReportID=673747](http://www.imperialmetals.com/s/Mt_Polley_Update.asp?ReportID=673747) link provided by Colleen Hughes

Unfortunately Sue is having some problems typing right now as she is recovering from a broken arm. We all wish her a speedy recovery and we look forward to her report next month. A big thank you to Paula and Kirstin for stepping up.

### **Enviro Club Fieldtrip to see the Golden Eagles**

From Paula Laita

On the sunny day of March 18<sup>th</sup>, members of the Williams Lake Secondary Enviro Club went on a field trip to Chimney Creek Peak (located above Stafford's ranch) led by mentor Paula Laita. The objective of the trip was to learn more about the ecology of the Golden Eagle and record breeding data for one of the surveyed territories in the *Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring by the Fraser and Chilcotin Rivers Project*\*

The group had a wonderful hike through the woods while enjoying the interesting information about natural history and the local forest shared by professional agrologist and forester Jim Hilton who volunteered to come along on the trip –we appreciate very much his



help, since two adults were needed for this fieldtrip to happen.

Once the group reached the observation point located on the top of the Chimney Creek Peak, they did not have to wait long for the Golden Eagles to show up. The pair was flying around the cliff for most of the time the group was up there. We could easily see through the scope how they were bringing nesting material to get one of the nests ready. There are five nests on this cliff and this year the pair chose a different nest for breeding. While having lunch on the top, the group also spotted a juvenile Golden Eagle checking out available territories and an adult Bald Eagle soaring along the river.

*\*The Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring by the Fraser and Chilcotin Rivers Project started in February 2014 with the main purpose of compiling information about the Golden Eagle in the Cariboo by doing ground surveys based on the observation of the strategic areas for this bird species, such as cliffs and open and mountainous areas, in order to determine current occupancy of the territories by the Fraser and Chilcotin rivers. This project is sponsored by Williams Lake Field Naturalists and BC Nature and totally run by volunteers.*

This was the second field trip for the new student Grade 10-12 Enviro Club. The group will be taking trips and doing projects related to citizen science, stewardship, and outdoor adventure. The mentors for the group are Laura Kaufman, Frances McCoubrey, Paula Laita, Roy Argue, and Sue Hemphill. One of the projects will be to help with the yearlong monitoring (water quality, invertebrate and fish sampling) in the Williams Lake River Valley. Roy is leading this and the first trip in February the monitoring spots were chosen. Let Sue know if you want to help mentor this group.

### Kindergarten/Grade 1 Class Visits the Nature Centre

By Kirsten Hamm (their teacher)

Our K/1 class enjoyed another visit to Scout Island on April 15th. We take the city bus from Nesika School and spend most of the day at the Nature Centre. The day actually goes too fast and we never seem to have enough time to do all the things we want to! The students enjoyed a slow observant walk on the willow trail, looking at small holes dug by ducks, watching Canada geese up close, playing a hiding game, looking for goose nests and eggs (we did not find any eggs) and looking at the nests in the drawers in the Nature Centre. We sat on the bank of the marsh and closed our eyes to listen to the sounds. One boy remarked that the sounds of the geese, birds and ducks made him feel relaxed.

We are thankful that we are able to come to Scout Island, whenever we want, at no charge at all. The students absolutely love it, all 22 of them. They are the perfect students - curious, energetic, joyful and enthusiastic to learn about Nature. It is a real joy to spend our day there.



### Earth Challenge

For the third year, we teamed up with the Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society and the Air Quality Round Table to engage students in the earth challenge. New this year was that they were all grade 7 classes. The four classes were visited by the leaders in January and February to give them plenty of time to study for the contest. All four classes made a trip to Scout Island Nature Centre for a full day of ecosystem learning and challenges early in the year. On Friday April 10<sup>th</sup>, the classes gathered in the gym at Columneetza for a morning of hands on activities provided by many including Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society, Scout Island Nature Centre, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, UNBC research and UBC research. After lunch, a Jeopardy-style event challenged the four-



The Winning team

member teams to recall what they had been studying. Of course there was much cheering, stamping and high-five-ing from the peanut gallery. It was fitting that the outdoor academy took first place—and chose an overnight at SINC for their prize. Anyone wanting to help with that—maybe take them on an in the dark adventure?

