

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2018 NEWSLETTER

AGM

What will I make for the Pot Luck?

LET'S ALL GO TO VISIT, VOTE AND ENJOY!



FRIDAY MARCH 23RD

BANQUET
APRIL 20TH

I need to hurry and get my Banquet Ticket



We are all off to sample desserts

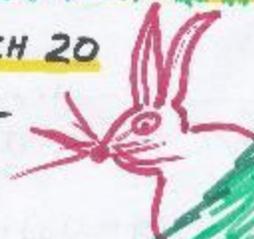


Wild life trading is a conservation threat for me

Rob Higgins is coming to town



TUES. MARCH 20
- HOP OUT -
- HELP OUT -
- PLAN A FIELD TRIP -



WED. EVENING APRIL 11th
PROGRAM



The newsletter for the:
Williams Lake Field Naturalists
1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC, V2G 5K5

Membership fees: Family (\$35), single (\$30) 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 **Vacant**, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Chris Coates



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter later in April. 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 Planning

The meeting to plan for this year's field trips will take place on **Tuesday, March 20**. It will take place at the Nature House, starting at 5 pm

Please attend and provide information about the field trips you wish to lead.

If you cannot attend please communicate with Jim Sims at muskratexpress@shaw.ca to provide information about your trip. The list of field trips will be shown in the next newsletter

AGM, Williams Lake Field Naturalists

Our club's AGM will be held on **Friday, March 23** at the Nature House

The events will include:

- 1) A pot luck supper starting at 6 pm
- 2) The business meeting starting at about 7:30 pm. The two main items on the agenda will be the election of directors and the approval of the new bylaws
- 3) Following the business meeting there will be presentations by members of either photos or "show and tell" articles. Please consider contributing to this part of the evening.

We encourage you to attend this event.

The Williams Lake Field Naturalists Needs YOU!

The WLFN is looking for a president and vice-president.

After 39 years of loyal and tireless service as president of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists, Fred McMechan is planning to retire into a less up-front role. He is happy to continue on the executive and assist with Scout Island Nature Centre duties. Now that the Nature Centre Management Committee is looking after most of the Scout Island operations, the overall responsibilities of the WLFN President has been greatly reduced. If you or someone you know would consider standing for president or vice-president or being part of the WLFN board of directors, please contact one of the members of the "Succession Planning Committee":

Ordell Steen (oasteen@shaw.ca)

Katharine VanSpall (kvanspall@shaw.ca)

Fred McMechan (fred_mcmechan@telus.net)

Don Lawrence (djlawren@telus.net)

Global Trade in Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles

An Evening program Wednesday April 11th at 7:00pm in the Nature House

Illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade is one of the greatest threats to the conservation of an increasingly long list of species around the world. Southeast Asia is at the heart of this crisis, as a source region, and importing/re-exporting center and increasingly as a consumer.

The numbers of species involved, and the volumes in which they are traded, are staggering. Globally, the trade in wildlife is comparable to the drug trade and arms trade, with increasing involvement of organized crime. Efforts to tackle this trade are underway, but much, much more is needed, as many species are perilously close to extinction – more than you might imagine.

Among the most heavily traded, and most threatened, are the tortoises and freshwater turtles. Traded for their shells - used in traditional medicines, their meat – for consumption, and live – for pets, this group of species is in serious trouble. Tortoises and freshwater turtles pre-date dinosaurs, but are now threatened with extinction thanks to the illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade.

Now living in Big Lake Ranch, Dr Chris R. Shepherd has been working in Southeast Asia on wildlife trade related issues for the past 25 years, working with TRAFFIC Southeast Asia for the past 20 years. He carries out research on a wide variety of species groups, including mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, looking at legal and illegal trade dynamics and assessing the impact trade may have on wild populations. He has recently returned to Canada and founded the organization MONITOR, and will continue researching the global wildlife trade to support policy, enforcement and other conservation interventions.

Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet

This banquet will be held on **Friday, April 20**, at the United Church Hall.

It will be catered by members from the United Church. Joanne Wright will be providing her wonderful desserts.

The Itinerary will be as follows:

- 1) Pre-dinner social , 6 pm to 6:45 pm
- 2) Banquet, from 6:45 pm
- 3) Short addresses from guests
- 4) Presentation by our banquet speaker, Rob Higgins

Banquet tickets will be available at the Open Book and Nature House, and from members of our club.

Tickets will be available from March 5.

Please make sure to buy your tickets at least a week before the date of the banquet. We need to give numbers to the caterers and Joanne at this time

The cost of an adult ticket is \$ 40. and a student ticket is \$ 15.

The Old and the Awesome Versus the New and the Terrible: Stories of the Insects of British Columbia

British Columbia is home to a great diversity of insects. We have our beautiful butterflies, our hissing ten-lined June beetle, and our huge wood boring beetles. We also have our social ants that ranch, take



slaves and even feed on the blood of their own young. There are many awesome tales to tell. However, we also have some new arrivals. Ladybugs that bite, bugs that spoil the taste of wine and ants that can stop planes from landing. They have a story as well and ones worth knowing as spring arrives. Tonight we will look at the stories of the old and awesome insects of British Columbia along with the new and terrible.

Rob Higgins Biography

Rob Higgins is an entomologist with Thompson Rivers University who was based in Williams Lake for 25 years. Specializing in ants, in the fall of 2010 Rob confirmed the presence of the European fire ant (*Myrmica rubra*) in the province of BC which has been creating considerable issues for a great number of residents and property managers. Following this, he confirmed the presence of the rough fire ant (*Myrmica scabrinodis*) and the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) in BC and rediscovered a number of other invasive ant species such as the tropical stinging ant (*Hypoponera punctatissima*) which has also turned up in eastern Canada. Currently Rob is working on a new comprehensive guide to the ants of the Pacific Northwest while experimenting with some new approaches to the control of invasive ants.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

By Margaret Waring

Can you believe it? Spring will soon be here and your help is requested to make our annual Spring Yard and Garden Sale a success.

Our sale has become an annual event started by Win Bennie and supported by Gloria Atamanenko's tomato plants. The money we earn is used for a bursary for a grade 12 student graduating from Lake City Secondary this spring. If we earn more than needed for the bursary the extra is donated to education programs at Scout Island.

Get a head start on your spring cleaning and downsizing. Please set aside a box or two labelled Yard Sale or a corner in your basement and add a few things to it every week.

We sell sporting goods, camping equipment, home baking, items for crafts and home and yard decorating, unique and retro clothing items, tools for the kitchen and workshop, toys for kids and we always have a section for books, cds, dvds and even vinyl records. Some hot selling items I remember from last year as well as the plants and berry bushes were a giant bird cage, sacks of manure and some mini tea sets.

Plants, pots, bird houses, and garden items are very popular. If you are thinking of starting seeds for your garden please start some extras as plant seedlings are on the best seller list. Now might be the time to refresh, divide and repot your house plants. Save some for the sale. We sell indoor and outdoor plants. We work to sell whatever you bring us!

If you have any questions, suggestions or ideas please contact me (Margaret Waring) at mewaring@hotmail.com or 250-398-7724

Your interest, help and support is very much appreciated.

The date has been set and It is an event not to be missed!

Spring Yard and Garden Sale Saturday May 12th 2018

Start gathering now and look for more information in your next newsletter.

BC Nature Conference and AGM

A reminder that this conference will be held at UBC in Vancouver from May 10 to May 13. The host is Nature Vancouver and they have organized an outstanding program of field trips and speakers. Please refer to the Nature Vancouver website, <https://event.naturevancouver.ca> for information and registration forms

Please note that to get the preferred registration rate one must register by March 15.



