

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

MARCH 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 late 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



From Jim at Tern inn (Eagle Lake)

This afternoon, when I should have been editing this newsletter, I went for a walk with my camera. During my daily morning walk at Eagle Lake I had found a second Ptarmigan and decided a picture was more important than the task at hand. It is usually not difficult for me to find a Ptarmigan as they rarely fly and they leave an obvious track in the snow. I was not disappointed. Something was different right



Follow the tracks to the Ptarmigan

from the start. This Ptarmigan was standing upright, seemed to be larger and was not happy that I had found it. It made short running bursts away from me rapidly wiggling the tail as it went. Then I noticed a very thin black line along the side and back of the tail. The feeding habit was also different, it showed interest in larger Willow shrubs and at one point was actually off the snow in a shrub (just a few cm). Eventually it did fly away from me and showed off the 2 large black triangles on each side of the tail and I knew it was the Willow Ptarmigan.



Willow Ptarmigan



Roosting White-tailed Ptarmigan

The other Ptarmigan I have been finding (White-tailed) have no black on the tail and they let me get very close. They have never scurried away from me but slowly move off a few short feet holding body and head low as they seem to just drag the body through the snow. Soon it will stop at the willow shrub and feed or lie down in the snow to roost. They prefer to feed on the smallest of willow and I have never seen them climb out of the snow to feed. This picture is the White-tailed roosting in the snow less than a couple of metres from me, it never left the roost. If the Ptarmigan does not fly it can be very difficult to differentiate them in their winter outfit. The males of all 3 of our Ptarmigan species can display the red flash above

the eye. My Willow Ptarmigan is a male.

Our 3rd Ptarmigan, the Rock Ptarmigan is very rare with only a few sightings in the region. In winter the male sports a black mask that joins the beak and the eye. The females are very difficult to distinguish. I doubt I will ever see one of these at Eagle Lake as they are a species of the high mountain tundra. Habitat can help identify the 3 species.

A week ago, I enjoyed a couple of days with Fred and Sandy. Sandy was here to find the Ptarmigan but had to leave disappointed with nothing but tracks after braving a strong cold east wind. He did spend a morning working with Fred and I as we cut up plywood for this year's supply of replacement Bluebird boxes. There will be a good supply of boxes for those of you who need replacements or want to start a new route. If you know you will be needing a lot of boxes it would not hurt to let Fred or Jim know soon so we can make more if needed.



Sandy and Fred in the Workshop at Tern Inn

Thanks again to all for your contributions.

William Lake Field Naturalists Annual General Meeting

Friday March 15th at Scout Island Nature House

Pot Luck Supper at 6PM with AGM Meeting at 7:30 PM followed by 8PM Sharing of club member pictures

We hope you will be able to come and support our Club. We require attendance to have a quorum for our AGM. We would appreciate your support and input. We usually enjoy an outstanding dinner, a brief business meeting and socializing among the attendees.

Meeting will be followed by sharing some pictures. Please contribute by attending the evening, bringing a dish to share for supper and some pictures on a memory stick. If you cannot come for the entire evening just drop by for the meeting or part of the evening. If you would like to be a member of the executive or have any questions please contact Margaret Waring at mewaring@hotmail.com or 250 398 7724.

Field Trip Planning Meeting 2019

Our annual field trip planning meeting will be on Tuesday, March 26 in the Nature House, starting at 5 pm. If you cannot attend and wish to lead a trip please contact Fred at 392-7680 or Fred_McMechan@telus.net. You might also have a place you have always wanted to visit but don't want to lead the trip, let us know and we will try to find a leader for you.

Annual First Field Trip (Alkali Lake)

The annual trip to Alkali Lake will take place on Sunday, April 14. Meet at the Nature House at 9 am. We will carpool at this time. Bring a lunch, water and binoculars. This will be a driving tour during which we will stop at ponds and Alkali Lake to view birds which are staging here during their northern migration.

