

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER 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 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: 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 early in November. 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 Thanks to Chris Coates for offering to help with the



distribution and photocopying. Jim is now living at Eagle Lake and will no longer be able to do these tasks and Margaret is frequently unavailable. We sure would love to get your Member's Moments. We thought it was a great opportunity to provide valued and interesting input to the newsletter and we are getting very few Moments. Please help.

Notes from the Executive

By Ordell Steen

From the September executive meeting

The first fall meeting of the 2018 board was on September 19. We were joined by Leah Hartley, Director of Development Services for the City of Williams Lake, who updated the directors and answered questions regarding the City's proposal to construct a pedestrian trail on the RC Cotton property and a bridge to the west end of Scout Island.

We anticipate further discussions and input on this topic.

Directors also reviewed work done over the summer on the Nature Centre to meet FireSmart guidelines. Treatments, including removal of lower branches of some trees and felling of others, are guided by a report submitted to us last summer by Ken Day. Additional needed work includes replacing the cedar shake shingles on the Nature House, which will likely be done in conjunction with replacement of the wheel chair ramp at the front entrance.

As in previous years, the directors again approved giving a \$1,000 bursary to a SD27 graduating student for their first year of post-secondary education. Funds for the bursary are from the yard and garden sale. The directors also noted that the week-long BC Nature Camp at Tatlayoko Lake in September was a success with field trips each day and presentations each evening. Thank you to everyone who contributed.

Anyone who wishes to review the minutes of Directors' meetings can contact Nola Daintith, secretary, or Margaret Waring or Ordell Steen.

A Proposal to Connect Scout Island to a Trail on the "RC Cotton" Site

The City of Williams Lake recently announced that it has purchased a fringe of land along the water on the "RC Cotton site" for purposes of building a pedestrian trail connecting Scout Island to the Stampede grounds and W.L. River Valley. The purchased land follows the water's edge from the Highway 20 bridge to the CN rail tracks and varies from about 20

to 60 m in width except near its triangular east end by the rail lines where it is wider. As we understand it, the City proposes to build a bridge from the RC Cotton site, across the dredged channel near the location of the old weir, to the west end of Scout Island where it would end on crown land, roughly 40m west of the land owned by The Nature Trust of BC. The east end of the bridge would probably be near the junction of the Butterfly and Bulrush trails. Although the City has considerable funding in place potentially for the trail and bridge, plans and priorities are not yet finalized and necessary permits, including from BC Crown Lands, have not yet been obtained. Also proposals by the City for additional features associated with the trail and bridge are preliminary.

The WLFN directors have met with City representatives, been informed of City plans, and provided input from the perspective of Nature Centre values. For example, we have asked that if a bridge is built, that it be automatically locked at night and that lighting at the bridge is minimal. Directors will continue to meet with and provide input to the City and to BC Crown Lands as the proposal is further developed. If you have any comments or questions regarding our input or understanding of the project, please contact Ordell Steen, Don Lawrence, or Margaret Waring.



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

It was a great summer at the Nature Centre despite the smoke. Nature Fun adventures started on July 9 with the Scout Island Olympics planned and organized by Marlie, William, and Kasey (summer staff) and the action continued until August 24. There were morning and afternoon programs for the younger children (4-8) 4 days a week and a full day session for the older children on Wednesdays. The full day sessions allowed staff to go into the week's theme in more depth with the children as well as do more involved nature art projects like pinning bugs. Laura Ulrich guided this as one of our guest artists. These "Art in Nature Programs" with guest artists are made possible with the support of the Cariboo Regional District and City of Williams Lake via the Central Cariboo Arts and Culture Society.

The civil engineers mimic beavers by building a beaver lodge, complete with mud!

Now it is being used by Nature Kindergarten beavers.