Notes from the Executive

By Fred McMechan

1) The registration for the Tatlayoko Lake Camp was carried out from the BC Nature office on February 19. After we receive the list of registrants we will send informational packages to them. In the next newsletter we will give the results of the registration.

2) The nomination committee has been active trying to find new directors for the executive

Information on this venture is found in a separate article in this newsletter

- 3) We encourage members to attend our AGM on March 23.
- 4) The planning for the Scout Island Nature Centre banquet is ongoing. We are fortunate to have Rob Higgins as our guest speaker. Please make sure to purchase your tickets at least one week before the banquet date, Friday, April 20.
- 5) We encourage you to lead a field trip this year. The field trip planning meeting will be held at the Nature House at 5 pm on March 20.

Nimpo Lake Bennie Cabin

By Jim Sims

The cabin and property at Nimpo Lake that is now owned by The Nature Trust of BC is in need of some attention this spring. Since TLC took over the property some of our club members have assisted with the annual maintenance chores at the cabin and the property. This year the porch and the add on storage shed will require new roofing and I am looking for a small amount of metal roofing to replace the missing rolled roofing. I have found enough for the porch roof but I need more for the shed, enough to cover 8' 3" long by 8' wide. Colour is not all that important as the roof is very low pitch and cannot be seen. Often a shipment of new metal roof is protected by a scrap piece. We are hoping there might be a few pieces of roofing out there that we can recycle for you. Please let Jim know if you can provide some, email the muskrat! I'll also be looking for help when we do the work bee, most likely following the Victoria Day annual field trip.



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Scout Island Nature Centre Updates

Ordell Steen, Suzanne Cochrane and myself have put the first set of challenges together for the Agents of Discovery. This won't be everyone's cup of tea but for the many people who enjoy nature and challenges that come via their phones this might please.

Have you heard of the super-secret **Agents of Discovery** mobile app? The game is downloaded for free from the App Store or Google Play and then played at participating locations or "Mission Sites" across North America! Agents of Discovery requires no WiFi or data connection while playing the mobile game.

How do you get started?

1. With WiFi access, download the Agents of Discovery mobile app;
2. With WiFi access, download the current Mission Sites for Williams Lake: Scout Island and the River Valley trail;
3. Do all of this before you head to the Nature Centre or River Valley. Be sure you understand how the app works before you go so you don't have to spend too much time looking at your phone instead of at nature.
4. Head to a Mission Site and get ready for adventure, intrigue, and a whole lot of fun;
5. Look at the map that shows where all of the challenges are. You don't have to do them in any order or all in one day. Take the trail that interests you and do the challenges along that trail.
6. Let's play! At the Mission site make sure your mobile device has it's GPS on and that it vibrates or makes a sound. This will tell when you are near a challenge without you having to look at your phone. Remember, you don't want to miss what is happening around you. You need your "Owl Eyes" open and ready for anything that comes across your path. Don't be looking at your phone just as a short tailed weasel flits by.
7. Tuck your mobile device in your pocket and enjoy the outdoors. When you are at or near a challenge your mobile device will let you know. Then you can stop and take the challenge.

To learn more call the Cariboo Memorial Recreation Complex at 250-398-7665.

Let Sue know how you like it and if you have ideas of how we can make it better or ideas for spring and summer challenges.

Spring Break Program

There will be an Art in Nature program for ages 8-13 year olds March 19/20 and for ages 4-8 on March 26/27. The sessions will be from 8:30-4pm to allow for parents who work. Mary Forbes is leading both sessions. She will be assisted by others on various days. Mammals and Birds in spring will be the focus. Sketching techniques will be taught to the older by Laura Ulrich for the March 19/20 sessions. Call the Nature Centre to register children.

Take time to go to our updated website at www.scoutisland.ca and be sure you check out the old and the new video. They are both quite fun. Thanks to Brandon Hoffman for helping us make the changes.

