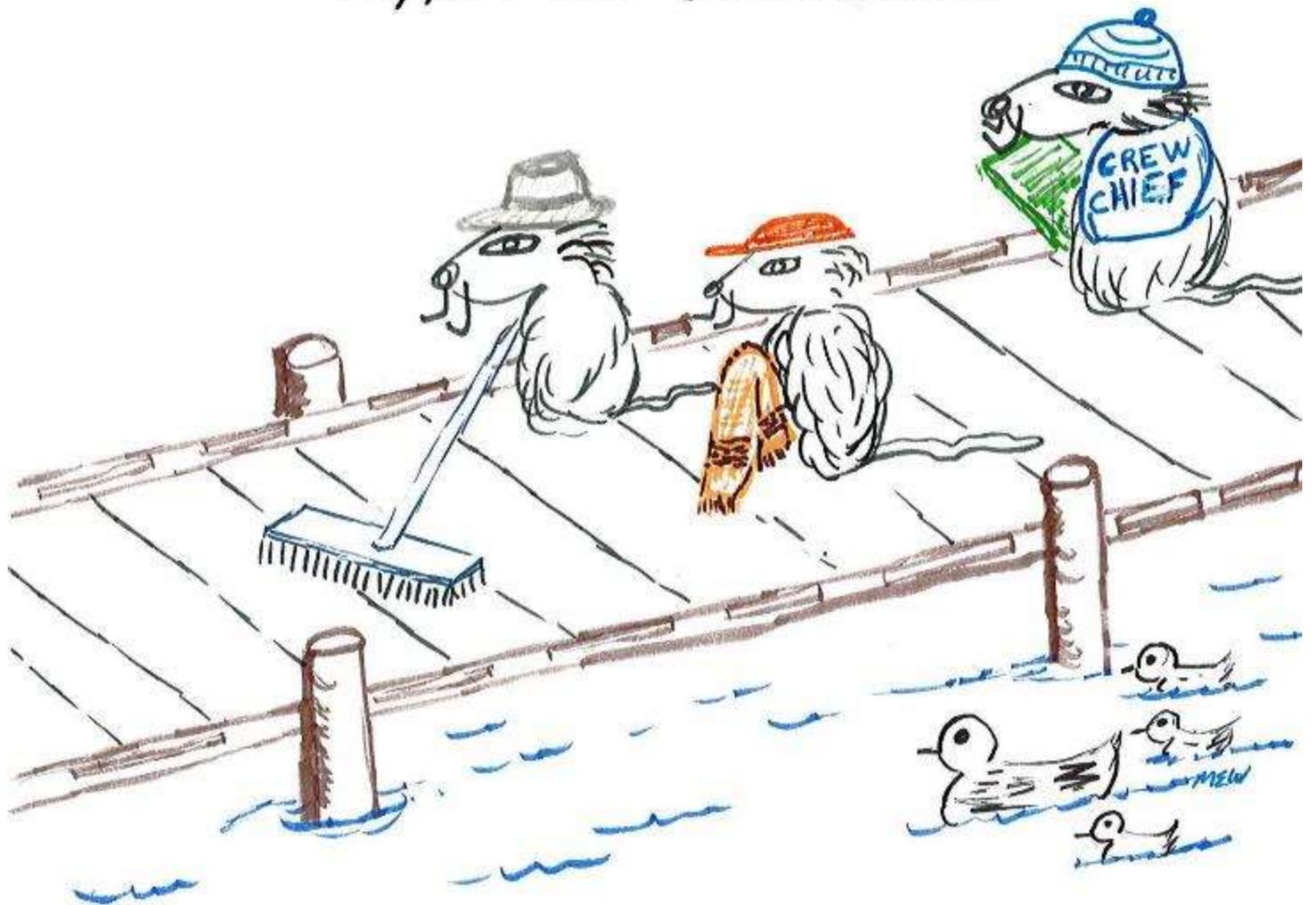


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

JUNE 2020 NEWSLETTER

Thank you to everyone for your
support and contributions





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, Sean Donahue 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 September. 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. I am patiently waiting for the announcement of this year's baby Arctic Terns. A tour through the islands of Eagle Lake a couple of weeks ago revealed that we have 3 Tern nests this year on 3 different Islands. For a while I was expecting to find no nests.

