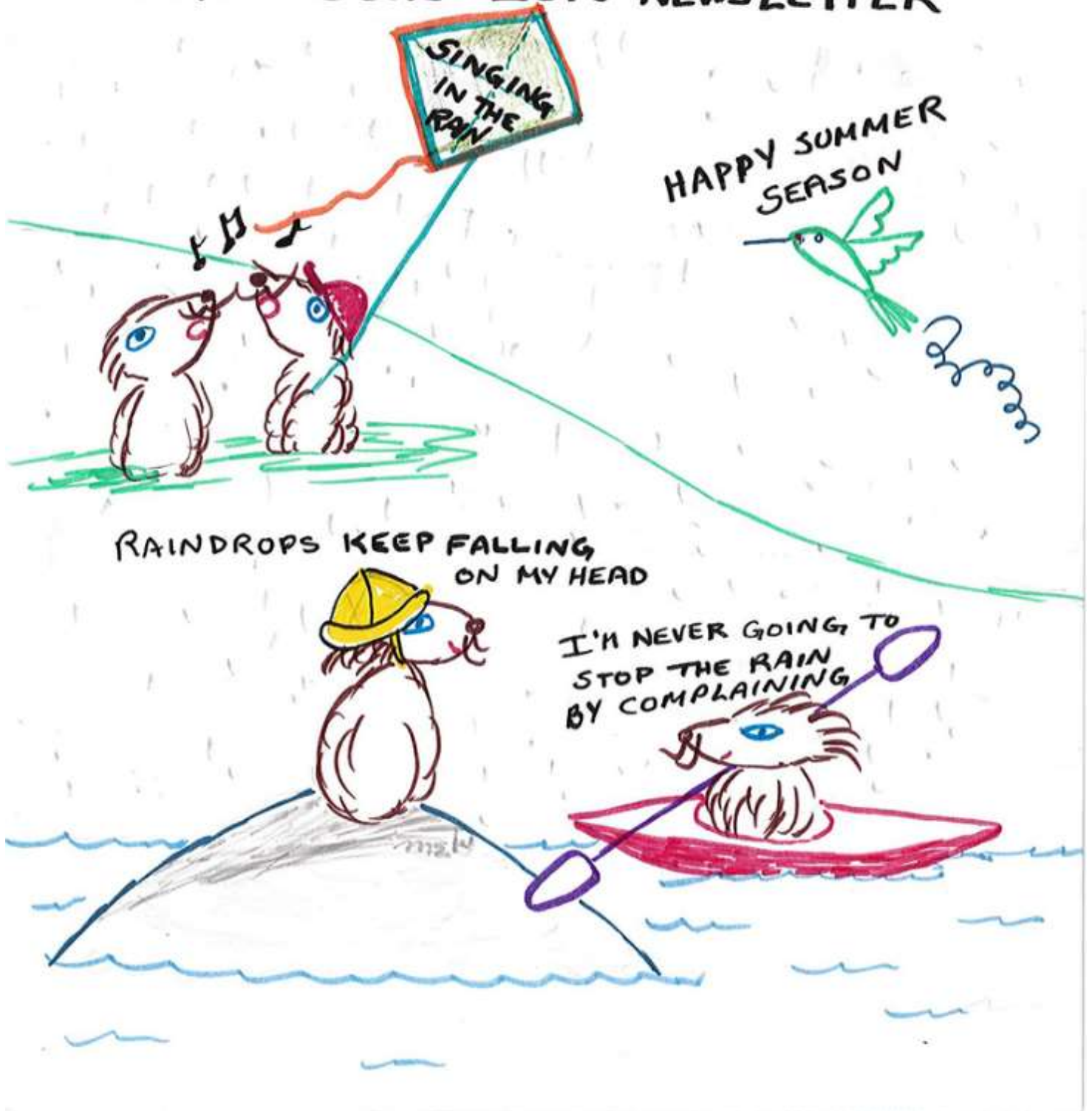


WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
MAY + JUNE 2018 NEWSLETTER





