

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2020 NEWSLETTER



FRANK RITCEY IS COMING
TO TOWN!

FOR THE BANQUET
FRIDAY APRIL 17th

I WANT TO
SING FOR HIM



MAYBE HE WILL FILM US
WHEN WE ARE EATING?



WHAT DOES
FRANK
LIKE FOR
DESSERT?



I WONDER IF WE
WILL BE NOTICED?



I AM A SUPER STAR
WAITING TO
BE DISCOVERED



FRIDAY MARCH 13th 6PM
POT LUCK + AGM + DISCOVER
WHAT IS A
JOKULHLAUP?



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 near the end of April. 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: Back on the day that only happens once every 4 years, I was sitting at the kitchen table when I caught a quick glimpse of a larger than normal bird followed by a loud thud on the window. By time I got up to the window and looked down at the hawk on the ground below the deck I was too late. Niut, who was outside, had also heard the loud thud and was quicker to get to the accident scene. By time I got outside Niut was running around quite pleased with himself and not so keen to give up his treasure that was flapping away as Niut held it by the other wing. Fortunately, it did not take long for me to truly rescue the bird.

As I picked up the small hawk I was surprised at how calm it was as I carried it into the house. It was a nice sunny afternoon so I decided to try placing it in one of the small decorated pine trees on the deck, hoping it would recover with quiet rest. Then I ran for the camera and hoped the hawk would stay put for a while. With the aid of some good photos and the bird book as well as some E-bird photos I determined it was a small juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk. The size did not fit a Copper's and its feet and legs were too thin. The brown colour did not fit a juvenile Merlin and the lightbars on the tail were too wide.



The Sharpie remained perched on the branch, somewhat wobbly for several minutes while a couple of brave (foolish) chickadees returned to the feeder a few feet away. It then made a somewhat less than graceful flight into an aspen tree where it continued to regain its stability. I left the bird there as I had work to get on with. When I returned a couple of hours later the hawk was gone and I assume it flew away.

I was not overly surprised to find the Hawk visiting my feeder. Almost 90% of the Sharpies diet is other birds mostly the smaller species like the Chickadees and Common Redpolls that are currently also visiting my feeder. A few visits by a hawk to your feeder is not a cause for great concern however if the hawk becomes a regular visitor it is recommended that you take down your feeders until the

hawk has moved on. Once the hawk is gone the birds will return to your feeder. My feeder birds were diminished significantly after the Hawk visited but have now returned.

At this time of the year this hawk will frequent the forest edges similar to what I have here at Tern Inn. During the breeding season they are a hawk of the forest and the nest is located in dense forest cover. They are referred to as “pursuit hunters” often taken prey on the wing. They are well adapted to flight through dense forest at high speed.

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Annual General Meeting

Friday March 13th 2020

The meeting will be held on **Friday night March 13th** 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 **Annual General Meeting** including election of directors will take place at **7:30PM**.

What is a Jokulhlaup?

After the AGM we have scheduled an interesting **presentation by Sage Birchwater** titled

What is a Jokulhlaup? This is an Icelandic word and you will learn what a Jokulhlaup is and see pictures where one occurred in the Chilcotin. Please contact me at 250 398 7724 or mewaring@hotmail.com if you have any questions.

Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet

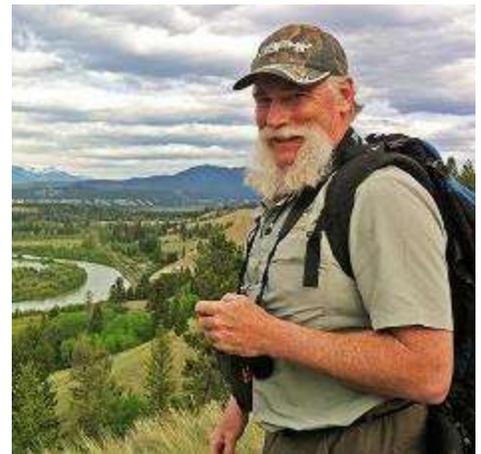
Friday April 17th

The Banquet this year will be on Friday, April 17th at St. Andrew’s United Church Hall. Doors will open at 5:45 and dinner will begin at 6:45 pm. We have an exciting evening planned.