The summer staff had help from high school students Sophia Wong and Jonny Russell and Jonny continues to help hosting and feeding the animals at the Nature House. Paula supervised the staff for the summer helping them to design programs. We were all sad when Paula announced in July that she and her partner Jon will be returning to



Spain to live in the near future. She needed the rest of the year to finish her phd, and this meant that we needed to find a new Education Coordinator. Serendipity, brought Bill Gilroy in the door early in July to offer his services as a volunteer. He is a retired teacher with an amazing wildlife and naturalist background. So he volunteered all summer and then became the new Education Coordinator. I will let Bill tell you about himself in a later Muskrat. We were both too busy on the Salmon Trip this week for him to get his article in to this Muskrat. Paula is still around to help train Bill and to help with other programs.

There were other volunteers busy all summer also. Ryan LaBossier helped fight weeds as well as assisting with the fire smarting that has begun around the Nature House. Of course, many of the usual volunteers were fighting weeds and also working on the Fire Smarting. Hannah Storochuk with the help of Kasey (summer staff) tried to keep the grassland bed in good shape.

We just finished a great Salmon Trip with 14 senior students and 16 junior students. There will be more about that in the future but for now here are some pictures from the trip. You can see Bill in the center of the photo.



Some New Rare Bird Species at Eagle Lake

By Jim Sims

Most of you will know that I am now settled into my new home at Eagle Lake where I am looking forward to next spring when I can watch the breeding Arctic Terns from the porch of “Tern Inn”, my new home. It has been an interesting month with regular new additions to my list of birds sighted at Eagle Lake and many of them have been rare species on our Cariboo Chilcotin Checklist. Maybe it is because I can now make daily tours to the mud flats by the recreation campsite. I thought I’d share a few of the photos and descriptions of the sightings.

On September 15th, the day after the fall camp in Tatlayoko I found a pair of Golden Plovers feeding on insects on the mud flats. The photos were not wonderful but did confirm that the one on the left was an **American Golden plover** while the one on the right showed different plumage so we asked for help with positive id. Russell Cannings examine the 2 photos and confirmed the one on the right was a **Pacific Golden Plover**. A couple of features are the dark cap, light eyebrow and longer primaries extending beyond the tail on the American. The Pacific shows a slightly shorter bill, lack of obvious eyebrow and the primaries might not reach the end of the tail.



Both Plovers remained on the mud flats for three or 4 days and after that the American remained alone for another week. On Saturday September 29th my sister and I discovered another American Golden Plover on nearby Martin Lake where there is similar mud flat habitat.

While busy photographing the Plovers on the 15th I noticed a small sandpiper leaving the larger plovers and making its way towards me across the mud. Initially I thought I was watching a small Least Sandpiper but when I shared this photo I discovered it was a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. This is a casual species (fewer than six sightings) for the region. There have been several sightings of the sandpiper in the region this year, might lose the casual rating. At the same location there was a Sanderling, another rare species for the region. This one is not as exciting as I had been seeing them daily with up to 8 in a flock of mixed shore birds.



Before the day ended I added a 4th rare species to the list for the day. A Turkey Vulture was sitting on the top of a Spruce tree out on Eagle point. When it flew it displayed the un-mistakeable light trailing edge on the wing. This was the first for me at eagle Lake and a few days later I saw another one, maybe the same bird. Vultures have been expanding their territory.

Osprey with long narrow bent wings. Eventually the camera focused and I managed this very distant photo. Once I got back to a computer I was able to digitally zoom in on the bird and the fuzzy image that resulted was clearly a Parasitic Jaeger. Note the long-pointed tail, white belly and dark throat band along with a lighter patch on the wing tips. This is another rare Cariboo species but not the first for Eagle Lake.



Taken on the 20th, this photo confirmed that a Boreal Chickadee has been visiting the feeder along with a few Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees. I've been suspicious that I had one but had never caught it with the camera or in good light. Note the brown cap, the only Chickadee with one. This is a species that frequents the sub-alpine forests and does on occasion venture down onto the plateau.

The Gulls were feeding close to the shore and moved quickly along the shore. The group was 2 adults in non-breeding plumage and 2 juveniles. Left is an adult with a darker back and a dark patch around the eye. This was the only day we saw the adults but the juveniles stayed until the snow fall and the shallow water of the bay froze. We canoed into the marsh on the 25th and got this very close picture of the juvenile. Note the absence of an eye patch and the marked brown back. We were very close to the bird and it did not fly so we had a very close look at the feeding technique. As it backed up it rapidly wiggled its feet in the mud, then it stopped and began feeding on the stirred-up insects. You might want to watch this Youtube video I captured <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq-2kp8hGQg> It has been a very interesting month of birding here at Eagle Lake, what will October bring?