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](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:** presidential Team Margaret Waring (Chairperson), Don Lawrence (Scout Island affairs) and Ordell Steen (Communications/liaison), secretary Nola Daintith, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Francis McCoubrey, Jean Oke, Kathie Hamm, Don Lawrence and Fred McMechan



**Editors:** Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in mid-September. Our Muskrat editors and staff will be taking a well-deserved summer holiday and they hope all of you enjoy yours just as much as we will. 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)

## Spring Yard and Garden Sale

By Margaret Waring

Thank you everyone for the help you provided and congratulations on our success. I think almost every member contributed and non-members too. There were the behind the scene early donators, plant growers, advertisers. Many dropped in and dropped off sale items on Friday night and others were setting up and organizing everything. We had our efficient and busy crew on the cash desk on Saturday and a dedicated clean up crew after the sale. There are too many names to mention so I say thanks to all. I do want to add a special thank you to our volunteer executive director Sue Hemphill who tolerates our intrusion into the nature house, shares the block house and the summer students and who advertises and finds donations for the sale and has Juergen donate plants to us as well.

I had great plans to take pictures for the newsletter. I had my camera with me and my cell phone too. Either I was just too busy or I forgot but I did want to take pictures to add to the newsletter. Maybe next year? I just checked what I said in the wrap up from last year's sale and I did the same thing, forgetting pictures then too.

Our sale was on May 12th this year and we earned \$1492.70. Not a record for earnings but the sale was very successful! We earned more than enough for the \$1000. bursary that the Williams Lake Field Naturalists give to a graduating grade 12 student at Lake City Secondary School. The rest goes toward programs at Scout Island.

We sold horse manure and tomato and other plants, books and bird houses and bird feeders, muffins and cookies, and more! We didn't have as many plants this year and there are now other groups selling plants too.

On Saturday afternoon as we always do, left overs were delivered and donated to the Salvation Army, Salt Jar, Share Shed, upcoming ALS garage sale and Rotary Book Sale.

In closing I again thank all of you for your help. It is rewarding to host an event where so many people contribute and help.

Now is the time to mention next year and remind you to continue with your downsizing, cleaning and collecting and get

a box and label it Scout Island Yard Sale and start to load it up for next year's sale!

## **Hello Williams Lake Field Naturalists,**

By Camille Roberts

I would like to send a sincere thank you to the Field Naturalists that helped plant the native flower garden this Saturday.

Thank you for your hard work and taking the time to teach others during the event.

I think it is going to be a very special ongoing project, and I am excited to see how everything unfolds.

I hope that you will be pleased to see the rock beds were planed yesterday thanks to your weeding efforts! The beds that you cleaned out have been replaced with good soil and planted with an array of annuals for the time being, which will be a cheery site for everyone passing by! Thank you for making short and sweet work of something that would have usually taken hours and hours!

Thank you,

Rick and Margaret helped at this and I enjoyed the morning. The potato house was welcoming and friendly and there sure are a lot of people who stop by.



## **The Old Man and the Vultures**

Reported by Chris Coates

Turkey Vultures have been moving into the Cariboo for the last few decades, following the cliffs along the Fraser River. As the number of roads grows, perhaps the birds are taking advantage of more road kill. Many of us have anecdotes of Turkey Vulture sightings, and so it was with special interest that people came to hear Dave Manning's talk on these birds at Scout Island on June 4, 2018.

Dave Manning has lived on Pender Island for the past 15 years. He loves wandering in nature, looking and listening – he is a believer in Thoreau's dictum "we must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day." One day about 10 years ago, Dave was below a sunny bluff on the island and saw a couple of Turkey Vultures. He decided to investigate. Scrambling up a steep cliff, he followed a strange hissing sound, and then saw the white fuzzy head of a Turkey Vulture chick sticking out of a cave. From that moment, he was hooked on these birds. Over the winter, he read all he could about them, and over the next few springs, he returned to this and other caves many times, documenting the breeding cycle of the Turkey Vulture.