Our guest speaker will be Frank Ritcey, nature observer and videographer and all-around naturalist. He is known as “The Outdoor Guy” on the popular and long-running CBC Radio program “North by Northwest”, on which he is a frequent guest. Frank brings a special perspective on being a naturalist, based on his lifetime of living in the Southern Interior and travelling throughout BC observing and recording the richness of wildlife, including creatures large and small. Although he has had a variety of careers, including manager of the WildSafeBC program, his lifetime passion has been observing and recording

wildlife and developing his own understanding of his relationship with nature. His presentation will be a celebration of the natural world, including a mix of unique video clips, stories, questions, and relaxed but insightful discussions with the audience about the wildlife of BC and our relationship to it. The presentation is entitled “The Compleat Naturalist: More Than Just Birds and Bears”. The title invokes, of course, the spirit of Walton’s “The Compleat Angler...”

Join us for what we know will be an exciting and not-to-miss evening. Tickets (adult \$45, youth \$20) will be available at the Open Book, Scout Island Nature Centre, and from Williams Lake Field Naturalist directors. Proceeds will support nature education programs at the Nature Centre.



Field Trip Planning Meeting

Tuesday March 31st at 5:00 PM at Scout Island Nature House

Fred McMechan will coordinate this event (Fred_McMechan@telus.net and 250 392 7680)

Come and share your ideas of where you would like to visit.

Bring a plan of somewhere you would like to take a group. It could be a walk for an hour or 2 after work. You could plan an all-day event or just a morning outing. Or just come and see what others are thinking about.

1st Field Trip of the Year

Alkali Lake on Sunday April 19th with Fred McMechan as Trip Contact

Fred_McMechan@telus.net and 250 392 7680

Meet at Scout Island at 9 AM and bring a lunch and water to drink

January Potluck

The Potluck supper at Scout Island Nature House on Friday January 24 was a successful event with about 50 attendees. An outstanding buffet was created and Lubna's presentation about becoming a Naturalist was excellent.



Annual Spring Yard and Garden Sale

The date has been set for the 2020 Yard and Garden Sale. It will take place on **Saturday May 9th** at Scout Island Nature House.

We have already committed to providing a bursary for a graduating grade 12 student this year. The purpose of the sale is to earn money to provide this bursary. I hope you are able to help. It is time to think about decreasing your clutter and sharing some of your treasures with others and I can help you do that! I think it is too early and a bit too cold to be out in your garden but you could start thinking about spring and dividing some of your indoor plants and considering what seeds to plant. Now might be a good time to clean out a closet or a box or a room or even a basement and pack some boxes in preparation for the Spring Sale. Please start gathering items to donate and mark your calendar for the annual Spring Yard and Garden Sale on May 9th. In our April newsletter more details will be provided.

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



Notes from the Executive

By Margaret Waring

We have evening meetings about 8 times a year. The most recent one was on February 26th. Our meetings take place at the Nature House. We share and discuss details of identified items and usually share some snacks too. We always have a report from the treasurer (Kath Vanspall), executive director of Scout Island (Sue Hemphill) and from co president (Don Lawrence) regarding the work happening on Scout island such as Fire Smarting and plans for the new entry and roof for the Nature House. Minutes are recorded by our secretary Nola Daintith. At this most recent Directors meeting we reviewed plans for the Annual General Meeting on March 13th and the banquet with Frank Ritcey on April 17th. Directors attend other meetings such as with city staff regarding the new bridge and about the city possibly purchasing a lake harvester to cut down aquatic plants growing in the water along parts of the shore. This requires government permits and they asked for our support. We support minimal removal of the aquatic plants as this is where the small fish, turtles and other aquatic creatures live. We also currently have no invasive weed species in our lake. We supported (the lake harvester) cutting aquatic vegetation for the float plane airport runway as this is a required safety need and for the boat launches (Scout island and Dutch Point) and the swimming beach. Co president (Ordell Steen) has written many excellent letters to the city, to Nature Trust and others on our behalf. There are some strategic planning sessions occurring that are focusing on future directions and funding for Scout Island and the Nature Centre. Jean Oke and Ordell Steen have attended the monthly Williams Lake Social Planning Committee Meetings. We had a request from a group called women that care who provide funds for Williams Lake groups and Frances McCoubrey went to their recent meeting to give a presentation representing the Williams Lake Field Naturalists and Scout Island Nature Centre. We have a dedicated group of members and are always looking for people to work on projects. Acknowledge them with a thank you when you see them and offer your help if you are interested and willing to share your time. Join in on a project and I am sure you will gain from the process.