## American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

Researched by Jim Sims

I've noticed on my last few morning walks that the major migration of Robins has dropped off considerably leaving behind our local nesters. For several weeks the Robins were constantly flying up from the hay field and the road side to sit on fence post until I got too close and they flew off to a safer place to continue their hunt for a bug or a worm.

The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds designates the Robin as a Common species (20 or more each day per location) from mid-March to the end of May. During the migration period they can be very-very common. They are found throughout the region from the grassland all the way to the alpine of the Cariboo Mountains as well as the Coast Mountains. Each year a few Robins will remain around through the winter. They are not very often observed in the winter as they spend most of their time roosting in trees and rather than hunting for worms on our frozen lawns they are looking for berries and fruit or just resting. If they eat too much over ripe fruit they can become intoxicated.



During the breeding season they are very aggressive defenders of the breeding territory although I feel they also take delight in trespassing on each-others grounds. The aggression can be directed at all intruders even us humans. At our Eagle Lake cabin we have encouraged them to find a nesting place somewhere around or on the cabin something they take to easily. As a youth I remember the year the robin built its nest on my sister's bedroom window sill. They had to keep the window closed as well as the blind. One year the male robin at Eagle Lake was most aggressive as it would not let anyone approach the back door without risking a good scare or maybe a scratched bald head, I always kept my hat on tight. In contrast this past year our robin was very mellow, it

incubated eggs while I sat on the front porch a few metres away with a cup of cocoa in one hand and the camera in the other.

The Robin is one of the first songbird species to start nesting. The Robin above began defending territory around my cabin before the last week of March. I took this incubating picture on May 14<sup>th</sup> when the Robin was on the lakeside porch. On June 10<sup>th</sup> I found the Robin on the back porch and when I opened the back door to bring in my gear the young from the nest fledged with a great flurry of excitement. I was not around to see if the first nest had been a success. The next day it was back to the lakeside nest and was sitting on a couple of eggs for a third attempt at nesting something the Robin is known to do. I was not around to see if the third attempt was successful. Nests will often fail as only 40% of nests will fledge one or more young, perhaps due to the very noisy defence of the nest site that my work against the Robin by attracting predators. Only 25% of the fledged young will survive until November and only ½ of these make it to the next year.

The robin uses auditory, visual, olfactory and possibly vibrotactile cues to find prey, but vision is the predominant mode of prey detection. It is frequently seen running across lawns picking up earthworms, and its *running and stopping* behavior is a distinguishing characteristic. In addition to hunting visually, it also has the ability to hunt by hearing. Experiments have





discovered that it can find worms underground by simply using its listening skills. It typically will take several short hops and then cock its head left, right or forward to detect movement of its prey. In urban areas, robins will gather in numbers soon after lawns are mowed or where sprinklers are in use.

It is important not to use pesticides on your yard and garden since. Robins spend a lot of time feeding there and they can suffer from the exposure to these pesticides. Mulching your leaves over your gardens can provide additional fall feeding habit. You can also consider adding a fruit tree or berry bush to your yard and leave some fruit behind in the fall. Robins love a birdbath as well. My Eagle Lake Robin loved its birdbath beside the front deck a few metres from the nest site. By providing food, water and building sites you will be rewarded with the summer long singing of the Robin, can't think of a better alarm clock song (although it might be a bit early at times!)

**Our View of the Night Sky – May 2015.**

**Planet Review**

Mars can be sighted (with a bit of difficulty) in early May as a mag 1.5 object very low in the evening twilight sky. Mars soon drops too close to the Sun to be visible for the rest of spring & summer.  
 Jupiter shines brightly in the western sky above Venus.  
 Venus continues to dominate the spring evening sky.  
 Saturn is visible to the south-east in the evening sky in Scorpius. Look for the Moon near Saturn as both rise together on May 4<sup>th</sup> and a month later on June 1<sup>st</sup>. May 23<sup>rd</sup> will be the best night of the year to view Saturn.  
 Mercury visible as a mag 1 object low in the western sky from May 1 to 21 in the evening twilight.

