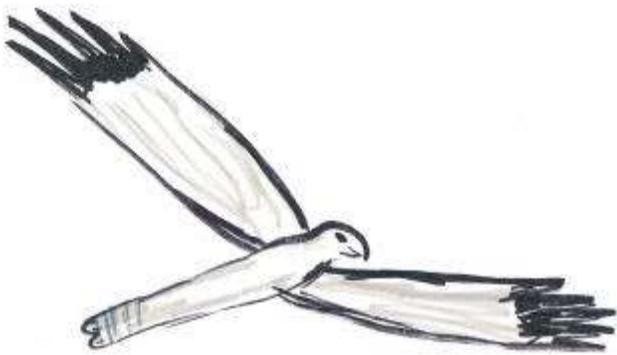


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
APRIL 2016 NEWSLETTER



Time
For
Spring
Adventures





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 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 Christie Mayall, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Chris Coates and Don Lawrence



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter near the end of 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



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.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Saturday May 7th 2016 from 9:30 AM until 1PM

Scout Island Nature House

Everyone can help and your help is needed

From Margaret Waring your Yard Sale coordinator

Areas where you can help are:

1. Collecting and delivering your donations for us to sell
2. Pricing and set up on Friday the 6th between 4PM & 7PM
3. I need a few helpers at the sale on Saturday May 7th
4. Shoppers to bring shopper friends and buy all the treasures
5. Clean up crew on Saturday May 7th at 1 PM

Please contact me if you are able to help pricing, at the sale or for cleanup. Contact not required for dropping off donations. Please just come!

Please divide and share some of the plants from your garden. Donate some plants that you start from seed. Take some cuttings from your favorite house plants, clean out your garages and garden and tool sheds. Feel free to ask your friends for donations and encourage them to come to the sale too! Try some new recipes. Shoppers often look for a snack! Bring some books or CDs or DVDs. Empty out your sport, camping and toy boxes, even kitchen cupboards and choose a few exotic items from your closet too.

Reduce your clutter, gather all your unused treasures and take them to the Nature House on Friday afternoon May 6th. It is helpful if you are able to label your plants and price some larger individual and unique items. A label or note to explain some of your unique items is always useful!

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 or muskratexpress@shaw.ca



WLFN Annual General Meeting

By Fred McMechan

This meeting was held on April 1st in the Nature House. The meeting was well attended with about 30 people in attendance. Many delicious dishes were provided at the potluck supper;

thanks to everyone.

The AGM included several reports followed by the election of officers. The table officers who were elected were: president – Fred McMechan; vice president - Christie Mayall; treasurer- Kath Vanspall; secretary - Ordell Steen. The following seven directors were also elected: Brian Chapman, Chris Coates, Nola Daintith, Ray Hornby, Cathy Koot, Don Lawrence, Peter Opie.

The special resolution to form a Scout Island Nature Centre Advisory Committee was approved. The new executive will pursue the model which was outlined in the information sent to the membership. Fred McMechan decided to stay as president for one more year to assist with the transition to this new model.



Back Row: Ordell, Fred, Peter, Cathy, Don, Ray
Front Row: Nola, Kath and Christie

Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz - the Blitz has started in BC! Please help get the word out.

By: Aaron Marshall a Blitz Volunteer

The Blitz challenges birders to seek Rusty Blackbirds throughout this species’ entire migratory range, from the southeastern U.S. through the Northeast, Midwest, Canada, and Alaska. It’s easy to participate- bird as you normally do and search especially carefully for Rusty Blackbirds- then report your results to eBird under the “Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz” survey type, even if you don’t find a Rusty. Or, visit one of our Rusty Blackbird Areas of Interest (visit our interactive map at <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/2015-areas-of-interest/>) to help us assess consistency of migratory timing and habitat use during spring migration.

Of course, the farther north you are, the later in the spring Rusties are likely to move through your area. To give you a sense of when Rusties are most likely to migrate through BC, we’ve posted a list of suggested target dates for each region: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/states-and-dates/> . However, migratory timing can vary annually based on weather and climate, so any Rusty reports during the Blitz period of 1 March through 15 June will help our effort!

For more information on Blitz objectives, along with Rusty Blackbird identification tips, data collection instructions, and data reporting information, you can find additional resources at <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>.

We hope you’ll “get Rusty” with us to help conserve this elusive and vulnerable songbird! Also, follow us on Facebook to hear about Rusty sightings, see Rusty pictures, and get the latest Blitz news: <https://www.facebook.com/rustyblackbirdspringblitz>

The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds lists the Rusty Blackbird as a rare (1 to 6 individuals per season). They also nest in the region. Look for them in wooded marshland. The similar Brewer’s blackbird has a purplish sheen on the head and neck during the breeding season. The female Rusty also has the yellow eye while the female Rusty has a dark eye. The Brewer’s is more likely to be found in the open around cattle or wetlands.



