

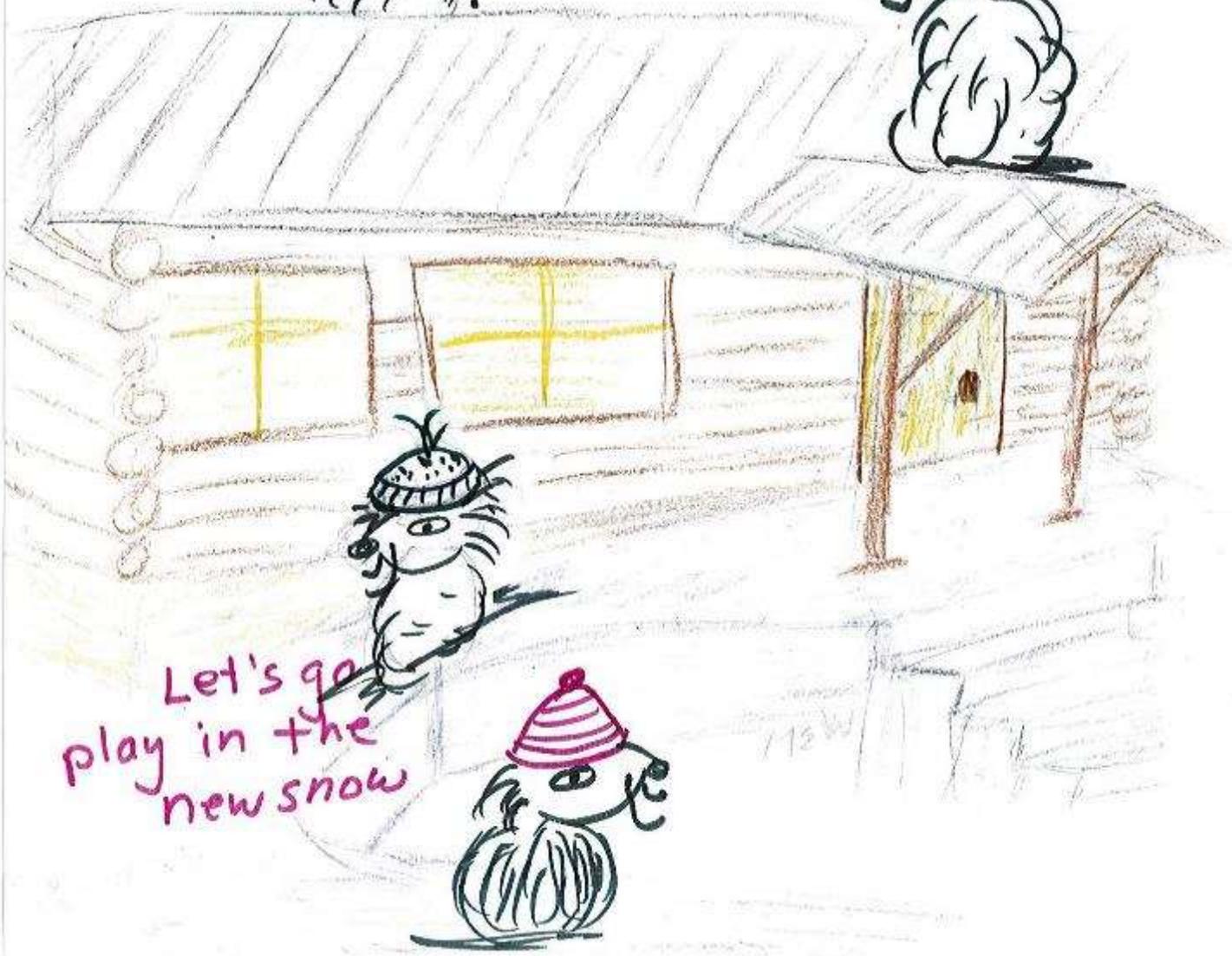
# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

I enjoy watching all  
the hard working  
humans!



They are doing  
a good  
job!



Let's go  
play in the  
new snow





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](mailto: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](mailto: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 November. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)



From Jim: I apologize for the delay in finishing my editing job, it was not because I had too much editing but rather the opposite. Unfortunately, we do not have programs or field trips to report on and we miss this significant part of the Muskrat report. It will be a great help to me if more of you could find a bit of time to put together an article or more on some appropriate topic for the newsletter. Even something short like our previous "Member's Moment's" would be appreciated. Thanks for your help.

## Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count

By Phil Ranson

Following consultation and some deliberation, it has been decided to continue with this year's bird count - given there are no further restrictions to health guidelines. The scheduled date is Sunday, December 20th. As most of our parties are either from the same household or single field observers, we felt we can safely meet the criteria set out by count organisers; Birds Canada and health authorities. The only break with tradition will be the cancellation of the post-count potluck at Fred McMechan's.

