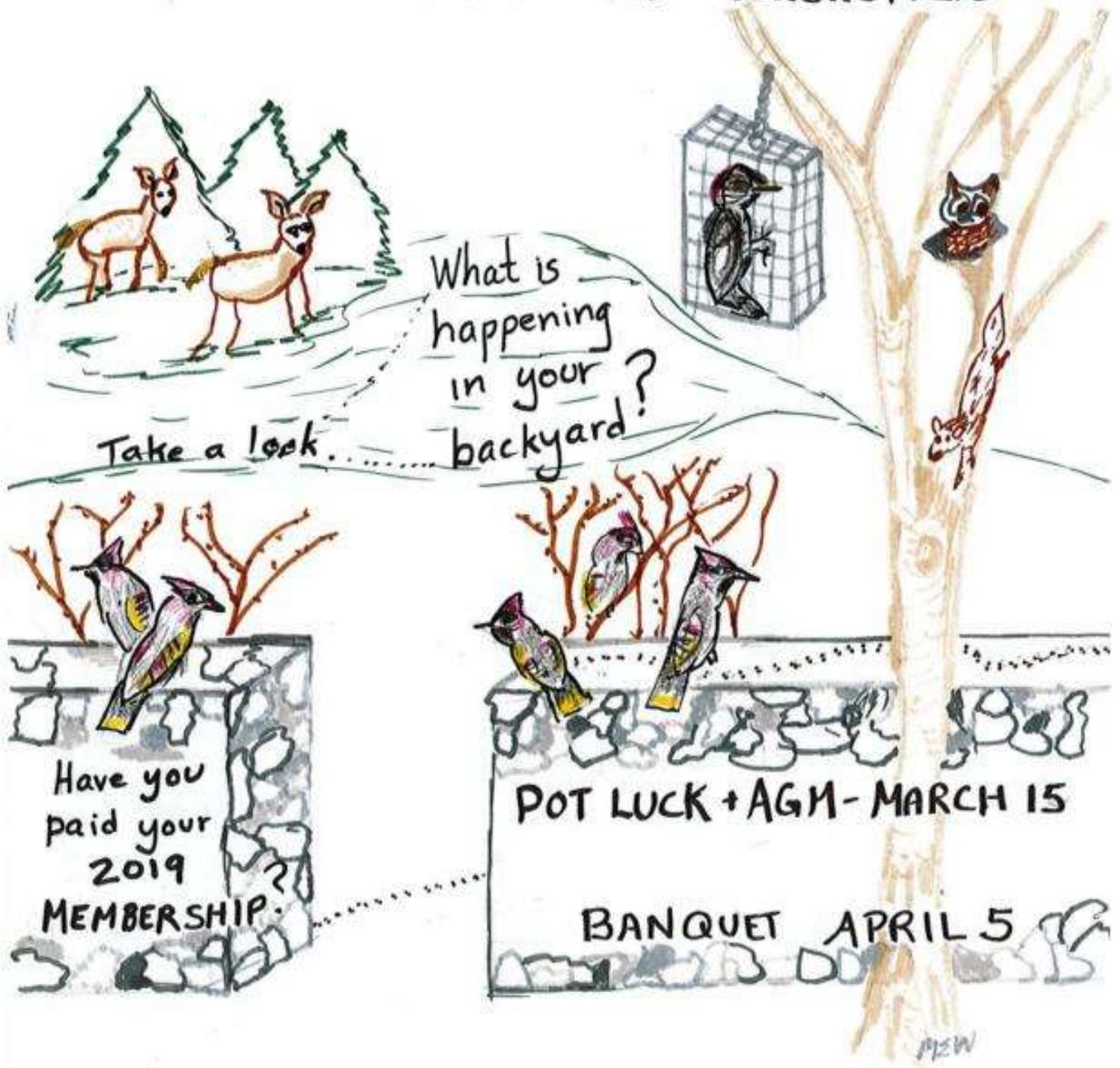


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

JANUARY + FEBRUARY 2019 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 March. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (778 764-2752) or e-mail us at muskratexpress@shaw.ca



From Jim's Tern Inn Kitchen Nook:

I see we have a bit of extra room so I'll add in a brief editor's report here instead of my usual report on a bird sighting. First of all, a big thank-you to all of the contributors this month, a lot of very interesting and exiting Nature news and activities going on. You have helped to produce another great Muskrat Express.