A pair had been staying around an island across the lake from home but due to rising water levels there was not much land left. A few days prior to my day of discovery I began seeing just a single Tern and as expected it turned out to be the one that is not incubating, I confirmed a nest with a couple of eggs. I can watch this island from the deck with the aid of a spotting scope.



Incubating Arctic Tern on small islet



Arctic Tern Flying over Tern Island

I found a second nest on a larger island in the south west corner of the Recreation Site bay. At that time I thought we only had 2 pairs on the lake. When I got too close and the adults became defensive, noisy and dive-bombing me a second pair joined them. This was unexpected as it is too far from the first pair. Now I knew there was a third pair.

A Week earlier I had watched a pair divebombing a Raven that I was accusing on stealing their eggs from a nest on Tern Island. I returned to search some more and went back to Tern Island and found the 3rd nest in the same location I had seen the Raven being dive-bombed.

If you visit the lake please check with me on the nest locations so you can stay well clear of the nest sites. Disturbed adults behaviour will attract the attention of Ravens and other predators. This is an extremely rare nesting location for Arctic Terns and should not be disturbed.

Maybe tomorrow I can confirm some Juvenile Terns again at Eagle Lake.

Scout Island Gets Scrubbed

By Sean Donahue

On Saturday morning a hardy crew gathered with brooms and buckets to give the Willow Trail boardwalk a thorough spring-cleaning. A nasty film of silt was deposited on the boardwalk during the April flood, making it super slippery. We were determined the good folks of Williams Lake would not go for surprise swims.



The Enthusiastic Crew is ready to scrub

Our enthusiastic crew, consisting of Rick Dawson, Fred McMechan, Betty Donahue, Jean Oke, Nola Daintith, Lubna

Khan, Denise Deschene, Darcy Lazzarin and Jim Buckland set off down the Willow Trail with a bounce in their steps and a song in their hearts. But only one would emerge with the cherished Golden Broom award.

As the brooms became a blur and bucket after bucket was sloshed on the offending silt, the boardwalks changed color from a dull grey to a lovely weathered gold.

It was close; but a winner had to be chosen. Congratulations to Jean Oke, who will cherish the one and only Golden Broom award forever. Everyone was a winner though; happy in the knowledge the boardwalk was safe. Well, most of it was safe.



A section in the middle will require extensive repair sometime this fall when water levels drop to allow access. For now, enjoy the east half of your silt free Willow Trail boardwalk.

Big thanks to Sean for organizing the team and to all the others who have helped repair the flood damage at Scout Island.

Distinguished Naturalist Mentor

Congratulations to Fred McMechan for being recognized in the recent copy of BCNature as a “Distinguished Naturalist Mentor”. Well-deserved Fred. I hope you have all had a chance to read the article about Fred in the current issue BCNature (summer 2020).



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Summer staff, Jacob Johnson, Sarah Dickens and Mackenzie Magnowski ready to go out and be roaming naturalists. Since we can't have the Nature House open, they go out to share nature out on the trails. We also have not been able to do school programs. Instead, they provide programs to families—one family at a time and all at a 2 metre distance. It is a challenge, but the families are enjoying the programs. Also, since no school programs the staff are helping with outside tasks about 1/3 of their time. Under Bill's tutoring they are getting at the weeds before they flower. Summer staff, Cassandra Abel, works



on outside tasks most of her time. The grounds have never been better cared for and she is even getting some green stuff going in the disturbed area around the new pedestrian bridge, Neku7usem Bridge.



Here is Cassandra practicing her birding skills on the Tuesday walk abouts with Bill. The whole staff learns what is happening at SINC so they are ready for questions from the public when they are out being roaming naturalists.

There will be summer Nature Fun programs for children just in a slightly different format to keep everyone safe and healthy. The poster with weekly themes will be out shortly.