Brewer’s Blackbird



Rusty Blackbird



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

The spring changes at the Nature Centre are coming fast and furious. There are new birds to see nearly every day and of course the pelican is the favorite. The butterflies have been out on the warmer days. Many of the willow catkins are “spent” and forming seeds on the female plants. The soopolallie is in bloom as is the blue clematis just to the left of the nature house door.

The Nature Centre has also been “blooming full” of grade 7 students over the last 2 weeks. Frances, Paula and I have been engaging a class a day (all day that is) with the ecosystems to prepare the students for the Earth Challenge on April 22. We thought it was better to get the students into nature to teach about ecosystems, so they got to hike, dip, smell the sage... Friday April 22 the eight grade 8 classes will take part in a contest based on water wise, waste wise, air quality, invasive species and ecosystem material presentations they have had (partnership with the CCCS). There are field trip prizes for all of the classes—the winner chooses first.

Summer staff will start early in May as well as two UBC teacher candidates who will be with us for 3 weeks. We have a lot planned for May and if you would like to share your natural history skills give me a call or email. You could help train summer and UBC staff (birding, invertebrates, ...), help with the salmon fry release programs at Scout Island or

on the Chilcotin River near Anaham, or join us on a weekend adventure with the high school Enviro group.

Hosts for the Weekends are also needed. Our two high school employees are helping with the hosting duties this spring, but we still need some of the weekend days (1-4pm) covered. I will be happy to train you if you haven't done this before. We need a host for May 1 and 8 and any weekend in June right now.

New in the Nature House Library

Fred has donated a great dvd, "Bees Tales from the Hive". It is the most amazing photography inside the hives and from the view point of a bee. I don't know how they did some of it. If you would like to borrow it, stop in and ask.

Appeal for warm clothing

To make the new Scout Island Nature Kindergarten a positive experience for everyone and accessible to all children, used outdoor clothing (snowsuits, boots, mitts, raingear, etc.) is being collected. If you have clothing that fits 5-6 year olds, donations can be dropped off at Scout Island Nature Centre.

Black and Yellow Mud Dauber (*Sceliphron caementarium*)

Mud dauber is a name commonly applied to a number of wasps from either the family Sphecidae or Crabronidae that build their nests from mud. Mud daubers are variable in appearance, but most resemble long, slender wasps about 1-inch (25 mm) in length. The name refers to the nests that are made by the female wasps, which consist of mud molded into place by the wasp's mandibles. Mud daubers are not normally aggressive, but can become belligerent when threatened.



Like most other wasps, mud daubers are predators. The females not only build the nests, but also they hunt to provision them. Black and yellow mud daubers primarily prey on relatively small, colorful spiders, such as crab spiders (and related groups), orb weavers and some jumping spiders. They usually find them in and around vegetation. Adults of both sexes frequently drink flower nectar, but they stock their nests with spiders, which serve as food for their offspring. Like connoisseurs, they prefer particular kinds of spiders, and particular sizes of spiders for their larders. Instead of stocking a nest cell with one or two large spiders, mud daubers cram as many as two dozen small spiders into a nest cell. They appear to know exactly what they are hunting for, and where to find it.

To capture a spider, the wasp grabs it and stings it. The venom from the sting does not kill the spider, but paralyzes and preserves it so it can be transported and stored in the nest cell until consumed by the larva.

The nest of the black and yellow mud dauber is composed of a series of cylindrical cells that are plastered over to form a smooth nest about the size of a lemon. Each nest contains one egg. Usually, they clump several nests together and plaster more mud over them. This set was found under the roof of the Potato House. You can see the remnants of the pupae cases where the adults emerged. It was made by the black and yellow mud dauber.



Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Researched by Jim Sims

During the recent Alkali Lake field trip Fred and I were driving along the Dog Creek Road on the extensive high elevation grasslands near the old Dog Creek Airport when we observed this Northern Harrier. It zig-zagged back and forth across the grasslands in typical Harrier flight. It was a male, light grey in colour showing its obvious white rump patch. From below it is whitish and still has the black wing tips. The female is brown in colour and also shares the white rump patch. The Northern Harrier is one of the easier hawk species for me to identify. Its low irregular flight, interrupted with brief hovering and glides with wings held up are a sure sign. It is also a slim hawk with a long narrow wings and tail.



The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds designates it as a nesting species that is uncommon (1 to 6 individuals per locality per day) from late March into the first week of December. There is a slight increase in numbers during the spring migration period (this time of the year). During the winter months they are an occasional species (more than 6 records but not seen every year). Most of these winter birds are juveniles.