Smedley and I continue to enjoy our morning walks here at Tern Inn (Eagle Lake). We even get in an occasional afternoon ski. Recently we have been keeping an eye out for this injured immature Bald Eagle (a 2nd or 3rd winter young Eagle). I first saw it a couple of weeks ago when I was skiing. It was sitting on the ice and did not fly. Since then I frequently found very large Eagle foot prints in the snow along with drag marks from the wings at several locations. For the last few days it has been staying around the horse corral at the Lodge and the neighbouring Culbert home. We have made successful attempts to feed it and tomorrow (Friday) there will be an attempt to rescue it before the promised cold sets in. Hopefully it will be successful and I'll have good news for you in March.



Today there was a bit better news as I located an adult Northern Goshawk, the first hawk I have seen this winter. The favoured Boreal Chickadee is a constant visitor to the suet feeder and we hope the Hawk is not interested. As I sit at the kitchen table writing this, I can make out the bird feeder through the window in the faint light from the kitchen. It is not swinging now and I keep watching. When it swings at night it is either windy or a flying squirrel has been visiting. Enjoy the Muskrats Newsletter.

Note how it is holding the left wing higher than normal

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Annual General Meeting

The meeting will be held on **Friday night March 15th** at the Scout Island Nature House. You are all invited and we hope you are able to attend. The evening will begin at 6PM with a Potluck supper. The meeting and election of directors will take place at 7:30PM. There will be some entertainment or an activity to follow.

Please contact Margaret at 250 398 7724 or mewaring@hotmail.com if you are interested in being a director or if you have questions or contributions.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

By Margaret Waring

Is it really time to start thinking about spring? It definitely is time to think about decreasing your clutter and sharing some of your treasures with others and I can help you do that! The month of May and our annual Spring Yard and Garden sale will be here before you know it. I have selected Saturday May 11th as the date for our sale. Maybe you are already studying seed catalogues and choosing what you will grow this year. This might be the time to think when you will plant your seeds so they will be ready to sell. Indoor plants can be divided and potted and prepared in advance. You can sort out a cupboard or book shelf when you have a few spare minutes. Please start loading a few boxes, gathering items to donate and mark your calendar for the annual Spring Yard and Garden Sale on May 11th. Helpers will be needed late Friday afternoon May 10th between 4 and 7 PM for gathering and setting up sale items and then again on Saturday 1-2 PM for clean up. Before the sale we need help advertising the event.

Everyone can contribute!

The purpose of the sale is to earn money to provide a bursary for a graduating secondary school student. It is also a good place to gather and meet your friends and make new ones too.

Watch for more information in your next newsletter.

Any questions please call 250 398 7724 or send an email to me at mewaring@hotmail.com.



For the Birds

A report on a presentation by Dr. Chris R. Shepherd at SINC on January 10, 2019.

By Chris Coates

We all know the dire threats that birds face around the world: habitat loss, especially to agriculture and logging, and pollution and garbage, such as plastics, which have a devastating impact on seabirds. Other major killers of birds are feral and invasive species, such as cats, which are estimated to kill between 100 and 350 million birds in Canada alone each year, and window strikes, such as on high rises, which kill 42 million birds each year worldwide. Of the 11000 species of birds in the world, 40% of them are threatened.