Further details will be available in the next *Muskrat*.

## In Memory of Stephen Jon Capling

The sudden and sad loss of one of our members, Steve Capling occurred at the start of summer on June 22, 2020. For many years Steve has shared with us his interest and knowledge of astronomy. Steve, with proof reading and other help from his wife Lynn, has written "Our view of the night sky." These articles shared information and helped us become more aware of the stars, planets and moons. Steve's professional career was working in forestry in the Cariboo Chilcotin. As well as astronomy, nature and gardens Steve had many other talents and skills. Some members will remember and miss him as their teacher for ballroom dancing. Steve and his contributions were appreciated and will be missed.





### Notes from the Executive

By Margaret Waring

I am writing to update you on the many projects at Scout Island and thank the wonderful crews of hard-working volunteers. If you have not yet taken a look, I encourage you to take note of the changes on a future visit to Scout Island. Please thank any workers you see for their contributions.

The spring began with our annual general meeting - the last large group gathering that many of us have attended. COVID 19 precautions have affected many of our usual club activities. The yard sale, evening programs, children’s and school programs, field trips and other events were cancelled, postponed or adapted and changed.

But not all activity ended. Directors, staff, volunteers and visitors have been busy. Many people are enjoying Scout Island every day: walking the trails, playing on the beach, looking in the water and observing the birds and insects. We were fortunately able to employ summer students as usual.



**Well deserved lunch break**



**Repairing flood damaged trails**

The new pedestrian foot bridge built by the city has opened and is being heavily used. Meetings and contact with the city continue on this project which has required significant input from the WLFN executive.

The lake had record high water levels that led to flooded trails and threatened our two bridges. Very quick-thinking volunteers installed huge containers filled with water on the bridges as the water was lifting the bridges off their supports. As I came to the island to take a look at what was happening, dedicated members were already working to save the bridges.

Flooding also damaged several trail boardwalks and all were very slippery from being underwater. While some were cleaned and reopened, others are going to require significant repairs, funds and rebuilding. Volunteers have worked hard to clean and repair boardwalks where possible, but some that were unsafe or too badly damaged had to be removed.

The crane needed to build the city’s new foot bridge damaged the existing wheel chair accessible trail. It has now been rebuilt using the special kind of gravel required for the smooth and durable surface needed by wheel chairs. Go for a walk and check it out now and see what has been put in place. It is a top-quality trail.

The Nature House is being updated with a new ramp and entrance to the Nature House. I think it is beautiful. Finishing details continue. It has been interesting to follow the development of this from a massive hole and major amounts of cement being poured and then covered in so we do not see the infrastructure anymore.



The old shake roof and plywood soffits are being replaced with metal to improve the Nature House and reduce fire risk as part of the overall “Fire Smart” plan for the Nature Centre property. Come and check it out. I think it looks classy and modern but also fits in well with the natural setting.

I am so impressed by the wonderful dedicated people who are contributing time and muscle and knowledge to improving the Nature Centre and running its programs. Thank you to everyone.

**News of a special award from BC Nature**

Did you notice the picture of our Past President Fred McMechan in the Fall 2020 edition of BC Nature? He was honoured with the BC Nature Volunteer Regional Award. Fred has been the Northern BC Regional Coordinator for more than 20 years. He has shared information with clubs in the north, organized inter club events and presented northern issues to the BC Nature Board. Congratulations Fred on this well-deserved award. Fred has received numerous other awards including an award for his support of education earlier this year and the Elton Anderson award in 2008. Congratulations Fred!



**Margaret presents the award to Fred**



**Scout Island Nature Centre**

By Sue Hemphill

This will be brief as I am working one handed, thanks to a stick into my spokes and my ungraceful landing after going over the handlebars. You met the great summer staff in the June Muskrat. They put in a challenging and creative summer. The weeds sustained a setback as a result of their efforts under Bill’s supervision. Our resident artist, Cassandra, painted a cave on the Nature K wall and led painting programs during the Art in Nature programs. Sarah, Jacob, and McKenzie led great Nature Fun programs. There were smaller numbers of participants but not a smaller number of enticing nature activities,



Bill will bring you up to date on the Stream to Sea program—yes, it is a go this year. Mary and Bill are offering the usual range of nature programs for classes—just differently—outdoors mostly and with masks. They are also offering to work with teachers to help them integrate more outdoor time into all of their subjects.

The Grade 7 Outdoor Education classes are back at Scout Island several days each month. They have been sticking to the outdoors as per Covid precautions. They will need the inside more often as the cold weather sets in. That means I will only work days they are not using the Nature House. The Nature K is on site every day. Kacie Young is the teacher and Tanya Johnson is the Education Assistant. We have all learned the Covid “dance” as none of us wants to be a “super spreader!”