For more information contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

Saturday May 11th, 2019

I just want to remind you to check that you did mark your calendar for this yearly event. It is not occurring until May but believe it or not May and spring will soon be here. I am hoping some of you can help by starting some seeds and preparing some plants. A number of our usual plant growers will not be able to supply transplants this year so I hope we have some new growers. If you are not a gardener you can help by gathering garden items, books, unique treasures and fill some boxes in advance. It might be a good time to do some downsizing and cleaning out and sharing what you no longer need with us. For the sale weekend items to sell are dropped off at Scout Island Nature House on Friday May 10th. I will also need some set up help at this time between 4 and 7 PM. On Saturday May 11th we need some help (about one hour) for clean up at 1PM. Thank you to those who have already contacted me. Any questions or offers for help? Please call me at 250 398 7724 or email me at mewaring@hotmail.com.

Meet Asia's Amazing Primates at the Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet

Friday April 5th

Join us at the Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet on April 5 where Dr Chris Shepherd will introduce us to the incredible array of primates of Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Approximately 120 primate species are found there, living in almost all types of habitats from mangrove swamps to snowy mountains. They range from tiny tarsiers to massive shaggy haired orangutans. Each has their own unique behaviour and each fills its own niche in the ecosystems of the regions.

The continued existence of many of Asia's primate species is severely threatened by human activities. Hunting, poaching, illegal trade, habitat destruction, urban expansion, irresponsible agriculture, and largescale conversion of forests to single species plantations are all having devastating effects on primates. Through Chris' presentation we will learn about these fascinating species and also what each of can do to aid in their conservation.

Chris' presentation will include dramatic and rare images of many of the species.

Chris and his wife Loretta recently wrote "A Naturalist's Guide to the Primates of Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Indian Subcontinent", published in 2017. Their knowledge, enthusiasm, and concern for these species will make this an evening you will not want to miss.



Golden Snub-nosed Monkey

The April 5 banquet evening will begin with a pre-dinner social at 6:00 and dinner at 6:45 followed by brief addresses and Chris' presentation. Tickets are \$40 for adults and \$15 for persons 16 and younger. They will be available from WLFN directors, at Scout Island Nature Centre, and at the Open Book. As in previous years, the banquet will be at St Andrew's United Church hall. Proceeds from the banquet contribute to children's nature education programs at Scout Island Nature Centre.

Have you seen a Varied Thrush recently?

Marg Pulver, a long-time club member and bird watcher reports daily visits by a Varied Thrush in her backyard since February 5th. Marg has feeders in her Wildwood yard and this bird has been showing up daily at the seed feeders. She has seen them in Spring but never this early or in the winter before.



Notes from the Directors

By Ordell Steen

Planning for the spring banquet is well on track including arranging the hall and caterers, confirming the feature speaker (Chris Shepherd), inviting guests, and preparing tickets and posters. Some other items that the board has been working on during the last two months include initiating a process to update/revision the long-term strategic plan for Scout Island Nature Centre, updating the WLFN website (site is currently down due to host issues), preparing a letter to governments requesting information regarding status of Mt Polley tailings breach impact studies, establishing a policy regarding beavers at Scout Island, and preparing a protocol for acknowledging First Nation's traditional territory. The Nature Centre has recently received funding from the Community Forest, the Woodlot Association, the City and the CRD in support of SINC education programs and infrastructure. The Nature Kindergarten program, which is held at the Nature Centre, has more applicants than spaces.

Thanks to Sue Hemphill and others at the Nature Centre for their good work. Fred McMechan was nominated by the board as a life-time member of the WLFN for approval at the March 15 AGM. If you have any questions or input regarding these or other activities of the board or Nature Centre staff, please contact any member of the board.