**Photo by Chris Coates**

Breeding, for adults that have reached four or five years of age, begins in March, when the vultures engage in courtship rituals of aerial diving and "billing." The vultures, which mate for life, select a nest site in a protected cave or crevice below a bluff. Heavy brush areas with hollow logs are occasionally selected. Two cream and chocolate blotched eggs are laid directly on the ground, which both parents take turns incubating. After hatching, one parent broods with the young for up to 14 days; after that, the parents leave the chicks completely on their own, returning 2 or 3 times a day to feed them. The parent stores food in its crop and regurgitates it when the chick sticks its head inside. On Pender Island, Columbia Black-tailed deer carcasses (often of fawns) are a favourite food. The vultures also eat dead rats, and mice and snakes killed by the blades of haying machines. However, unlike other raptors such as Bald Eagles, Turkey Vultures chicks are companions rather than rivals – the older chick does not kill the younger one. After several weeks, the chicks



grow black wing tips and start coming out of the cave. Their bodies and heads gradually darken. After about 70 days the chicks are ready to fledge. They spend the next 2 to 3 weeks practicing their flying, preening, and perching, sometimes with their parents, sometimes alone.



Photo by Chris Coates

By the end of September, Turkey Vultures have left the nest sites and are flying all over, preparing to migrate south for the winter. They gather in hundreds, perhaps thousands, at the southern tip of Vancouver Island. East Sooke Regional Park is a great place for birders to witness this migration. The vultures, which don't like crossing large bodies of water, wait for the right conditions before flying 19kms across the Strait of Juan de Fuca. They "kettle" overhead until the sun and winds are just right. A line of vultures will start streaming over the water, some coming back and then trying again, until all (save for a few who overwinter in Metchosin) have left by the last two weeks of September or the first week in October. The Olympic Peninsula is the first in a series of stops in route to the warmer climes of California, Arizona, Mexico and Central America.

Dave Manning also spends the winter in southern Arizona, where he observes all three species of New World vultures. The heavy bodied Black Vulture is a resident. Dependent on intense rising thermal winds for flight, it is unable to move into cooler regions. The California Condor has a massive wing span of 9 1/2 – 10 feet. Reduced to only 22 in the wild in 1982, this species was facing extinction from ingesting lead pellets in carcasses shot by hunters. Since then millions of dollars have been spent on a highly successful captive breeding and release program. Today there are more than 400 California Condors. Condors and Turkey Vultures may be observed at the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona (which is also a condor release site), especially from the Navajo Bridge over the Colorado River.

Vultures have unique features. In the morning they may be observed in the characteristic "horaltic" or spread wing stance: warming up, cleaning their feathers, or expressing irritation. Their feet are designed solely for perching or standing on the ground or on carcasses; unlike other raptors, vultures cannot use their feet to grip or carry meat. They do not have strong beaks, so they usually go for the softer parts of a carcass, such as the eyes or anus, and then wait with characteristic patience for a Bald Eagle or other scavenger to open up the rest of the carcass. Vultures are opportunistic feeders: they gorge themselves when food is available, because they may go two weeks without eating. They have incredible digestive systems. Their strong stomach juices kill much bacteria, and that coupled with the fact that they eat only carcasses that are one or two days old helps to explain why they are not bothered by decayed matter. They have keen eyesight, and an excellent sense of smell. The Turkey Vulture has the best olfactory sense of all the vultures. Using its nostrils or "nares" to detect chemicals in rotting meat, it can readily find a dead deer hidden below the forest canopy.

In March in Arizona, groups or "kettles" of Turkey Vultures begin to gather on their spring migration. Roosting companionably and communally at night, such as in eucalyptus trees, they move north over a period of a few weeks, ready for another breeding season. This is a signal for Dave Manning to return to Canada: when some of those Turkey Vultures reach Pender Island, they will find him already there, waiting, and ready to look and listen.