Fewer of us may be aware that an illegal and unsustainable trade in birds is another major threat to avian species. For example, peacocks are traded for their tail feathers, hornbills are traded for their ivory casques, and owls are traded for their meat and medicinal properties. However, the songbirds (passerines) that are traded as cage birds face an even greater threat to their survival. Dr. Shepherd has been interested in conservation from a very young age (some of you will remember his presentation on the illegal trade in tortoises and turtles last April), and when he first saw a songbird market in Indonesia, he knew instantly that saving these species would be a high priority in his life. Working to save these species from extinction is now a major project of his Monitor Conservation Research Society.

Keeping songbirds in cages has a long history in Asian countries, where cage birds are part of the culture. Singing competitions, such as in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, are also a major drive behind the trade in songbirds. The loss to birds is compounded when the owners purchase other songbird species to encourage their birds to mimic new notes. Indonesia, especially the island of Java, is a centre of the trade of songbirds, and birds from around the country and further abroad are sold here. The trade in Java's markets is largely unregulated, and while some markets are legal, vendors often don't have legal licenses and sell birds that have been illegally taken from the wild. Birds reach the markets though poachers, who use other songbirds as decoys, and glue on branches to capture birds. They often transport the birds by stuffing them into plastic water bottles or in other small containers. The mortality rates are staggering, even for those birds that are still alive when they get to the market. Dr. Shepherd and his associates visited just one market in Jakarta for three days in a row, and counted 19000 birds languishing in cages. There, the birds, especially smaller ones, are stressed, and their immune systems can't cope with



Songbird Market

being jammed into crowded, filthy cages. Disease kills many, and mortality rates are staggering. Nevertheless, the trade continues to be lucrative, especially in rare birds. Those involved in the trade justify their cruelty with the view that “birds are like cut flowers – they look nice for a while but aren’t expected to live long.” In other words, birds are expendable. As a result, Indonesia is second only to Brazil in the number of threatened bird species worldwide, and number one in the number of bird species threatened by trade.

Dr. Shepherd and the Monitor Conservation Society are part of a multi-pronged approach to ending the trade in songbirds, and thereby saving some species from extinction. One of the first things to do is to get an idea of the remaining bird populations, and which species are at greatest risk. He and his associates regularly visit caged songbird markets in Indonesia, and count birds and species. As popular species disappear, new ones will become the “next best thing.” If these newly popular species can be predicted, work can be done to protect them. Another approach is to learn about smuggling routes and networks. If songbirds can be seized at the point of capture, the birds can be safely released in the same area. Unfortunately, most confiscated birds must be euthanized to prevent the spread of disease.

Work also needs to be done to change attitudes and regulations. For example, convincing traders and hobbyists to keep only captive-bred birds would take pressure off wild populations. Education and raising awareness are crucial. In Indonesia, for example, school children often learn about the plight of Polar bears, yet they know little or nothing about the native Sun bear. “Research” and export quotas are a joke because they are funded by the bird exporters themselves. Fortunately, pressure to convince governments that conservation is important is starting to bring about change. Malaysia now has significant fines and jail terms for those found in illegal possession of songbirds. The pressure also comes from around the world, where bird watching is a growing industry. In the US alone, it is worth \$42 billion, and it has created over 6000 jobs. People want to see birds when they come to Indonesia, where those who might otherwise be involved in the illegal songbird trade could in the future make a living as guides, or in local hostels and restaurants. In fact, the first complete field guide to Indonesian birds has been recently published.

There have been international efforts to address the plight of endangered songbirds. At two Songbird Crisis Summits, universities, NGOs and various government agencies met to develop a conservation strategy for SE Asian songbirds in trade. Data sets from songbird markets have led to the identification of 20 priority species. An IU CN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist group has been formed. Four teams within this specialist group are working on genetic and field research, captive breeding and husbandry, community engagement, and trade legislation and enforcement. Dr. Shepherd leads the team on trade legislation and enforcement.