Be a Naturalist Mentor for High School Students

By Sue Hemphill

Field Naturalists-You may know that Scout Island has been supporting the two Enviro Clubs (Greenologists grade 7-9 and Falcon Enviro grades 10-12) for the last several years. These clubs do a variety of activities that include: Citizen Science Stewardship and Outdoor Adventure

Scout Island staff help the teachers in charge guide these activities. Our special interest in this is to make the Outdoor Adventures possible by providing adult naturalist mentors for the adventures. It is our way to help ensure that there are Field Naturalists into the future. We think people like you are the perfect “models” of what a lifelong interest in nature can bring to your own life and the health of our ecosystems. Can you help with any of these activities? You would be with very motivated, interesting and interested high school students. **Contact Sue if you have questions or are interested. 398 8532 shemphill@xplornet.com**

Murtle Lake Canoe Trip Williams Lake Secondary Enviro Club

(Students grades 10-12)

Murtle Lake (4 nights/12 students, plus chaperones)

- Leave June 24th after exams, no later than 4:00 pm, drive to Blue River and spend the night in teepees (no need to set up tents)
- Drive the 27 km on gravel to Murtle Lake trail head on the 25th. Cart the canoes over the 2.5 km of trail to the lake. Put in and canoe to campsite.
- 26th move camp further down the lake, or leave camp and paddle down the lake (depending on how far we get on the 25th. Exploration of shoreline and surroundings.
- If we don't need to move camp on the 26th, paddle to Rainbow Trail head and hike to alpine. This is a full day hike there and back. If we move camp on the 26th then do the hike on the 27th.
- 28th paddle back to take out, portage back to parking lot, load up canoes and gear, head for home. Long day.

Students will supply their own food

******* In order for the trip to proceed the group needs at least one more chaperone and an individual that is able to tow the canoe trailer for us. This could be the same person.**

The Greenologists (Enviro club grades 7-9) are interested in doing the following that you might be able to help with:

- *Overnight shelter building
- *Farewell Canyon - day hike
- *Canoe Trip: 2 nights



A Project to Reduce Badger Mortality on Highway 97 near 150 Mile House

A report on Roger Packham's presentation at SINC on February 21 2019, by Chris Coates

Badger populations in Canada have declined to the point where *Taxidea taxus jeffersonii* is nationally listed as endangered. Of the 4 subspecies in North America, the eastern and western subspecies *jeffersonii* resides in British Columbia, where it is red listed. Of the estimated 250 badgers left in the province, an estimated 75 – 100 reside in the Cariboo, making our region a very important one for the animal. Retired biologist Roger Packham has been studying badgers for over 15 years, and as a member of the provincial Badger Recovery Team, is looking for ways to stabilize and increase the Cariboo's badger population.

Badgers are large members of the weasel family. They are usually solitary, unless females with kits, and they are mostly nocturnal. Kits are born in late March or early April, and the juveniles disperse in late July and early August. As highly adapted fossorial, or digging, animals, badgers sniff out the burrows of hoary marmots and Columbian ground squirrels. They also eat other protein rich prey such as voles, mice, muskrats, and grubs. Badgers weigh up to 15 kgs, are good swimmers (although they don't like water), and keep clean burrows. In captivity they can live from 12 -15 years. In the

Cariboo, the polygamous male badgers have large home ranges of 200 – 300 square kms, which overlap several smaller female ranges of about 20 – 30 square kms. 50 or 60 years ago, badgers could be found as far north as Vanderhoof, but their range has shrunk because of forest encroachment. Today, just north of Williams Lake is the northern extent of the badger range in British Columbia.

Habitat loss or degradation is a major factor for badgers being red listed in BC. The open grasslands where they find their prey are often converted to hayfields or subdivisions, or else are covered with encroaching trees. However, it has been speculated that increased clear cutting in the Cariboo due to the mountain pine beetle epidemic and the recent large wildfires may actually be helping to expand open grassy areas and the badger population.