## The Great Sandhill Crane Feather Hunt

[The Great Sandhill Crane Feather Hunt](#), is a project to decipher genetic differences between BC's coastal and interior cranes. The two-year project is mainly using moulted feathers for DNA extraction. Yes! We are carrying on with more feather collection in 2018. Last year, scores of volunteers from all over the province sent us information about crane breeding areas and many gathered moulted feathers and mailed them in to add to our collections. To complete the sampling, we will need feathers from parts of the central and north coast, and the Cariboo Chilcotin region that we don't already have feathers from. You can see where feathers were collected on the project's [updated map](#) with the

‘feather sites’ button turned on. Sites where feathers were collected will appear as red dots. If you know of a breeding crane area and you don’t see a dot there, we would love to hear about it.

We will once again be setting out this summer to search the bogs, marshes, and fields for feathers, but we can’t cover the whole breeding range. We have funds to help cover costs for volunteers to gather samples, so please let us know if you would like to get involved!

Once again, we would like to say a huge Thank You to all of those who sent or called in crane breeding locations, searched for feathers and cranes last summer, and helped to spread the word. We really appreciate all of your efforts, and look forward to sharing the results with you.

Sincerely,

Krista, Ruth, and the whole Craniac Team

Links: Learn more about the project on our blog page: <https://coastalcraneatlas.wordpress.com/the-great-sandhill-crane-feather-hunt/>

See the updated map of crane breeding and feather collection sites: <https://rutherfordjoy.shinyapps.io/sacrest/>

Joy Gammie is a teacher and rancher at 70 Mile House. She does lots of driving and along her routes has opportunities to observe the natural environment. She did not go far to see Sandhill Cranes. Looking out her window at home, without driving anywhere she recently watched Sandhill cranes in the field doing a mating dance and more.



Photo by Joy Gammie

### Bird Events in Vancouver this summer

By Margaret Waring

I think some of you might be interested and I wanted to be sure you are aware of the Vancouver International Bird Festival and the International Ornithological Congress that are happening in Vancouver this summer. The festival and congress are being held August 19 to 26, 2018. This is a week-long event with walks and talks, lectures and tours, workshops and cultural events. Events are in Vancouver and the region. There are lots of free events. Check out [www.vanbirdfest](http://www.vanbirdfest) or Google: International Ornithological Congress

If you attend it would be great if you could share with us what you saw, learned and enjoyed via the Muskrat Express Newsletter.

I have a couple of quiz questions:

How many bird species can be found in BC?

Who or what is Vancouver’s official city bird?



### Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

#### Summer Fun in Nature

July 9-August 23

Nature Fun ages 4-8 Half day sessions \$12

Mon and Tues: 9:30-11:30 or 1-3pm

Thursdays 1-3pm and Fridays 9:30-11:30am

Tales and Trails ages 0-5 (with care giver)

Thursdays 10:30-11:30 *no charge*

Art in Nature Adventures Ages 8-13 (\$25)

Wednesdays 8:30-4:30pm

Art, exploring, observing, games—at a slow summer time rhythm

with the support of the  
Cariboo Regional District  
& City of Williams Lake



For more information Call  
398 8532 or [scoutisland@shaw.ca](mailto:scoutisland@shaw.ca)  
Registration starts June 15

Small Groups allow for relaxed child centered exploration

Children who play outdoors are found to make friends more easily, concentrate better, and suffer less from depression and anxiety.

### Here is our Scout Island Summer Staff

#### Marlie:

Marlie Russell will be finishing her third year this fall at UBCO as a computer science major. She is teaching the Bugs and Nature Detective programs at Scout Island and she loves it! Outside of work, she spends most of her time on two wheels either bicycling, mountain biking, dirt biking, or working on her motorbike with a nice cup of tea in hand.