**Moon Status**

Full moon - May 4<sup>th</sup>.  
 New moon - May 18<sup>th</sup>.

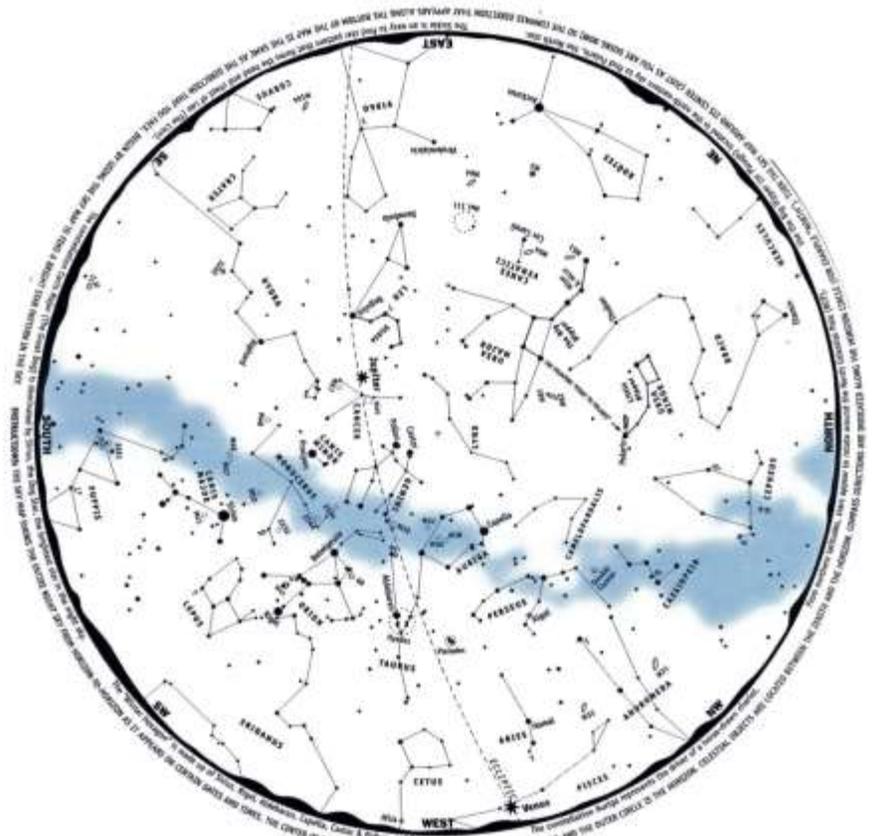
**Meteor Showers**

The Eta Aquariid meteor shower peaks on May 5-6<sup>th</sup> (This shower is composed of dusty remnants of the famed Halley's Comet. The long-running shower is visible from April 19th until May 28th, but will peak overnight on May 5-6th with up to 30 sightings per hour. Unfortunately, the full moon from the 4th will wash out all but the brightest meteors. The meteors will appear to be coming from the constellation Aquarius. The Eta Aquariids can be seen in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, though those in the South will have a better view).

**Evening Sky Map**

courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - [Skymaps.com/downloads.html](http://Skymaps.com/downloads.html) - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. "May 2015: Northern Edition (PDF)". At the end of the month it changes to show the next month's chart.



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## Member's Moments

Submitted by Ruth Hoehne



### A River Valley Majestic Beauty

We were driving down the WL river valley on March 20<sup>th</sup> when I spotted the Eagle. He was perched high above on the rocky ledge of the river valley wall. I jumped out and started shooting, so sure that he was about to fly away. He took his time as if surveying his kingdom and then spread his wings and flew away. I was blessed to get a number of great shots.