The other major factor in the declining badger population is highway mortality. Being mostly nocturnal, low to the ground, and, as Roger says, not very good at crossing roads, badgers are all too often the victims of road kill. The most hazardous time for badgers is in late July and early August, where breeding season and juvenile dispersal coincide disastrously with peak traffic on roads such as Highway 97. In the last 17 years there has been a steady increase in badger road mortality in BC. While 91 badgers were killed outright, it is estimated that for every reported road kill, another two badgers are hit and die off the road, which means that the number of deaths is closer to 270.

Roger believes that fencing programmes can reduce badger road mortality. With funding from the Badger Recovery Team, he looked at the road kill “hotspots” and chose a study area of Highway 97 just south of 150 Mile House. Here the highway passes through undisturbed habitat with lots of badger prey, especially voles and ground squirrels. Then he inspected all the culverts going under the highway in the area, and discovered that 38% were impassable or unsuitable for badgers, either because they were plugged with mud or they were flooded with irrigation water. Luckily it took only 10 -15 minutes to dig out and drain each culvert. The next step was to study badger use of the culverts, in order to confirm that the study area would be suitable for a fencing trial. With financial support from provincial government ministries, Roger obtained 14 high quality cameras to monitor badger movement in the culverts.



Female adult with 3 kits in culvert

Roger’s daughter Jill Packham, who is a biologist with Parks Canada, and who has expertise in monitoring wildlife with cameras, was in charge of the camera traps photo analysis. Nine of the cameras were placed in culverts in the study area of 1.1 kms, and the remaining 5 were placed in culverts in a control area a few kilometres further south on Highway 97. The cameras were in place between June 8 and October 11 2018. Each time the motion signal was triggered by an animal movement, the camera would take three pictures. The results were both surprising and significant.

A surprising result was the large number of animal species using the culverts to cross the highway. The 10,615 trigger events identified 13 species in all, including marmot, mink, turtle, coyote, long-tailed weasel, ground squirrel, chipmunk, muskrat, cat, red squirrel, deer mouse, and western jumping mouse – and badgers of course.

A significant result was the large number of recorded badger crossing events – 436 in three months, with peak traffic in late July and early August. The cameras allowed 11 different badgers, including a female with 3 kits, to be recognized by their individual facial stripe patterns, and then named (Tongue, Faded etc). Some were males with scars from fights. One of the badgers cooled off in the cool culvert mud on a hot day. All animals sniffed each other’s scent. Most of the badger crossings took place in the study area, which has less development than the control area. Also significant was the time of crossing – 68% were between 9am and 6pm, suggesting the badgers were not as nocturnal as studies have suggested. Why did the study area have an unexpectedly high density of badger crossings? Possible reasons are the high number of culverts, the badgers’ increased familiarity with the culverts, better cameras to recognize individual badgers,

or all three reasons. Crossings were dramatically reduced after September 6, probably because the badgers and their marmot and ground squirrel prey were digging in for the winter.

Considering the large home ranges of badgers, to have 11 different badgers using the culverts in a 1.1km stretch of Highway 97 just south of 150 Mile House underlines the area's importance for the animals. It could possibly have the highest badger density in British Columbia. The fine dry soil wicks away moisture and is ideal for badgers and their burrowing prey. Perhaps badgers congregate here and use these grasslands as a travel corridor. The camera monitoring clearly showed the value of the culverts in the study area, and Roger estimates that without them, there could have been 500 wildlife and vehicle interactions over the camera monitoring period.

Roger is proposing a fencing programme along the 1.1km stretch of Highway 97 south of 150 Mile House. Existing fence posts would be used, with barbed wire taken off and replaced with fence fabric. Funnels would be built into culverts, and livestock would be kept out. The exclusionary fence would also have jump outs for the badgers. He has applied for funding from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and expects to hear from them soon. He says the fencing programme must include funding for ongoing maintenance of the culverts. However, the project could be delayed by a recent stipulation that an archaeological assessment must be completed before the fencing can be done.