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

It has been a busy winter at Scout island. The weather has been great for classes visiting and for the Nature Kindergarten. There was the short period of severe cold, but it did not last long. Bill will fill you in on all the activities he has been leading. It is quite a pleasure to listen to all the laughter and oohs and awes when Bill is busy with the students. Today Frances' Grade 7 outdoor education class spent the morning exploring the outdoors with a kindergarten class visiting from Marie Sharpe. This afternoon they are

learning how to weave from Jane Perry and macramé from Oliver Berger (with recycled materials from the dump). Bill is off working with classes in 100 Mile.

I miss the action with kids but someone has to do the paper work, write proposals, and organize and report on activities.— That’s me the executive director. It is a different kind of fun. Sound interesting to you --as we are starting to look for someone to replace me. To do this we first have to find a steady (or at least a semi steady) source of income to pay this persona decent wage. I am able to work for very little as I am old and have enough money (not lots but enough), but we can’t expect that from whom ever takes over. So I am looking for someone who would like to research possible sources of the funding that we need. It can’t come from the present budget as that is used for all of the activities we already do and pay staff for. **Please contact me if you have expertise in researching funding sources and are willing to help.**

Scout Island Nature Centre Activities

by Bill Gilroy SINC Education Coordinator

This winter has been quite busy, with many education programs being delivered, both at Scout Island and in schools. The most asked for program by teachers is “Plants and Animals in Winter.”

We attended the Williams Lake Family Festival at the Gibraltar Room in January towing along a variety of biofacts (horns, fur, antler, skulls, animal tracks). It’s always great to watch the children as they touch and hold these as well as to witness the interactions between them and their parents and grandparents. We also brought a pail full of live aquatic invertebrates which were placed in a large basin for viewing. We gently captured and placed them on magnifiers so the children could get up close and personal with these wonderful beasts.



Above: photos from the Williams Lake Family Fest

We’ve also had a very busy year in the Stream to Sea Program that we provide to schools with support from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We have tanks in 14 locations, including here at Scout Island. For the first time ever in the Upper Fraser system, due to very poor chinook returns, the decision was made to take eggs from pink salmon for most schools to raise (3 schools in the Chilcotin received Chilko River chinook eggs). The Williams Lake River actually had a fairly substantial run of pinks, which return in greater numbers during odd numbered years. Normally, classes raise the chinook to the fry stage and release them in May and June. Chinooks will stay in the river for a year or so. Pinks are a different fish altogether. When they emerge from the gravel, they immediately head to the ocean and are notoriously hard to keep in tanks. We had to collect the alevins (which still have yolk sacs) from each school and hold them in improvised containers until they were ready for release. To date, we have released about 650 pink fry at the outlet of Williams Lake.



Pink salmon “eyed” eggs



Pink salmon alevins



Releasing pink fry



Chinook fry-they are very curious!

The Great Indoors

By Matthew Church, *Canadian Wildlife Vol.24:6, p.38*

No matter how much we love winter, we spend more time indoors in January and February when it is colder, darker, wetter and snowier than any other time of the year. For many nature lovers pining for wildlife, being inside feels like deprivation. It shouldn't: your abode, your place of dwelling, is teeming with living things of all types, from mould to maggots, mites to mice. Your home, like the entire planet, is a biosphere, a self-contained intricate, interdependent and invisible web of life. And it is much busier than you might have wished.

As researchers continue to deepen our understanding of biodiversity and its importance, more work is being done on the indoor biosphere than ever before. This is apt given that the indoor biome, that is, the part of the world's biodiversity that occurs indoors, is currently at 0.5% of the global biome and growing. Despite this, we know very little about the wildlife with which we live and are most intimately connected.