Osprey Observations by Mackenzie Magnowski

As part of the summer data collection on Scout Island, the osprey pair inhabiting the osprey pole near the pellet plant are being monitored throughout each week. Through these observations, we have noticed the female osprey dutifully maintaining her position in the nest with little movement while the male hunts and brings food back to her. Consequently, we have determined that the female osprey has been incubating her eggs. After laying her eggs, a female osprey does most of the brooding, incubating and direct feeding of the young while the male defends the nest and hunts to bring food back to the nest for the female. However recently, our female osprey has become more active within the nest. Furthermore, the osprey pair has been seen frequently dipping their heads into the nest in what appears to be a feeding motion. Given the fact that osprey eggs (in a clutch of 1-4, but most often 3) are generally laid in April or May and are incubated for about a month, we suspect that the eggs have recently hatched. Now we look forward to hopefully seeing little chicks poking their heads above the edge of the nest soon!

Beaver Observations by Jacob Johnson

I have been observing and monitoring beaver movement and foraging this last month at Scout Island. This consists of watching the lodges and keeping a count of how many beavers we have here at Scout Island and how many plants they have been eating. So far at least five beavers have been spotted, three being adults and only one kit. I assume they have been mainly focusing on reeds so far but they have been taking branches off trees along the Willow Trail and Bulrush trail.

Jacob Johnson

Jacob is thrilled to be joining the staff at Scout Island for the first time this summer and brings a curious enthusiasm for learning about all aspects of nature and wildlife.

He was raised in Williams Lake, and has recently returned home from Prince George after completing his first year of studying biology at UNBC. Jacob is interested in a career in environment and health and finds his work at Scout Island to be a rewarding way to further pursue this passion.

“I love the fact that I’m learning so much at work,” Jacob said.

He has already enjoyed meeting many of the volunteers and employees at the nature centre, and is looking forward to spending the next few months with them.

“The whole atmosphere of Scout Island is amazing, it’s incredible to see how much all the people and

volunteers here genuinely care about Scout Island and everything that's going on," Jacob said.

Jacob's main focus this summer will be teaching about birds, reptiles and amphibians, and, his personal favorite, beavers. He is busy monitoring the beaver lodges at SINC, in addition to running the nature programs and helping with weed eradication. Jacob is anticipating a summer of hiking, biking and kayaking. When he's not enjoying the outdoors, you can find him happily watching reruns of his favourite TV show, *The Office*.

Cassandra Abel

Cassandra is another hardworking and eager addition to the team at Scout Island, where she is undertaking most of the outdoor maintenance and landscaping around the nature centre and walking trails.

With her job being so hands-on with plants, Cassandra has picked up a lot more knowledge about different phylum species, and is incredibly thankful for the opportunity to work in such a beautiful environment

"I can really just appreciate the scenery as I work," Cassandra said. "Scout Island has such a great atmosphere."

In addition to weeding, planting, and taking care of general clean-up of the grounds, Cassandra is researching the painted turtles that are common to certain areas around the island.

"I'll be doing a lot of monitoring of their numbers, size, how they respond to different temperatures and where it is best to find them," Cassandra said.

Cassandra has just graduated from UNBC with a bachelor's degree in health science, where she majored in community and population health. In the fall, her tentative plan is to continue her studies at Thompson Rivers University for an additional 3 years in hopes of becoming a respiratory therapist. During her down time this summer, Cassandra plans to kayak, play her favourite sports, and paint.

Mackenzie Magnowski

With her ready smile and energy, Mackenzie is a bright new member of the staff at SINC. She is the marsh and plants specialist this summer, and has thoroughly enjoyed the fact that much of her work takes place outside.

Since starting at the nature centre, Mackenzie has gained much more understanding about wildlife, especially from her boss, Sue Hemphill, and fellow employee, Bill Gilroy.

"I didn't fully appreciate how rich the ecosystems surrounding Scout Island were before working here," Mackenzie said.

Besides helping the SINC team craft unique ways to offer programs, Mackenzie will also be collecting data on ospreys this summer, and hopes to discover some new information about traits that are specific to birds of prey. She is excited to take this knowledge and include it in her lessons for the family and nature fun summer programs.

"I've already been learning a lot about the plants and animals of our area and am starting to figure out how I can share that knowledge with the community," said Mackenzie.

Mackenzie is happy to have finished her first year of general studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, where she discovered an interest in sociology, and plans to return in the fall for another year. Besides enjoying the outdoors, Mackenzie hopes to fill her summer with playing her fiddle and training her dog.