Roger's study of the area south of 150 Mile House has implications for the entire province. For example, other badger mortality hot spots such as along Highway 1 east of Kamloops could benefit from a similar fencing programme. He hopes that his study will raise the public's awareness of the conservation value of badgers and allow BC's red listed badger population to fully recover.

The Great Community Bird Count

By Kim Zalay

The Great Community Bird Count Family Event at Scout Island on February 17, was attended by three youngsters aged 3-4 years. Along with parents of the young children were several other adults without children in tow, just out to take in the experience and knowledge that Cathy Koot had to offer. No matter the level of experience of the participants there was something new for everyone. The children were enthralled with being able to touch specimens of the birds as Cathy discussed their identifying markings. Angus Wellburn had the adults attention with the amazing knowledge that this 3 year old already has about birds. Look out you birders out there!



Once Cathy had given participants descriptors and visuals we were off to view the various feeders and surroundings from inside the Nature House to see which birds we could identify on this day. Observed were black capped chickadees, juncos, American goldfinches, song sparrows, a hairy woodpecker, crows, and house finches.

Upon leaving the Nature House the group caught a quick glimpse of a short-eared owl in flight. There had been reports of a saw-whet owl sitting just off the Willow Trail so the group headed out in anticipation. Unfortunately, we did not find the little guy, but enjoyed the walk none the less.

Thank you to Cathy Koot for taking time to enlighten our group this year.

Next Event - Our next free Family Event is on March 10th, from 1-3 pm at the Scout Island Nature Centre, when we will be doing a Walk for Wildlife. The event will have participants checking out prints in the Nature House from a few of our local visitors along with a discussion of what else we might look for to identify animals visiting Scout Island. The group will then head out to explore the Island looking for the various animals, their prints, scat, feathers and fur. Open to all children aged 5-12 years accompanied by an adult. Donations will be accepted for the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

Register to become a Nature Kid at www.naturekidsbc.ca , pick up a form at Scout Island, or call us at Scout Island: 250-398-8532

In Class Nature Programs

By Mary Forbes

As 2019 rolled in so did the requests for more nature presentations than ever before. Even with a menu of six established programs (wolves, owls, sturgeon, corvids, spiders and bears) I still get the "what's new?" Question with my regular classes. This year Sturgeon has been a smash hit with a great teaching kit from Nechako Sturgeon Hatchery. I also wrote up a new presentation about Octopuses because when you wash your hands, that water will touch an octopus in 5 weeks. It's a bit of a stretch for local but they are soooooo interesting! The students think so too!

Linda Durrell 1952 - 2018

By Phil Ranson

For 22 years, from 1983 to 2005, a regular feature in *Muskrat Express* was Linda Durrell's bird report from the Wineglass Ranch. The Ranch, which has been in the Durrell family since 1895 and spanned 5 generations, is located on the Chilcotin River 6 km upstream from Farwell Canyon and 3 km below the confluence with Big Creek. Linda's reports had many interesting and unusual species and had wintering species that were unrecorded at that season in other parts of the Cariboo-Chilcotin.

The Wineglass Ranch is a--riparian oasis nestled in a bend on the north side of the river sharing similarities with Soda Creek as a river level micro -climate that seems to attract birds at the periphery of their range and is probably the closest thing we have to a 'migrant trap'. Included in Linda's reports were such species as Dickcissel, Brambling, Willow Ptarmigan and the first wintering records for Virginia Rail and Spotted Towhee.

I visited Linda in the mid - 1990's on the pretext of issuing a burning permit to the Ranch which her brother Brian had requested from the BC Forest Service. After business with Brian was concluded I enquired if Linda was home. I had never met Linda and was told she was shy and somewhat reclusive but I was confident the topic of birds could overcome any potential barriers. She could well have been taken aback by my unexpected intrusion but it seemed that with neither of us being well versed in the art of chit-chat it was soon apparent that Linda was much more comfortable observing and recording birds than discussing them with strangers. That was the only time I met her.