I get the creeps every time we do that drive down the twisted narrow road towards the river valley (our own mini Bella Coola road) but there is always something that makes the drive worthwhile. There is definitely peace in that valley that no amount of money could buy.

Member's Moments is an opportunity for you to share with us a favourite moment from one of your many Cariboo Chilcotin outdoor adventures. Please submit your photo along with a description (when, where, how and what makes it so special to you) to [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca). We will not use your photo for any other purpose without your permission.

## The Bennie Cabin

By Jim Sims

Fred and Winnie Bennie were founding members of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists who served the club and Scout Island Nature Centre for many years. Each summer they spent most of the time at their much beloved Nimpo Lake Cabin. After they passed away the cabin was donated to “The Land Conservancy of British Columbia” as it was their wish that the property they loved so much would remain as it always was. I along with some other members of the club have assisted in the maintenance of the cabin by providing a few



improvements, clearing some beetle trees and making sure the cabin is opened each spring and closed up for the winter. I know from reading the cabin log that the cabin is getting minimal use. Although the cabin is very rustic it is a really awesome location with so many opportunities that could provide a wonderful get-away like the ones Fred and Winnie enjoyed. One of Winnie’s requests on making the donation was that members of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists be allowed to use the cabin at no cost. If you are looking for a great holiday opportunity here is one to consider. For more information on the cabin follow this link <http://blog.conservancy.bc.ca/properties/northern-region/nimpo-lake/nimpo-lake-cabin/>.

I hope that if you do choose to rent the Bennie Cabin that it will not be for free and that you will make a sizable donation to the Land Conservancy that is even larger than the rental fee. I’ll look forward to reading your note in the cabin log!

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**2015 WLFN Fieldtrip List****Chilanko Marsh & Tatla Lake**

*Friday May 15<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup> (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. This is an annual bird species count conducted on the marsh and the surrounding riparian zone. The marsh provides an opportunity to see most of the waterfowl 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. Bring a tent or camper as there is limited space available, (the sauna will be warmed up and the ice is already off the lake). There will be a pot luck supper Saturday evening and a pancake breakfast Sunday morning. Sunday we will take a walk along the north shore of Tatla Lake that features an interesting grassland slope with spectacular views of the Coast Mountains. You are welcome to stay with Jim for the holiday Monday but you will be on your own for the rest for your meals. Some of us will be going to the Bennie Cabin on Nimpo Lake on Monday and you are welcome to travel with us and help open the cabin.

**Russet Bluff Hike**

*Wednesday May 20th (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)*

Meet at SINC at 7:00 pm to carpool; wear your hiking boots. We'll drive to the top to view the landscape and enjoy the birds. Plan to explore interesting features in the vicinity including the "Asbestos Pits" and associated plant communities.

**Farwell Canyon Balsam Root Tour**

*Sunday May 24<sup>th</sup> (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440 or alternate?)*

Meet at SINC at 8:00 am to carpool; bring water, lunch and hiking boots. Hike onto rangeland north of Junction Sheep Range. The display of balsamroot is spectacular at their peak with hillsides blanketed in yellow with a sprinkling of blues and other colours. A great trip if the timing is right. Otherwise, still a good trip to look at grassland plants. Short, easy walks from vehicles on road. Suggest high clearance vehicles only because will likely be some rutted areas.

**Williams Lake Creek Valley Bike Ride**

*Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup> (Leaders Rick Dawson 392-3370)*

Meet at Scout Island at 6:30 pm with your bike, helmet and water bottle. We will drive our cars to the last parking lot going down the Frizzi Road past the garbage dump. It is an easy and interesting cycle to the Fraser River and back. The road is gravel. On past trips with we have seen Pelicans, deer, high and low water in the river and even flooding of the road.

**Birding at Scout Island**

*Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> 8-10 am (Leader: Cathy Koot 392-4250)*

The Scout Island Nature Centre has lots of great habitat for birds. We will stroll the trails to see and hear what birds have returned. Bring binoculars if you have them.