Current efforts to save endangered songbirds have brought mixed results. The Rufous-fronted laughingthrush, endemic to Java, remains highly threatened in spite of being protected. The Bali starling has been bred very successfully in captivity and released, only to be caught by poachers again. The Java green magpie is in the early days of being bred in captivity for release back into the wild. The Straw-headed bulbul, nearly extinct everywhere but in Singapore, where it is reduced to 40 pairs in the wild, was finally placed under protection, but after bird traders protested, the protection was removed in September 2018. However, the Sumatran laughingthrush was finally protected by law in 2018. When this bird calls, all the neighbouring birds of the species call at the same time to make a beautiful laughing sound. Hopefully, the success stories will continue and grow.

We in Canada can help the songbirds too, by following the maxim “think globally, act locally.” We can reduce our use of pesticides and plastic. We can put bells on our cats, and keep them indoors. We can put decals on windows to prevent bird strikes. We can make our areas bird friendly with native plantings and shrubs. We can participate in citizen science projects, such as the Great Backyard Bird Count and the annual Christmas bird counts. Bird watching is fun, as is making lists of those species we observe. We can join clubs that do projects to help birds by building bird houses and feeders, such as the Williams Lake Field Naturalists and the Scout Island Nature Centre. We can support bird conservation efforts at home and abroad, especially financially. And as Dr. Shepherd says, we should make sure we are part of the solution, not part of the problem.



Sumatran Laughingthrush

51st annual Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count

By Phil Ranson

On December 16th, as 35 bird counters set out at first light on the annual Williams Lake Christmas Bird count, wind speeds at the airport were being monitored at 45 km/hr gusting to 71 and were to increase during the morning before moderating only slightly for the remainder of the day.

Weather plays a key role in the success of the bird count and no condition affects it as adversely as high winds. Birds tend to stay hunkered down, calls are often drowned out and the constantly swaying branches make it difficult to pick out the movement of birds.

One factor which would seem to provide an advantage was the exceptionally mild conditions but this proved to be a detriment in some cases as many of the bird feeders were strangely quiet with some normally productive feeders showing a complete absence of birds. Partially explaining this would be the lack of snow cover and a good seed and berry crop allowing birds to forage widely without the need to concentrate around a well stocked feeder.

The wind however proved to be a double edged sword pushing away the ice forming along the edges of Williams Lake and allowing several duck species to remain beyond their normal departure dates. One duck species, the Gadwall was recorded for a count first when 2 males were spotted at Scout Island. The Gadwall is a fairly common dabbling duck in the breeding season in the Cariboo but is usually one of the first to leave in the fall. Other ducks to remain included a record 24 Lesser Scaup and 30 Common Goldeneye.

A pair of stately Trumpeter Swans also remained at Scout Island as the winds and the moderate temperatures kept the channels through the marsh open. These swans will stay as far north as conditions allow and can now be found in good numbers on larger open waters such as Quesnel Lake throughout the winter.

This year's count was again a tale of the waxwings. Last year a record number of Bohemian Waxwings contributed to over 40% of the overall total. This year the waxwings were back again in good numbers only slightly lower than last year, but to add to the variety, Cedar Waxwings were also added to the count for the first time. Cedar Waxwing are not uncommon as a breeding bird but rarely overlap with the Bohemians which swarm into the area from the north to spend the winter.

Another bird seen in record numbers was the Eurasian Collared-Dove which have swept across the continent from a single point of introduction in Florida. The first one on our count was seen in 2011. On December 16, 59 were recorded including a single flock of 30 along Pigeon Avenue. It will be interesting to see where this increasing population levels out and what effect it may have on native species.

One bird which doesn't seem to mind the wind at all is the high-flying Bald Eagle and 49 were tallied as they tracked across the 450 square kilometre count area.

The count also revealed an alarming reduction in woodpecker species. All our regulars; Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers and the Northern Flicker were down considerably. The Hairy Woodpecker had its lowest ever number on the 51 years of the count with only 7 seen. An average number would be around 30 with a high of 50 in 2006. There is probably some correlation with these numbers and the lack of birds at feeders, but not entirely explained considering typical feeder species such as Chickadees were only a little below average.