The next time I heard from Linda was in early December 2018 when she phoned regarding undelivered copies of some nest record cards she had submitted to the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies. Over the years she had submitted hundreds of nest record cards. Anna Roberts thought I might be able to assist her and after making some enquiries it seemed details of the address had changed unknown to her.

So, I was surprised when I received a phone call from Brian Durrell about a month later in early January of this year to say that Linda had died. He was looking after her affairs and had asked Anna Roberts if there was a secure place where Linda's notes could be deposited. She had referred him to me and I said I would be happy to look after them, without a clear idea of what I would do with them. Brian arrived a couple of weeks later with five large tote boxes filled with 3-ring binders and notebooks of Linda's records dating back to 1983. I estimated the total weight at 200 lbs.

After consulting with Fred McMechan, Wayne Campbell, a co-founder of Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in



In 1980, Linda's bird notes from Wineglass Ranch filled 11 large binders and by 2019 the number of binders had increased to 52!

Photo by R. Wayne Campbell, Wineglass Ranch, Riske Creek, BC, April 27, 1980.

Victoria was contacted and was delighted with the opportunity to add the notes into the repository of *Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies*.

Wayne had been introduced to Linda at the Wineglass Ranch by Anna Roberts in late April, 1980, while he was travelling the province collecting records for the monumental four volume *'The Birds of British Columbia'* which he co-authored. He had been much impressed with the depth and detail of her observations and field notes. In a recent letter to Brian Durrell, Wayne wrote:

"Her collection is extremely valuable because it represents a long-term record of bird observations from a single location. The binders of notes are among the top eight of over 350 collections we currently maintain. Next week, we will start the task of formally cataloguing the collection. This may take several months to complete and will include other material I have received from her since the 1980's, including personal correspondence.

We are currently preparing a major publication *An innovative Partnership for Wildlife: a Blueprint for the Future* discussing a Wildlife Foundation that was established on our behalf last year to obtain and preserve such collections. The publication will highlight Linda's contribution."



Our View of the Night Sky – March 2017.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury reappears in the evening twilight in mid-month. This is your best time to observe Mercury. On March 29th a very thin crescent moon sits approx. 9° to the left of Mercury.

Venus continues to shine brightly in the early evening in the western sky after sunset. It will continue to sink lower in the sky and will re-emerge at dawn in late April.

Mars is visible as a reddish 'star' low in the evening sky just east of Venus as it passes through the constellations Pisces, Aries and Taurus.

Jupiter rises in the east after sunset and continues to shine all night. Jupiter reaches opposition on April 7th where it will appear motionless near the star Spica throughout much of March and April.

Saturn is low in the dawn sky.

Sun

Note there will be a solar eclipse on August 21 this summer that passes through Oregon and then across the US. If you haven't yet observed a solar eclipse this is one of the closest to us there will be in the near future!

Moon

New Moon - March 28th.

Full moon - March 12th and April 11th.

Spring equinox is on March 20th.

Meteor Showers

Next meteor shower is in May.

Zodiacal light is visible in the west sky after dusk for about two weeks starting on March 14th. You need a dark sky away from the city to see this.