The Northern Harrier was formerly known as the Marsh Hawk. An appropriate name as this is where we are most likely to find them flying low over the cattails looking for small birds and maybe even the odd duck. They will often drown their larger prey when the initial attack did not end with the death of the prey. Unlike other hawks they rely heavily on their hearing to find prey. The head is most like that of an owl with disks of stiff facial feathers surrounding the ear that focus the sound of the prey.



Female Harrier photo by Kris Andrews



Male Harrier looks white from below

The male Harrier attracts a mate to its territory by performing sky-dancing displays: undulating, rollercoaster-like flights up to 1,000 feet off the ground, sometimes covering more than half a mile. The male will mate with up to 5 different females but most often just one or 2. The nest is located on the ground usually in dense cover from Willows, grasses, reeds or bulrushes. The nests are located on platforms of alder and willow branches and cattail stalks. The nest is lined with dry grasses and weed stalks.

Why not join us for our annual field trip to Chilanko Marsh where we often see this interesting hawk of the marsh.

Sources: *Cariboo Chilcotin Checklist of Birds*; *The Birds of British Columbia* vol. 2; <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>



Our View of the Night Sky – April/May 2016.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury is visible low in the eastern dawn sky. See transit information below.

Mars is visible as a reddish ‘star’ rising in the evening in the east in the constellation Scorpius near Antares. It is closest to Earth on May 30 and attains a maximum disc size of 18.6 arc seconds (very small, no matter what you hear on TV..... Some astronomers will be excited because it gives a better opportunity to view Mars in telescopes, but it will still appear to be very small).

Jupiter is visible high in the south to south-west all night long in Leo. Late in the evening of May 6 the shadows of the moons Io & Callisto will transit the planet’s disc at the same time.

Venus is out of sight until mid-July.

Saturn rises after Mars in the late evening.

Rare Transit event!

Mercury will transit the sun (move across the face of the sun) on the morning of May 9th. Check the internet for live feeds of the transit starting at sunrise local time and going until about 11:20 a.m. The transit is already in progress as the Sun rises in Williams Lake. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO VIEW THIS EVENT WITHOUT PROPER SOLAR VIEWING FILTERS & EQUIPMENT.**

Conjunction

The Moon joins Saturn, Mars & the star Antares in a quasi-conjunction on April 25/26.

Moon

Full moon - April 22nd & May 21st.

New moon - May 6th.

Meteor Showers

The Lyrid shower peaks on April 22nd under a bright moon.

The Aquarid shower peaks on May 5th.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “April 2016: Northern Edition (PDF)”. At the end of the month it changes to show the next month’s chart.

The Skymaps chart also has a useful list of what is visible with the eye, binoculars and telescopes.

Field Trip List for 2016

There is still a lot of time for additional club filed trips, if you would like to add to our list please contact Jim (250)296-3638 or muskratexpress@shaw.ca or Fred at (250)392-7680 or Fred_McMechan@telus.net Thanks to all of the volunteer leaders.

Chilanko Marsh Tatla Lake and Skinner Meadow

Friday May 21st to May 23rd (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. On Victoria Day Monday join us for a morning visit to Skinner Meadow and check out the amazing assortment of wild flowers. Some of us will be going to the Bennie Cabin on Nimpo Lake on Tuesday and you are welcome to travel with us and help open the cabin.



Hike with us on the North Shore of Tatla Lake

Birding at Scout Island

Saturday June 4th 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.

North side of Churn Creek.

Sunday, June 5th (Leaders: Ordell Steen 398-5017 and Jim Young)

We will walk through grasslands, dry open forests and by some wetlands along the north edge of lower Churn Creek canyon. With spectacular views of the canyon, this walk will be mostly gentle downhill and approximately 11 km in length from Gang Ranch property to the mouth of Churn Creek in the Protected Area. Be sure to bring plenty of water and wear good hiking footwear. This will be a joint trip with the Friends of Churn Creek. Meet in the parking lot by A&W near the "Y" at 7:15 to carpool.

Fox Mountain Walk

Wednesday evening June 8th (Leader Ray Hornby 250-392-2271)

Join us for a walk along the trails on Fox Mountain. Good chance of viewing birds, wild flowers, and wildlife including deer, moose, bear, and fox. As well as an opportunity for great vista views of the lake. Meet at the corner of Fox Mountain Road and Teal Place (2nd road on left at top) at 6:30 pm. Bring camera and binoculars. Walk is relatively easy and dry.

Late evening Poorwill and Flammulated Owls Moon Rd.

Friday evening June 17th (Leader Cathy Koot)

Details in the May newsletter

Williams Lake River Valley Birding

Sunday June 19th (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.

Russet Bluff Hike

Wednesday evening June 22nd (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.