As the day wrapped up, the count species finally stood at 53 which is marginally higher than the recent average. Notably absent from the list were Pine Grosbeak which dominated the count last year with 340. This is not all that unusual for



Note the Yellow breast extending down onto the tail on this CBC Cedar Waxwing

these irruptive boreal forest finch species. The final tally on individual bird numbers was 5968 which surprisingly was only 500 less than last year's record count and comprised once again of a significant proportion of Bohemian Waxwings.

The complete count results can be found at the end of the newsletter.

Notes from the Executive

By Ordell Steen

Planning for the Nature Centre banquet is well underway for April 5 at St Andrews United Church. Dinner will be catered by the Church and Joanne Wright has again volunteered to provide desserts. Chris Shepherd will be our guest speaker. It promises to be a great evening. Tickets will be available soon. Look for more details in the March newsletter. The directors submitted a response to BC Crown Lands and the City with recommendations regarding design of the City's proposed bridge and trail from the RC Cotton property to Scout Island. The Nature Trust of BC, owners of the Nature Centre property, has supported our response.

Fire Smart objectives for the Nature Centre properties are currently being reviewed for progress and clarification of tasks. Work will continue next summer.

We recently had a useful meeting with a representative of the Williams Lake Indian Band to learn more about the band's plans for the new cannabis store being built on IR#6 adjacent to SINC property and for discussing ways we may cooperate in property and trail development.

The fence around the old gravel pit ponds in the W.L. River Valley, built by the WLFN about 10 years ago with funding from Rotary and others, has been repaired and a gate installed for removing cattle which may get into the enclosure. The riparian area adjacent to the ponds was significantly impacted by cattle last year.

Scout Island Nature Centre continues to operate a very dynamic nature education program and be the location for a SD 27 Nature Kindergarten. Thanks to Sue Hemphill and all other teachers.

If you have any questions or input regarding activities of the board, please contact any director.



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Scout Island Nature Centre is hiring Summer Staff—Teacher Naturalists. If you know of a university student interested in biology and/or teaching please have her/him send me a cover letter stating why he/she would like to work at the Nature Centre, a resume, and references. They should be interested in nature, have taken biology in high school and enjoy working with children. They can email me if they would like more information about this great summer job. **Wage Rate Per Hour** \$17.00 with 40 hours/week 14 weeks between May 1 and Aug. 23

Nature Kindergarten

By Kirstin Hamm

Nature Kindergarten is off to a good start this school year. The children have really been enjoying learning outside.

We have done a lot of exploring around the island and we have our favourite places to visit. One of these is the huge "Fallen Spruce" on the trail below the lookout over the lake. In imaginary play it has become a spaceship, a motel and an airplane! It takes great courage to climb up high along the trunk of the fallen tree. Students have been helping and encouraging each other when someone is scared or needs help. The benefits of this kind of thrilling play is that students learn to be risk takers, and learn to set their own personal limits of safety and communicate it to others. They learn to be courageous, resilient, and to believe in their own strength. Plus, it is a lot of fun!



Another favourite spot to play and learn is under the great Cottonwood beside the Nature House. This Fall students read "Rosie's Walk" in which a hen named Rosie is chased by a fox. They acted out the scenes from the story using a pile of cottonwood leaves, a garden rake, a stuffed bee, and a wagon as props. They built an obstacle course to practice prepositions such as around, under, over and through. Students' delight is evident in their laughter, creative ideas, and general excitement.

Being in the basement of the Nature House gives us the opportunity to participate in the salmon program, feed and observe the live animals (with the help of Bill Gilroy and Scout Island staff) and learn from the displays. The children were amazed to observe how the corn snake's jaws separate in order to eat a mouse.

We are very appreciative of all the volunteer work that goes into making Scout Island a great place for Nature Kindergarteners to learn and be safe, such as the new signs that went up and the work that took place to improve the Willow Trail boardwalk.