Sarah Dickens

Sarah is returning to her position as a teacher naturalist after her first summer at Scout Island in 2017. She has recently graduated from Trinity Western University with a major in English and a minor in Media and Communications, and is hoping to pursue a career in the writing and communications field.

Sarah is in charge of teaching about the ocean tank and terrestrial bugs, and is working on building different displays at the nature centre. She is enthusiastic about the chance to interact with members of the community again in an outdoor setting, especially in terms of the modified nature fun programs.

Besides teaching and caring for the critters at SINC, Sarah is in charge of posting updates on social media platforms about the nature centre and what the staff are getting up to during the day. She is also publishing articles in the Tribune to keep the community in the loop about different events.

“This summer is definitely going to look different,” Sarah said. “But I’m excited to be a part of Scout Island’s goal to keep instilling an appreciation and curiosity about nature in the community.”

Sarah plans to return to Langley, but is happy to enjoy one last summer in her hometown. She hopes to catch up on all the hiking and road trips that she missed out on during the studying of her last academic year.

The Weedy Take

By Bill Gilroy

Scout Island is no stranger to invasive plants, as many of you know. A lot of work has been undertaken over the years to either eliminate them (good luck!) or keep them in check. I’ve been provided with 5 hours per week to coordinate invasive plant management and, with reduced programming due to Covid, have the luxury of receiving help from our 4 summer students.

Working with the mapping, inventory and recommendations by Ken MacKenzie, we are systematically tackling those wascally weeds! I am mapping our progress as we go. Lots has been done already in the general area at the west end, including around the new bridge, osprey pole and Otter Point. The Canada geese certainly have a huge impact on some areas in this vicinity. Other areas covered are at the causeway entrance, the east side of the causeway, the eastern Island and adjacent to the City water treatment buildings.

The most problematic weeds include Canada thistle, burdock and blue stickseed (which produces those little burrs that coat your shoelaces when you walk through it). As always with invasives, we’ll work our way from beginning to end...then do it all again! So far this season, I feel that some of the areas that I hit hard last year are not showing as much growth. Fingers crossed for the same results from this year’s efforts.

News from Basque Country

By Jon and Paula

It has been already two months since we came back home and we have had time to reconnect with family, friends and local wildlife. We have been biking lots and also birdwatching in other parts of Spain. We took the pictures below at Gallocanta lagoon in the province of Zaragoza in central Spain (<http://www.birdingaragon.com/en/aragon-and-the-birds/ornithological-outes/gallocanta-lagoon-and-surroundings/>). It is the largest endorheic salt lagoon in Spain, where

thousands of cranes (*grus grus*) spend the winter until it is time for them to leave to their breeding territories in northern Europe. Around the lagoon, we can also find other resident steppe birds, as the Great Bustard (*otis tarda*), one the heaviest flying birds of the world, together with the African Bustard Kori (*ardeotis kori*).



Great Bustard (*otis tarda*)

Cranes (*grus grus*)

While watching these birds, we are talking about how grateful we feel for having ended up randomly in Williams Lake 7 years ago. Since we arrived to town in March 2013, we felt very welcomed and at home, and a big part of that is thanks to the WLFN and the Nature House. Scout Island was our first stop and while exploring the trails with binoculars and scope, we run into Rick and Margaret who invited us to a potluck that was happening the following Friday at the Nature House. They told us about the WLFN and we thought it would be a great way to meet local people that shared interests on natural history, outdoors and birdwatching. The day of the potluck, Sue welcomed us at the door with membership form in hand, and, since then, Scout Island would be a big part of our lives in Williams Lake. We found not only a very knowledgeable group of people but also great mentors and good friends we learned from and shared time and experiences in nature with. We just want to say thanks to all. Special thanks to Sue from me (Paula) for the opportunity to work at the Nature House and for sharing all her passion and great mentoring on nature education.

Ring-billed or Necked Duck

By Tom Godin

Does anyone receive the magazine called Birding from the American Bird Association? I picked up half a dozen from a thrift store and found some fun reading.

One story about the naming of the Ring-necked Duck is quite interesting. The author, Rick Wright, contends that this waterfowl should have been more aptly named the Ring-billed Duck.