**Dipping for invertebrates is always engaging**



The big news is the facelift the Nature House is getting. Our wonderful volunteer crew has been working in spurts since June then full out for the last two weeks.—Not easy work! They have all had to be mountain goats.

It has been a very busy summer and fall for our volunteers – bridges to save, flood damage to fix, construction... The winter will bring this year’s tasks to an end but repairs are not complete. More volunteers will be needed in the spring!

**Stream to Sea Program Brings Hands-On Experience and a Call to Salmon Stewardship for Students in the Cariboo-Chilcotin**

By Bill Gilroy

Scout Island has, for many years, been contracted by DFO to deliver the Stream to Sea Program (formerly Salmonids in the classroom) to students throughout the Cariboo-Chilcotin. The goals of the program are to provide them with a hands-on nurturing experience in which they receive salmon eggs and raise them to the fry stage, at which they are released. Throughout the process, lessons are provided that teach students about the salmon life cycle and the importance of salmon in both freshwater and marine ecosystems as a keystone species and ultimately, foster a sense of lifelong stewardship.



**Chinook Salmon Eggs Received at Scout Island on October 14<sup>th</sup> 30 Days Old (eye spots visible)**



**Scout Island Salmon Tank Awaiting Eggs**

In recent years we have been hearing that salmon returns to the upper Fraser River have been in decline, most notably chinook, the largest salmonid in BC. In fact, last year, the situation was so dire that no eggs were available from chinook. Instead, we received pink salmon eggs (taken from pinks in the Williams Lake River). Unlike chinook, which stay in fresh water systems for a year or two, pink salmon head directly to the sea as soon as they “button up” or reach the fry stage. This meant that the students would not get to feed their salmon, as they would need to be released when they “buttoned up.” Unfortunately, Covid restrictions in the spring

prevented classes from coming to Scout Island to release their fry. I had to collect all the fry myself and do the release, which was interesting. On one hand, standing at the edge of the water all alone watching the newly released fry tentatively checking their new environment was exhilarating. On the other, I really wished the children could be there to gain, in this component, what is perhaps the strongest sense of stewardship in their Stream to Sea Program experience. This year, we are fortunate to once again be receiving chinook eggs that come from salmon taken from the Nechako River. In past years, as many as 50 eggs have been allowed for each school. This year, due to low returns once again, only 20 have been allowed. So, over the next few weeks, I’ll be traveling throughout the local school district with my precious little cargo, delivering eggs and providing lessons to enthusiastic learners and hopefully future salmon stewards.

## Golden-crowned Sparrow

By Jim Sims

Just prior to the 30 cm of snow fall last week I had this interesting visitor around the back yard. It looked like a very large Sparrow and perhaps too large. It allowed me to get very close and I got some very good pictures like this one. The pictures along with Sibley's and E-bird enabled me to identify it as a first season Golden-crowned Sparrow. This one was the first juvenile bird I have seen. It stayed around for a few days after the snowfall, seeking out shelter under the front deck or under the old cabin I even found it in the greenhouse one morning. By then it was also getting fairly cold at -18 cel. The large size and gold on the forehead made the positive identification easy.



**Juvenile Golden-crowned Sparrow**

Most Golden-crowns are observed in our region during the spring migration, often seen with the White-crowned Sparrows but closer to the end of the migration period. I'll see a few each year out here at Eagle Lake. Most nesting is done further north but they are known to nest in our region in alpine areas. One of the first photos I took of a GCSP, in fact one of the first bird photographs I took was taken way back in 1975 when I took some students on my first backpacking trip into the Niut Range. I must have been close to the nest as I recall it flew up close to me and scolded me for getting too close. Several years later I found a nest across the valley on the top of the Potato Range. The nest was on the ground, well-hidden but close to the trail. I found it when the startled bird flew up from close to my feet and stayed close by giving the warning call notes.



**Adult Golden-crowned Sparrow  
During migration at Eagle Lake**

The White-crowns are one of our least known songbirds, particularly on the breeding grounds. Expect this is because they are northern and alpine breeding birds. Miners in the Yukon at the turn of the twentieth century woefully referred to



the Golden-crowned Sparrow as the “no gold here” bird, because its song resembled that depressing phrase. They also interpreted its song to say “I’m so tired,” prompting them to dub the bird “Weary Willie.”

Here is that very first photograph that was taken with a “Real Camera” and a 200mm lens. Unfortunately, he was above me and I never did see the golden crown.

Watch for this bird during next years migration and remember to submit your observations and photos to E-bird.