Teacher workshop

By Francis McCoubrey

On February 16th Scout Island and the Williams Lake Community Forest cohosted a Pro-d day for teachers focused on tracking, snow science and outdoor learning opportunities in the area. Teachers went home with 4 easy to replicate snow experiments tied to the curriculum, a better understanding of how to identify different tracks and how the Williams Lake Indian band and the City of Williams Lake are working together to manage the new community forest. Teachers snowshoed through the forest area off Birch Lane with one of contractor Hugh Flinton who's company is managing the community forest now. Both the community forest and School District #27 hope teachers will start taking advantage of this great outdoor learning resource a 5 minute drive from Williams Lake.

2018 Great Back Yard Bird Count at Scout Island

By Paula Laita

17 birding enthusiasts participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count on Saturday, February 17 afternoon at Scout Island. Expert birder Cathy Koot taught us about bird identification and showed us frozen specimens of the most common birds that visit our feeders in winter –thanks Cathy for the interesting talk!



Chris examines snow flakes

Then we counted birds at the Nature House feeders and found Common Redpolls, American Goldfinches, one House Finch, Pine Grosbeaks, Black-capped Chickadees, Blackbirds, Song Sparrows and a Harris's Sparrow! –thanks Lubna Khan for spotting this one and also Betty and Shawn Donahue for helping with the count!

We finished with a game to learn about the different types of beaks that birds have. We pretended to be loons, woodpeckers, waxwings, robins, mallards, red-winged-blackbirds and goshawks by using different tools to catch our food.

Birds in the News

By Margaret Waring

I have recently noticed some articles about birds in the Vancouver Sun newspaper. I am unsure if I am just more aware or if they have increased their reporting about bird life.

Saturday February 3, 2018 Aly Thomson of The Canadian Press has an article about Eagles in Sheffield Mills Nova Scotia. This is a rural farming community with chicken farms that is about 100 kms from Halifax. It has become a destination for wildlife observers, photographers and tourists. Feeding Eagles during the winter is a tradition of many decades and each year they have an annual festival. Chicken scraps used to be left out by the farmers. Now they are organized and contained. A local resident and member of the organizing committee for an annual bird watching festival gathers the scraps of chickens that are leftover after processing. From late December to late March, two or three times a day, the chicken scraps are flung into an area where the eagles can feed and can be viewed but are not easily disturbed by humans. It has been reported as

the largest eagle population in eastern North America. As well as the feedings the eagles migrate to the area because the Annapolis Valley's climate is slightly milder than windswept Cape Breton. More information can be found at sheffieldmills.org.

Wednesday February 7, 2018, in her daily report from an 18 day expedition to Antarctica, Postmedia columnist Daphne Bramham includes information about albatrosses, reporting that they are the most endangered family of seabirds. There are 22 species. They have an average lifespan of 56 years and can travel up to 1000 kms in a day. Seabirds including several species of albatross follow the ship Daphne is on. Large nesting grounds are in the area of South Georgia and Sandwich Islands. Albatross mate for life and come ashore only to breed every second year.

Four species of albatross and 300,000 pair of penguins breed at South Georgia. If you go onto the island, which is a marine protected area, there are protocols to follow to protect the birds, animals and area. These include scrubbing and dipping your foot wear in biocide. Species such as dandelions, rats, mice and even reindeer have been introduced and millions of dollars have been spent eradicating them. Researchers have recently discovered the albatross jigfish for squid at night, they flap and move about on the water to stir up phosphorescence, which attracts squid. The birds dive up to five metres to scoop up krill and other fish. Many birds are dying every year because they get caught in baited longline nets and drown. She mentions seeing two species, the Wandering albatross (has the longest wingspan of any bird, up to 3.35 metres and weighs nine kilos) and the Sooty albatross (reported to be a rare bird near the top of serious bird watchers lists). Albatrosses are featured in marine folklore, most memorably in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Have you seen an albatross?

What's Up at the UBC Alex Fraser Research Forest?