Ring-necked Duck
Photo by Steve Smith

He then goes into the history of how the duck was named. The story goes back to 1801 in a wild meat market in Leadenhall, a town 150 miles from London and a key supplier of game meat for that city. Not only meat buyers but scientific types wandered the market seeking new species to document. Edward Donovan was such a man and he spotted an unknown species of waterfowl lying on a table and immediately knew that it was something different. The duck was presumable shot in Lincolnshire, some 150 miles away.

Donovan studied the bird and wrote a full description of the specimen in front of him. Of course he mentions the maroon ring around the neck which leads to it being called Ring-billed Duck, but oddly, nowhere in the description is there mention of the colour of the bill. This leads the magazine article writer to conclude one of several scenarios. The duck's



bill was either badly damaged when it was shot or perhaps the 150-mile-long coach ride to London from Leadenhall, spoiled the look of the bird's bill. Wild game arriving at the market, it was noted, was not always fresh.

An illustration done of the new species of duck about that time, does not show the rather blatant feature of the hard-to-overlook, distinctly marked bill.

Handcoloured copperplate drawn and engraved by Edward Donovan from his own "Natural History of British Birds," London, 1794-1819

The bird was scientifically described and named in 1806 and so we end up with the name Ring-necked Duck sticking to this bird.



Our View of the Night Sky: July/August 2020.

By Steve Capling

Planet Review

Mercury gradually emerges in the morning sky near mid-July. Shines brightly in the morning sky until mid-August and then reappears in the evening sky in late-August.

Venus is visible in the eastern dawn sky. By month end it will be very low in the evening sky and then will not be visible until mid-June when it becomes visible in the morning twilight in the east. There is a close conjunction of the crescent moon and Venus in the early dawn sky on July 16-17th. Venus is prominent in the early dawn sky through-out August and September.

Mars is visible in the late evening sky in July, rising around midnight. In August, Mars doubles in magnitude from -1.1 on the 1st to -1.8 on the 31st. In September Mars is rising early in the evening. The Moon passes very close to Mars on Sept. 5-6th.

Jupiter is very visible in the evening sky through all of July and August. Remains visible with Saturn through-out the summer evenings.

Saturn is visible in the evening sky (although only about 1/tenth as bright as Jupiter). The full moon passes below Saturn on July 5-6th, August 2nd and 28-29th.

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 - July 20th, August 19th.

Full moon - July 5th, August 3rd, September 2nd.

Monday, August 17th pre-dawn low in the east north-east: The wafer-thin waning crescent moon is located just above M44 the Beehive cluster.

Eclipses

July 4th - Penumbral Lunar Eclipse. We are located at the very edge of the event and it is in progress as the moon rises. A penumbral lunar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes through the Earth's partial shadow, or penumbra. **During this type of eclipse the Moon will darken slightly but not completely.** The eclipse will be visible throughout most of North America, South America, the eastern Pacific Ocean, the western Atlantic Ocean, and extreme western Africa.

Meteor Showers

July 28, 29 - Delta Aquarids Meteor Shower. The Delta Aquarids is an average shower that can produce up to 20 meteors per hour at its peak. It is produced by debris left behind by comets Marsden and Kracht. The shower runs annually from July 12 to August 23. It peaks this year on the night of the 28th and morning of the 29th. The second quarter moon will block many of the fainter meteors this year. But if you are patient, you should still be able to catch a few of the brighter ones. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Aquarius, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

The Perseids

August 11/12. The Perseids is one of the best meteor showers to observe, producing up to 60 meteors per hour at its peak. It is produced by comet Swift-Tuttle, which was discovered in 1862. The Perseids are famous for producing a large number of bright meteors. The shower runs annually from July 17 to August 24. It peaks this year on the night of the 11th and morning of the 12th. The second quarter moon will block out some of the fainter meteors this year, but the Perseids are so bright and numerous that it should still be a good show. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Perseus, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

For more details go to the following url and type '2020 Perseids' into the search bar at the top right of the home page as we get closer to mid-August.

<https://earthsky.org>

And from the American Meteor Society: <https://www.amsmeteors.org/meteor-showers/meteor-shower-calendar/>. Scroll down to Perseids.