#### Kasey:

Kasey Stirling will be entering her fourth year of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry at SFU this fall, while continuing in her genetic research assistant position in Dr. Nancy Hawkins' asymmetric cell division lab. As an Nlaka'pamux, Mi'kmaq, Métis, and Acadienne, First Nations, Indigenous, Chartered Herbalist, she is excited to bring traditional Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to Scout Island in the Plants and Birds programs



William, Kasey & Marlie

#### William:

William Newberry will be entering his fourth year of Physics at SFU in September while continuing to work in a super-conductor research lab. He is teaching the Marsh Ecosystem, as well as sea creatures from the coast of Vancouver Island. Outside of work, he enjoys the local rock climbing, and spending time with his parrot.

### Stream to Sea Program – Fry release

By: Paula Laita

We had couple busy weeks at SINC with the fry release program. 9 classes came to release their Quesnel river fry to Scout Island (around 350 fish in total). Students said bye to their fry after 7 months of raising them in their classroom. It was a successful release – although we could certainly see hungry predators, like loons and trout, hanging around already... On their visit to Scout Island, students also learned about the importance of a healthy marsh for water invertebrates as primary food source for the fry. We also dissected a spawner salmon to learn about their external and external anatomy and had the opportunity to meet some of the new ocean creatures living in the salt water tank and learn more about the intertidal zone – amazing ecosystem that the fry will see for their first when they become smolts and get to the ocean!

On May 24, Chilko fry were also released at Tl'etinqox-Anaham (around 165 fish in total). Three T̓silhqot'in schools (Tl'etinqox-Anaham, Yunešit'in-Stone and Alexis Creek), leadership, elders and community members, the T̓silhqot'in National Government, DFO and SINC participated in the event. An opening prayer and ceremony was offered by Anette Frank, Alexis Creek T̓silhqot'in language teacher, and students and teachers from the threes schools drummed several songs to wish their fry a good trip to the ocean and back to T̓silhqox-Chilcotin river. There was also several stations where we learned about water invertebrates and the external and internal anatomy of the salmon. Yunešit'in school also prepared salmon in their traditional way and cooked it around the fire for lunch.



## Our View of the Night Sky – June to August 2018.

By Steve Capling

### Planet Review

Mercury remains too close to the Sun to view until the end of June when it emerges at dusk low in the northwest. Mercury is not visible in late July through to late August when it appears low in the east at dawn.

Venus is visible low in the western sky in the evening twilight. Look for it near the waxing crescent moon on July 15<sup>th</sup> and August 14<sup>th</sup>.

Mars is visible after midnight through to dawn low in the south south-east. It doubles in size (from quite small to not quite as small) and the magnitude gets brighter going from -0.4 to -2.8 by late July - outshining Jupiter in brightness. Mars reaches opposition on July 26/27 and is closest to Earth on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

Jupiter is rising at sunset in the east and is visible in the evening through spring and summer. It remains moderately well placed for viewing through June making this a good time to look for the prominent dark belts and Great Red Spot.

Saturn is visible in the evening sky but is very low in the southern sky making it a bit difficult to observe at our latitude. However, its rings are tilted as much as they can be (26°) so viewing is worth the effort. On June 27<sup>th</sup> the full moon is very close to and a few degrees above Saturn.

For those wanting to know more accurate rise and set times for the Planets check out this website:

<https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/night/canada/williams-lake>

### Solstice

Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>.

### Moon

New Moon - June 13<sup>th</sup>, July 13<sup>th</sup>, Aug. 11<sup>th</sup>.

Full moon - June 28<sup>th</sup>, July 27<sup>th</sup>, Aug. 26<sup>th</sup>.

### Meteor Showers

The next major meteor shower is the Perseids - which peak on the evening of Sunday, August 12<sup>th</sup> into the early hours of the 13<sup>th</sup> under a favourable moon situation.

### Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart try this web site - [Skymaps.com/downloads.html](http://Skymaps.com/downloads.html) - scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “June 2018: 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.



**Member's Moment from Sharron Henry**



**Birders Three**

When we went to clean out the bluebird boxes around the MacDonald Ranch I took this picture of Kris Andrews, Betty Donahue and Lubna with their binos up scouting out a bird up in the trees. There is always more birdwatching than cleaning boxes.

“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](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca). A special thanks to Sharon Henry the winning entry.