By Jenny Noble

Situated on 10 000 ha in two areas near Gavin Lake and Knife Creek, the UBC Alex Fraser Research Forest serves as a living laboratory where research and education regarding forests and forestry is conducted. Long-time member, Director and bird maven Cathy Koot is also the Research Coordinator at UBC's Alex Fraser Research Forest. "Since it was formed in 1987, almost 400 research projects have been tallied," says Koot. As an example, she shares recent results of Masters student, Wesley Brookes, and his supervisor Dr. Lori Daniels from UBC Forestry.

This project was done at the Knife Creek Block to reconstruct the historical ranges of fire frequency and severity across about a 90 hectare area and how they've changed since the early 1900s. Using evidence from tree rings, they determined such interesting things as:

- 23 fires occurred between 1619 – 1943, (avg. interval of 15 years)
- fires burned at varying severities at scales between 1-20 ha (some were hot enough to kill most of the trees while others just singed them or were somewhere in between)
- most of the trees in the canopy at present became established after particularly hot fires in 1840 and 1863 and before the last widespread fire in 1905.
- the human-caused cessation of fire has led to more homogenous, dense and closed-canopy forest structure, with uniform and high fuel loads across all plots.

So now we know that the range of openings, and ages and distribution of trees at Knife Creek were even more variable and at finer scales than we thought. This information will inform forest management moving forward. With 1000 ha of forest burned at varying severities at the Gavin Lake Block in 2017, we also anticipate more investigation about the after-effects of fire and our responses to it.



Increment core being sampled from a fire scarred tree for this study at the Alex Fraser Research Forest

Why do so many Rare Cariboo Chilcotin Birds show up at Eagle Lake

By Jim Sims

One of the main reasons is the lakes proximity to a short low elevation migratory route that links Butte Inlet to the interior via Tatlayoko Lake valley and the Hormathko River system. The lake and river system provide a nearly north south route through the mountains, a natural migratory route for many bird species. Tatlayoko Lake is designated as a birding hotspot by E-bird and the number of species recorded there is 191 just 7 less than our own Scout Island Nature Centre. The bird observatory banding station is the reason for the high count at this remote location and this count reflects the significance of the route.

Eagle Lake with its extensive alkali mud flats and rocky shoreline provide a natural stopping spot for many species on their way to or from northern nesting sites. For the past 40 years the lake level has been declining and is now over 5 metres lower than previous levels. Hence the new exposed mud flats and rocky small islets.



Eagle Lake mud flats exposed by receding water levels

The lake has a very small watershed and as a result has very clear water, one of the clearest in the province, Perhaps this makes it easier for bird species that feed on small fish to find there next meal.



Here are a few of these rare species for the Cariboo Chilcotin that have been located at Eagle Lake:

Minnnows are easy to find in crystal clear water



Whimbrel: Only 4 recorded sightings, 2 of these at Eagle Lake. Three of the four reports are of single birds, this one from May 21st 2013 was a group of 7.



Indigo Bunting: During the summer of 2014 the bunting was a regular at the lodge feeder. Only two other sightings, both from the Dog Creek area.



Lewis's Woodpecker: Nests in the Dog Creek Alkali Lake area but is also found in both east and west branches of the Hormathko River. This juvenile stayed around for 3 weeks in October of 2016.



Semipalmated Plover: Rare nesting species that should be breeding in the far north. Has been located in other lakes in the west Chilcotin with similar habitat. Has been up to 6 nest sites in a single



Arctic Tern: Very rare nesting site. Another arctic breeding species. There are currently 3 adult pairs at the lake and 2 were observed with nest in 2017.

Other species observed include Bluejay, Sanderling, Yellow-billed Loon, American Golden Plover, Black-necked Stilt, Hairy Wood Duck, Pacific Loon and Dunlin

The editors are disappointed to report that we did not receive a single Member's Moment for this newsletter. Please remember us before the next newsletter. We always look forward to seeing your awesome photos and reading your story as I am certain the members do as well.

"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 muskratepress@shaw.ca.