Finally we found 4 Sabine's Gulls on Sept. 24th when we stopped to check out the mud flats on our way to Chilco River to look for Grizzlies.





Our View of the Night Sky – October 2018.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury - by late October will emerge very low in the west-southwest at dusk.

Venus is visible low in the western sky in the evening twilight until mid-October when it becomes lost in the twilight glare.

Mars is visible low in the southwest at nightfall. It is becoming smaller and shrinks to 12 arcseconds in size by the end of October.

Jupiter is low in the south-west at sunset. If you have an un-obstructed view of the horizon you can try for a glimpse of Jupiter and Mercury together in binoculars very low in the west-southwest in late October.

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. The waxing crescent moon has a close conjunction with Saturn on Oct. 14th.

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>

Moon

New Moon - Oct. 8th, Nov. 7th.

Full moon - Oct. 24th, Nov. 23rd.

Meteor Showers

The next meteor shower is the Leonids - which peak on the evening of Nov. 17/18.

The next major meteor shower is the Geminids - which peak on the evening of Thursday, December 13th into the early hours of the 14th.

For more details on the meteor showers try this web site:

<https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/meteor-shower/>

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

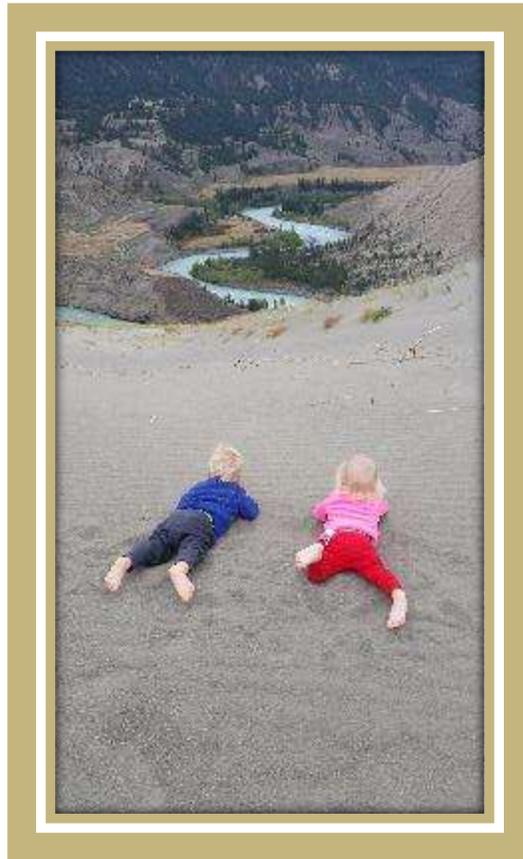
For a printable sky chart try this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “October 2018: Northern Edition (PDF)”. At the end of the month it changes to show the next month’s chart.

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

Our last 2018 field trip (Junction Sheep Range)

Sunday October 21st (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 Margaret Waring**Mckenna and Clark visiting the Sand Dune**

This might be a place you are familiar with and like to visit or maybe you have never been before and it is time to explore. Just one hour from Williams Lake we have one of the largest sand dunes in BC. Take a drive to Riske Creek and visit Farwell Canyon and experience the beautiful Chilcotin. This is an area where you can see wildlife including one of the province's largest herds of Big Horn Sheep. There are great views of the Chilcotin River, Farwell Canyon and hoodoos. There is an old homestead, known as the Pothole Ranch down by the river. Go for a drive, have a picnic or enjoy a hike along a trail to visit the sand dune. Take some pictures and send us a story about your visit. Do some research on sand dunes or history of the people who inhabited this area for our next addition of the Muskrat Newsletter. We have a final field trip coming up too and that does not include the sand dune but it provides an outing in the same area of the Chilcotin.

“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 Margaret for her winning entry.