Potato Range

Saturday July 9th (Leaders Frances McCoubrey and Paula Laita)

Details in the May newsletter

Pink Mountain

July 23rd Pink Mountain (Leader Sue Hemphill)

Details in the May newsletter or call Sue

Old Bishop Farm Site hike (Churn Creek)

Sunday August 14th (leader Ordell Steen, 398-5017))

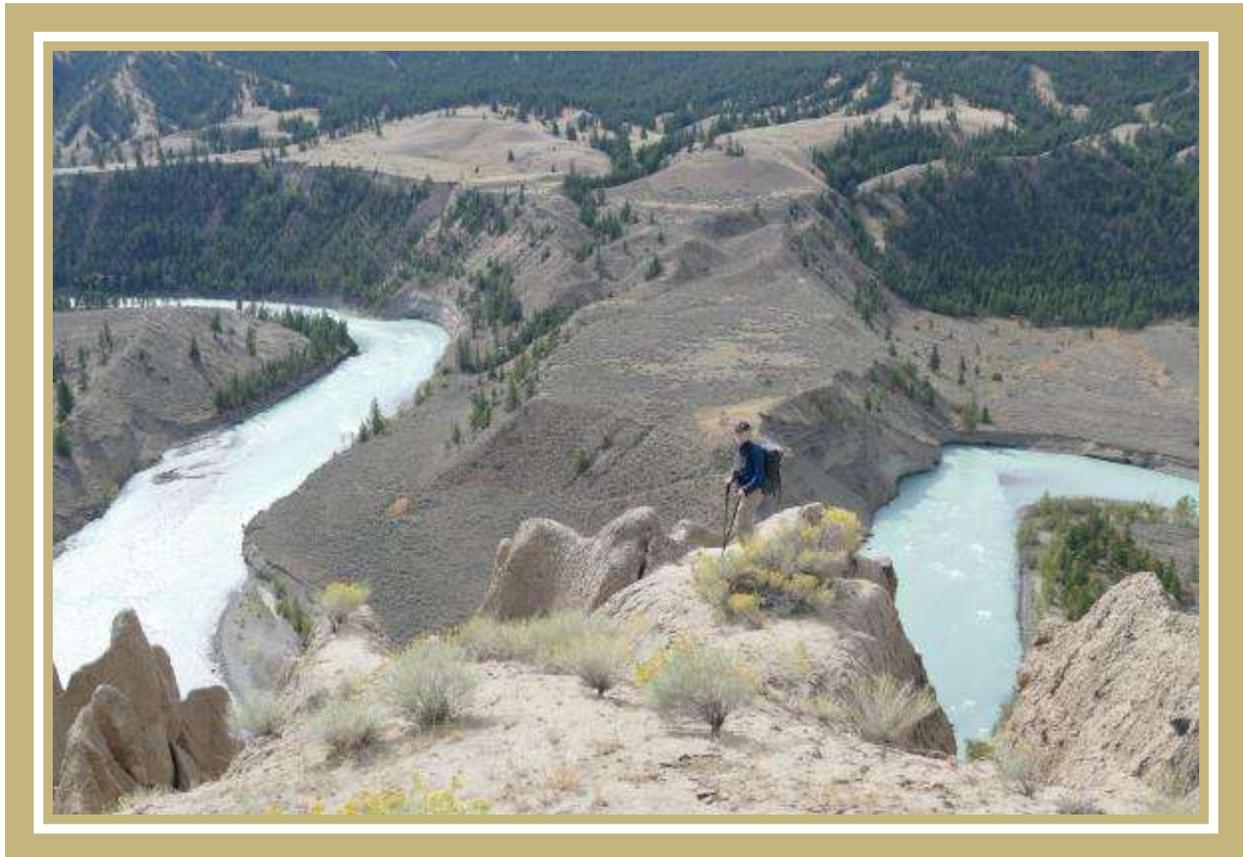
Details in the May newsletter

Junction Sheep Range

Sunday October 23rd (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.

Member's Moment from Rick Dawson



Member Sean Donahue on a hike above the Chilcotin River where he seems to be as unafraid of the edge as a wild sheep”

This awesome vista from above the hoodoos down river from Farewell Canyon is well worth the climb. Leave your vehicle at the small pull out on the lower bench on the east side of the road before the bend leading to the bridge. Follow the indistinct trail up onto the higher bench to enjoy the Bighorn's view of the river meanders far below you.

“Member's Moment” is an opportunity for you to share a special scene, plant, animal, bird or outdoor activity that you have enjoyed and photographed here in the Cariboo Chilcotin. A chance for you to encourage other members to get outdoors and find their own special moments close to home and perhaps share them with all of us. For each newsletter the editors will select one or two photos for inclusion in the newsletter based on the quality of the photo as well as the interesting paragraph you must provide. We will save all submitted unused moments in hopes they may find a place in a future edition. Please email your full resolution photo and paragraph to the muskratexpress@shaw.ca. A special thanks to Rick Dawson for his winning entry.