For more information on celestial events see this website:

<http://www.seasky.org/astronomy/astronomy-calendar-2020.html>.

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. "July 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.

Banding at the Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory in the age of COVID-19

By Avery Bartels

The Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory in the West Chilcotin is approaching its 14th season of operation. On August 3rd the banders Sachi Dell and myself, Avery Bartels, will be opening nets again. The start of a new season always brings a sense of heightened excitement as we wonder what this season will have in store for us. On the back of a record 62 Northern Saw-whet Owls banded last year, will we see a marked decrease this year in keeping with the established four-year cycle? What about Yellow-rumped Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, our late September bread and butter – in 2018 we had a high year for them but last year was down notably...will they arrive in our nets in big flocks as they do some years? And will the locally breeding Swainson's Thrushes, who have had two consecutive stellar breeding seasons after the forest fires of 2017, be just as successful again?

One thing is for sure, the 2020 season will see a milestone reached as the TLBO will count its 250 000th bird since the program started in 2006! In 2019 we passed two significant milestones banding our 20 000th bird and recording our 200th species (a duo of Caspian Terns noted flying over the station).

This year is seeing the project transition from BC Spaces for Nature, who will be administering the TLBO for their fourth and final season, to the newly formed and local Tatlayoko Field Station Society (TFSS). The period since 2017 that BC Spaces have run the program has been invaluable for the continuation of the TLBO and we are looking forward to what we see as a long-term, secure future under the TFSS.





The 2020 season promises to be a unique one however the bird numbers pan out. With Covid-19 causing uncertainties across all facets of our lives, operations at TLBO will also include unprecedented protocol adaptations as we aim to ensure that the project does not contribute to bringing Covid-19 to the area nor infecting any local wildlife (the impacts and ability to transmit to wildlife is largely unknown at this point but we aim to play it safe!). Mandatory 14-day quarantines for the banders once they arrive on site will mean separate banding set-ups for each bander, separate equipment and frequent sanitizing of equipment that has to be shared (ie the laptop for data entry) as well as wearing of face masks, among other measures.

As we aim to keep our crew as small as possible this year, we are looking to hire a third bander so as to negate the need for volunteers and limit the number of people coming to and from the TLBO. To be

able to put this plan in place though **we do still need to raise some more funds** ahead of the season. We are not far off from meeting our budget goals but a few generous contributions would ensure that we can confirm this course of action. If funding will not allow the hiring of a third bander then we may be looking for up to three unpaid “Banders-in-training”, who could commit to 2-3 weeks at the TLBO to help us out. No prior banding experience is necessary but a modicum of computer savvy and an appreciation for early mornings (and/or late nights during owling season in September!) are helpful. If you, or anyone you know are interested please email us at tatlayokobirds@hotmail.com. Unfortunately, this season the TLBO will not be open to visitors.

As always, we are dependent on the generosity of the many like-minded individuals who value the work we do and this includes the William’s Lake Field Naturalist who have made a generous donation to the TLBO this year! To make your own donation to the TLBO we have three options (all donations to the TLBO will receive a charitable tax receipt), based on the amount of the contribution:

For donations of <\$250: please donate to the “Wandering Tatlers” Team Birdathon at <https://www.canadahelps.org/s/tg6KF> this will go towards our 2021 season.

For donations of \$250-\$500: please donate via the BC Spaces for Nature CanadaHelps page at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/bc-spaces-for-nature> be sure to select the **TLBO** from the specific fund drop-down menu. These donations will be immediately available to go towards our 2020 field season!

For donations of >\$500: donations can be made direct to BC Spaces for Nature via **etransfer**: info@spacesfornature.org, Subject: 2020 TLBO Project.

Or by **cheque** mailed to: Box 673 Gibsons, BC, Canada V0N 1V0 and made out to BC Spaces for Nature, Memo: 2020 TLBO Project. These donations will also be immediately available for the 2020 season!

For more information about the TLBO please visit our website at <https://tatlayokobirds.wordpress.com/> where you can also read about the Birdathon exploits of the Wandering Tatlers Team (Avery, Sachi and former bander Steve Ogle). Enquiries and any tips on local funding sources can be sent to tatlayokobirds@hotmail.com