**Clyde Mountain, Churn Creek Protected Area - hike**

*Sunday, May 31 (Leader: Ordell Steen, 398-5017)*

Meet at the parking lot at the "Y" (by A&W) at 7:30 a.m. We will hike from the campsite at the calving barn on the trail going around the east side of Clyde Mountain and overlooking the Fraser River. The first km or two of the trail includes some moderate slopes but on the east side of Clyde the trail is gentle. We will return on the same route. In addition to great views of the Fraser River Valley, the trail passes through some nice grasslands, open Douglas-fir forests, and a few small deciduous forests. This will be a joint trip with the Friends of Churn Creek P.A. Society.

**Williams Lake Paddle**

*Wednesday June 3<sup>th</sup> (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)*

Paddle the east end of Williams Lake to the San Jose River. Meet at the Grebe Drive (Russet Bluff) boat launch at 7:00 pm. **Approved Life Jackets mandatory**

**Williams Lake River Valley Birding**

*Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup> (morning) (Leader Phil Ranson 398-7110)*

Meet at 8:00am in the lower parking lot (Frizzi Road past the transfer site and down into the river valley). 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.

**Golden Eagle Walk**

*Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> (Leader Jon Gaztelumendi)*

Jon will take us on a hike to observe a Golden eagle nest hopefully with young to be observed. Details will have to wait for the May newsletter so Jon can determine the best nest site to visit.

**Native Bees and Flowers**

*Saturday July 4 (and Sunday, July 5?) (Contact: Peter Opie, 392-1440; Ordell Steen, 398-5017)*

Details of this weekend with Gord Hutchings are not yet finalized. Gord Hutchings is an expert on native bees (as well as dragonflies) and the coevolution of native bees and flowers. His enthusiasm is captivating. On the evening of July 2 (7:30 p.m), he will make a presentation at SINC on native bees and bee/flower coevolution. On Saturday, he will lead a walk, probably in the Williams Lake River Valley, to observe native bees and the characteristics of flowers they are visiting. On Sunday, July 4, he may lead another walk to observe bees in the Becher's Prairie to Farwell Canyon area. Stay tuned for final plans. Before coming to Gord's talk or the walk, check his website for lots of great background information on native bees (<https://sites.google.com/site/hutchingsbeeservice/blueberry-crop-vs-maple-tree-flowers>)

**Fire Ecology Jaunt**

*Wednesday July 15 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm (Leader: Cathy Koot 392-4250)*

Back in September 2013, a lightning strike led to a small forest fire at the Knife Creek Block of the UBC Alex Fraser Research Forest. We will visit Ground Zero for the fire and see the many ways that natural succession is taking place. There will be a good chance to encounter the fire-adapted black-backed woodpecker too. Meet at Scout Island NC at 6:30 pm and plan to car-pool for a half-hour drive to the site.

**Potato Range overnight and Teapot Day Hike**

We hope to finalized details for these 2 trips to the alpine, one in the dry coast range and the other in the wet Cariboo Mountains. Look for details in May or June.

**Dry Farm to Grinder Creek, Churn Creek Protected Area – hike**

*Sunday August 23 (leader: Ordell Steen, 398-5017)*

Meet at the parking lot at the "Y" (by A&W) at 7:00 a.m. This hike will be a mostly gentle downhill walk (about 6 km) from the Blackdome Mine road through the Dry Farm area, where some ecosystem restoration work has been done by BC Parks, and through a large, open grassland to Grinder Creek. We will follow riparian forests along the creek to the Empire Valley Road and the parking lot near the ranch headquarters. A car shuttle will be required. This is a joint trip with the Friends of Churn Creek P.A. Society.

**Big Creek Ecological Reserve**

*Sunday September 27<sup>th</sup> (leader Jim Sims, 296-3638)*

Details in the June newsletter and the date may change.

**Junction Sheep Range**

*Sunday October 25<sup>th</sup> (Leader 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.