Comets

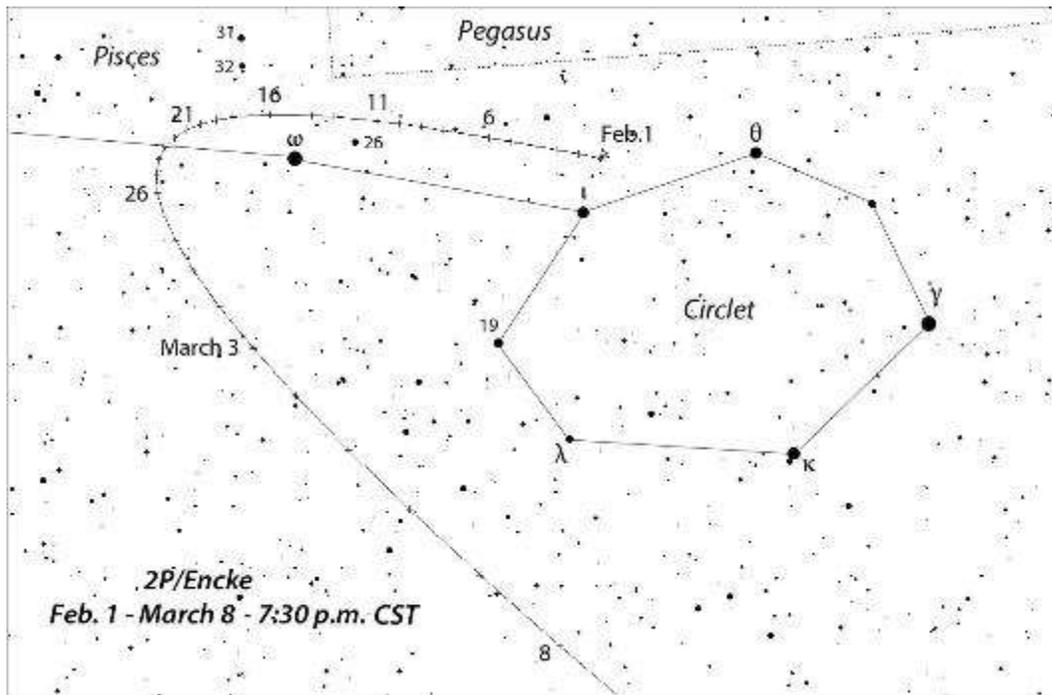
Comet 45P/Honda-Mrkos-Pajdusakova: Update. The fast moving comet has receded to a dim magnitude 12 as it rapidly moves out of our solar system.

Comet Encke (2P/Encke): Currently about Mag. 7. Look for it slightly west of and lower than Venus in the darkening



dusk sky. Comet **2P/Encke** makes its 63rd observed return to earth since its discovery by Mechain in 1786. The orbit is quite stable, and with a period of 3.3 years apparitions repeat on a 10-year cycle. This year the comet is well seen from the northern hemisphere prior to perihelion, which is in mid-March. The comet is a binocular object in early March at mag 7.

Look for it in the Constellation Pisces below Pegasus. It is however dropping rapidly into the northern dusk and will be lost by early March. It may be visible in the LASCO C3 field of the SOHO spacecraft from March 9 to 14. It then emerges rapidly into southern hemisphere skies, but fades equally quickly. The comet is the source of the Taurid meteors and may be associated with several Apollo asteroids. This suggests that on occasion it may outburst, though nothing major has been detected to date.



Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “March 2017: 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 Kris Andrews



Not your Ordinary Tobacco

Last summer, Sharon Henry, Sandy and Rita Proulx and I did some birding in a 2017 burned area in the Chilcotin west of Riske Creek. On our travels we came across amazing plants flourishing in the ashes of the previous summer's wildfire. One or two were new to me and so recently I sent photos of them to a couple of experts, Ray Coupe and Curtis Bjork. They responded that the plant was *Nicotiana attenuata*, which is Indian tobacco. Apparently it was a native tobacco species used by our indigenous peoples before the Europeans introduced them to their cultivated commercially grown tobacco products. I understand that this plant is not previously recorded for the Cariboo and Curtis and Ray think that the seeds likely have been in the soils here from pre-contact trading and have been stimulated to germinate as a result of the wildfires. So if you are wandering in the recent burns keep an eye out for this plant. It is a red listed species recorded in the B.C. Conservation Data Centre database only in the Osoyoos area although its use was recorded by early ethnographers in the Thompson, Okanagan and Kootenay watersheds. If you find it you should contact Ray Coupe, our local botanist and WL Field Naturalist so he can enter its location in the Conservation Data Centre.

“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 the for the winning entry.