We are looking forward to the winter months of snow and thick ice on the lake.

Nature Kids In Williams Lake

Paula Laita is passing the Nature Kids baton on to Bill Gilroy and Kim Zalay. Both are former teachers and are looking forward to being part of the program that brings a variety of nature-based experiences to children ages 5-12 years of age.

Bill was introduced in a previous edition of the Muskrat when he took on the Education Coordinator position at Scout Island.

Kim taught in the school district for 28 years, finishing off by being the teacher in the Grade 7 Outdoor Education program for its first three years. Having taught grades 3-7, raised a daughter, and now enjoying three young granddaughters she enjoys the inquisitive nature of children of all ages. Between the exploration of the seashores and forested areas where she grew up, and several years in Girl Guides, Kim has always preferred to be following a trail, watching the animals and changing seasons, and learning about our natural environment and the role/impact we have within that environment.

From September - April Bill and Kim will host free monthly family events at Scout Island that are open to all children accompanied by adults in our community. During the summer months programs are planned that just members of Williams Lake Nature Kids are invited to. These are often events that take the group on explorations away from Scout Island. This is a good reason to join Nature Kids. Registration to the Williams Lake Nature Kids program can be done online at naturekidsbc.ca or by picking up a mail in registration form from the Scout Island Nature Centre's front desk.

The first event that the two will coordinate is the **Great Community Bird Count** scheduled for February 17, 2019, from 1-3 pm at the Scout Island Nature Center. See our most common winter birds up close, learn to pick out who is who, and take a walk with us on the trails of Scout Island.

This event is a family event open to all children and their families. ((Children must be accompanied by an adult.))

Contact Information:

Scout Island Nature Center: 250-398-8532 *or check out the Scout Island Facebook Page*

E-mail: williamslake@naturekidsbc.ca

Web sites: <http://www.scoutisland.ca/>
williamslake@naturekidsbc.ca

Birds and Beyond: Grade 7 Outdoor Education Students and Project FeederWatch

By Bill Gilroy

“Why do we have to learn about Birds?” That’s a perfectly good question asked by a grade seven Outdoor Education student during a recent introduction to Project FeederWatch, which is a very successful initiative of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology based in New York. Experienced birders and folks tuned into the value of birds as environmental health and climate change indicators will have no problem answering this question. “Well, young man, we are contributing to a massive and successful Citizen Science project in which we can learn (as quoted from Project FeederWatch): long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance, the timing and extent of winter irruptions of winter finches and other species, expansions or contractions in the winter ranges of feeder birds, the kinds of foods and environmental factors that attract birds and how disease is spread among birds that visit feeders.”

Needless to say, I offered praise to the student for the question and provided a response approximating the FeederWatch description. This response may satisfy a component of the intellectual aspect of learning, but not the experiential and emotional aspects. Our effort to bring birding to life to naturally active and distractible twelve years olds, involves introducing them to local feeder birds through a combination of a slide show and the use of frozen and preserved specimens, bird sounds, interesting facts and personal stories. The students are taught to record data, which will be added to the Project FeederWatch database.

There are three feeder viewing stations at the Scout Island Nature House. While half the class handles, observes and sketches the specimens from our collection, the remainder of the students gathers at the stations in small groups for 15-20 minutes of observing and recording. Scout Island staff rotates among the stations to assist with identification and counting. This is an important time to awaken enthusiasm. As mentors, we need to get excited about the birds we are observing. Every time. Woven into the pleasure of seeing the birds, we talk about size, markings, flight patterns, individual and group behaviour, displacement by larger or more aggressive species and actual feeding behaviour. For example, the students learn that chickadees cautiously approach the feeder, then dash in, grab a seed and fly away from the feeder to eat it and that song sparrows spend a lot of time furtively flitting among the lower branches of the red osier dogwood at the edge of the marsh.