A recent study from North Carolina State University found the average North American household is home to roughly a thousand species (including 100 types of insects), some still unknown to science. Among those that are known, some are ubiquitous, that is, literally everywhere. The study determined that gall midges, cobweb spiders, ants and scavenging beetles live in 100% of American residences. Book lice and dark-winged fungus gnats are nearly as omnipresent, at 98% and 96% respectively. Another common cohabitant is the unappealing woodlouse, an intruder also known as the potato bug, roly-poly and, in Newfoundland, "boat-builder," that wanders about in the dark looking for moisture. Interestingly, woodlice are not insects at all but are related to crustaceans, which makes me think of the hilarious scene in the film *Annie Hall* when lobsters get loose in the kitchen and terrorize Woody Allen's and Diane Keaton's characters. An infestation of large crustaceans would indeed be terrifying.

This whole idea may seem gross to many readers – most of us cling to the illusion that our homes are safe from nature's baser species, just as we like to think our food stocks are protected and uninfested, that our cooking surfaces are clean and that we sleep protected in our beds. And we do, though larvae are everywhere, bacteria omnipresent, and we share our beds with thousands of almost invisible mites. But these are harmless, hardly pests at all. And some of our cohabitants are beneficial. For instance, bacteria introduced via houseplants often act to counter pathogens from "bad" microbes, stabilizing the ecosystem and enhancing biodiversity.

Perhaps the best example of a friendly intruder in the home is sourdough bread. For millennia, humans have been mixing flour and water and waiting for it to go sour and produce gas, creating a leavened dough which could be portioned into loaves, with a little being saved and used over and over. It wasn't until the 19th century that Louis Pasteur figured out that microbes, wild yeasts and bacteria were the agents of fermentation. They are related to the bacteria that curdles milk, yoghurt, kefir and cheese and that produces other fermented foods like pickles, sauerkraut and kombucha. These are the probiotic foods so beneficial to the gut and to our overall health – and they are the result of the invisible wildlife of our homes.

Now there is an effort to open our eyes to the incredible biodiversity of the great indoors, and naturally it must rely on the citizen-scientist for the groundwork exploration. The lead researcher on the North Carolina study, ecologist Rob Dunn, has published a new book, *Never Home Alone*, and has added a project of the same name to inaturalist.org, a biodiversity website that enables the do-it-yourself public to register all the wildlife they encounter. By bringing the search to the public right where we live, we can deepen our understanding of the creatures who share our space. When the winter winds are howling, and all creatures great and small are taking refuge, there is no better rime to begin your own indoor exploration.



Our View of the Night Sky: March 2020.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury is becoming visible again in the morning sky to the east. It gets as high as it will get this spring around mid- to late March at about 25 degrees.

Venus is highly visible in the western sky in the evening at twilight and into the evening. Look for Venus passing through the Pleiades star cluster in late March and early April. It will be visible in the cluster on April 3rd.

Mars is visible in the morning twilight close to the horizon in the east. In March it will be close to Jupiter on the 20th and to Saturn on the 31st.

Jupiter is visible in the dawn sky as part of the group of planets that includes Mars and Saturn.

Saturn is visible in the dawn twilight. The waning crescent moon passes close to it on March 18th.

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>

Zodiacal Light - March 10th to March 24th.

For about an hour after dusk during the two-week period preceding the new moon on March 24, Northern Hemisphere observers can look west-southwest for a broad wedge of faint light rising from the horizon. It will be below Venus and centered on the ecliptic. This is the zodiacal light - reflected sunlight from interplanetary particles of matter concentrated in the plane of the solar system. You will need to observe from a location without light pollution. (Don't confuse the zodiacal light with the brighter Milky Way to the northwest).

March Equinox

Friday, March 20th marks the spring equinox.

Comet

Comet T2 PanSTARRS is becoming visible in telescopes. Go online to check out the orbit for it and updates on magnitude.

Moon

New Moon - Mar. 24th, April 23rd.

Full moon - Mar. 9th (largest of 2020); April 8th.

The March full moon, known as the Worm Moon, Crow Moon, Sap Moon or Lenten Moon, always shines in or near the stars of Leo. Full moons always rise in the east as the sun sets, and set in the west at sunrise. When fully illuminated, the moon's geology is enhanced, especially the contrast between the ancient cratered highlands and the younger smoother maria. This full moon occurs half a day before perigee, the point in the moon's orbit when it is closest to Earth, generating high tides worldwide and making this the largest and brightest full moon of 2020—the first of three consecutive supermoons.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart try this web site - [Skymaps.com/downloads.html](https://www.skymaps.com/downloads.html) - scroll down the center of the page to the download button. "March 2020: 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.