As one can imagine, 15-20 minutes of feeder observation, especially when the birds aren’t coming, can be a challenging time for energetic and social 12 year olds. In truth some, just like adults, don’t get into birds, but perhaps, as they gain exposure to many aspects of nature through Project FeederWatch and the Outdoor Education Program, they may get excited about bats...or trees...or insects...or, perhaps most importantly, develop a greater appreciation of the natural world and the need for wise stewardship. Two memorable moments occurred during the grade 7 introduction to birding. The first was a sighting of a short-eared owl foraging over the north marsh at Scout Island. The excitement that rippled through the group was real and genuine, as was learning that not all owls are strictly nocturnal. The second occurred when the feeder watching was finished, birds specimens were being put away and binoculars handed back. One student excitedly rushed up to me and asked for his binoculars back. He said he was sure that he spotted a new bird and just HAD to identify it. He was right.

Boot-jjoring

By Jean Oke

Have you ever tried 'boot-jjoring'? It is a new sport that this SPCA volunteer practices. You find yourself on the end of a lead attached to a large, enthusiastic dog on an icy path through the forest at this time of year. When a 'Squirrel!' moment happens it can be exhilarating, though precarious.

Walking dogs for the SPCA gets me out into the woods at all seasons. Since I retired a few years ago I have been going to the shelter twice a week when I am not travelling. This has enabled me to watch the unfolding of the seasons. Early mornings in winter are good times to be in the woods with the sun tinting the snow a light rose that shades into glittery gold and silver. (The sun is especially welcome when I have driven up through a cloud layer that socks in the



valley.) I can hear chickadees calling, watch crows and ravens swooping down to steal food from the dogs, squirrels scolding from branches and gray jays playing in the trees. Observing the different tracks in the snow I have seen the passage of deer, squirrels and (I think) moose, among others.

As the days get warmer and longer there are more birds to hear and see. The flowers start to appear, arnica, violets, fairy slippers beside the quad tracks, mosses and lichen everywhere.

Walking along one trail in spring with a Pyrenees whose shoulder came to my hip I saw a deer bounding across our path. Luckily the dog was as content as I was to just watch as it slowed and began foraging again. That same morning, we walked to a small lake where a pair of Sandhill Cranes were courting and rafts of ducks were resting and feeding before continuing North. Again, he was content to walk.

When summer arrives, it is cooler under the trees than elsewhere and again there are the successive plants. The birds are nesting and it is a challenge to find nests. Occasionally one can see pileated woodpeckers, creepers and nuthatches picking at trunks for bugs.

In autumn the woods are full of asters and other late season blooms, as the leaves turn and fall and the birds head south. And so, the round of seasons starts again. I enjoy walking 'my' dogs. I would recommend volunteering this way to anyone who likes dogs but does not, for one reason or another, wish to own one. It is also, as I mentioned, a great way to get out in Nature in all seasons.



Our View of the Night Sky: February, 2019.

Planet Review

Mercury emerges into the evening sky around Feb. 11th. Look for it very low in the western sky at twilight. By late February it will once again be too close to the Sun to observe.

Venus is visible low in the eastern sky at dawn. Venus is close to Saturn (within a 5 degree binocular field of view) in mid-February.

Mars is visible high in the south-west at nightfall.

Jupiter is visible in the morning twilight in the eastern dawn sky. It has a close conjunction with the waning crescent moon on Feb. 27th.

Saturn continues to emerge in the dawn sky. It has a close pass of the waning crescent moon on Feb. 2nd.

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 - Feb. 4th, Mar. 6th.

Full moon - Feb. 19th, Mar. 21st.

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. "February 2019: 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 Lorelee Sutton



Encounters with a Groundhog

I was at Fletcher Lake July 5 to August 17 2018. I was fascinated by an animal whose body looked exactly like the marmots I'm used to, except that the colouring was different. It was a grayer colour. It had black feet. It didn't have white on its nose. From what little information I could find I thought it might be a groundhog. Then one day when it was feeding, it slowly walked over to a tree, put its front feet on the trunk, and with the greatest of ease took its roly-poly body up into the branches. It climbed somewhat like a black bear, only much smoother. I searched for my camera, but by the time I was ready to shoot, it was already back on the ground. That is the only time I saw it climb. Often when it was feeding, the birds followed it. I gather it disturbed insects as I'd see some birds do weird contortions like they were trying to catch a grasshopper. The birds' antics didn't bother it until a magpie grabbed its tail! It swung around so fast all the birds jumped back. It didn't make another physical movement. It must have been glaring or lecturing because the magpie so very slowly kept inching back. When it resumed feeding it had all its followers but they stayed away from its tail. It ate alfalfa and dandelion leaves. It loved salsify flowers. It would reach up and so gently bring the flower to its mouth. You could see it savour the taste. It was wary of land vehicles, dogs and coyotes. It would have raced me to one of its safe hiding places long before I saw what had startled it. Boats and even low flying helicopters didn't bother it. It didn't race away from me but it slowly went to its safe place before I got near it. It didn't sunbathe. It lived alone. Much later, Julie Steciw, who is studying woodchucks, confirmed it was a groundhog, or woodchuck, a species of North American marmot. She said she hadn't seen one climb but reliable outdoor people have seen them part way up a tree. She said in this area they are only seen west of the Fraser River. I wonder how big their area is, and if all marmots can climb, or is it just groundhogs? Three or four years ago I saw one at Tatlayoko a few hours before someone ran over it. As it was dead, I didn't bother trying to find out what it was.

"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 Lorelee for your winning entry.

Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count Results

1	Trumpeter Swan	2	
2	Mallard.	55	
3	Green-winged Teal.	3	
4	Gadwall	2	NEW
5	Ring-necked Duck	2	
6	Lesser Scaup	24	CH
7	Bufflehead	5	
8	Common Goldeneye	30	CH
9	Hooded Merganser	3	
10	Common Merganser	5	
11	Bald Eagle.	46	CH
12	Northern Harrier	1	
13	Northern Goshawk	1	
14	Red-tailed Hawk	4	
15	Golden Eagle	4	
16	Great Blue Heron	1	
17	American Coot	3	
18	Pied-billed Grebe	2	
19	Rock Pigeon	465	
20	Eurasian Collared-Dove	59	CH
21	Northern Pygmy Owl	1	
22	Downy Woodpecker.	7	LC
23	Hairy Woodpecker.	7	CL
24	Northern Flicker	23	LC
25	Pileated Woodpecker.	2	LC
26	Merlin	1	
27	Northern Shrike	2	
28	Canada Jay	4	
29	Steller's Jay	1	

30	Black-billed Magpie.	25	
31	American Crow.	333	
32	Common Raven.	297	
33	Black-capped Chickadee.	208	
34	Mountain Chickadee.	108	
35	Red-breasted Nuthatch.	105	
	Brown Creeper.		CW
	Pacific Wren		CW
36	American Dipper.	7	
37	Golden-crowned Kinglet	6	
38	Townsend's Solitaire.	23	
39	American Robin	15	
40	European Starling.	125	
41	Bohemian Waxwing.	2468	2H
42	Cedar Waxwing	10	NEW
43	Spotted Towhee	2	
44	Song Sparrow.	28	
45	Dark-eyed Junco.	447	2H
46	Red-winged Blackbird.	4	
	Brewer's Blackbird		CW
47	House Finch.	64	
48	Red Crossbill	36	
49	White-winged Crossbill	3	
50	Common Redpoll	50	
51	Pine Siskin	717	2H
52	American Goldfinch.	80	
53	House Sparrow.	138	
	Total	5968	

NEW	New species to count
CW	Seen during count week - not on count day
CH	Count high - highest number recorded
CL	Lowest count record
LC	Unusually low number
2H	Second highest number on count