

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

MARCH 2025 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) you must include an additional \$5 if you request a paper copy of the BC Nature magazine. 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 Margaret Waring at (250)398-7724 or e-mail [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)

**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:** president Margaret Waring secretary Nola Daintith, treasurer Ken Day and directors Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Jean Oke, Sue Hemphill, Lara Roorda, Katharine VanSpall, Michaela Waterhouse, Kim Zalay and Natalie Swift



**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 stop receiving the newsletter please contact the editors. We always welcome your comments, suggestions, articles and Member's Moments. We wish we could fill all of the extra spaces in your newsletters with more of your interesting articles.



Why not do a bit of research on a favourite Natural History topic and share it with us. Please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (778 764-2752) or e-mail us at [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)

**From Jim:** Spring began to arrive early at Tern Inn this year but a recent snow fall has re-covered the bare ground with white and it has persisted. In spite of this the Juncos, and Red-winged Blackbirds have returned. I have also seen the first robin and 2 days ago I heard the first Canada Goose flying along the south shore of the lake. It was just an exploratory adventure and they did not stay.

The return of the first geese and the recent rivalry between the "Canada Goose and Bald Eagle" has piqued my interest in our recently more favoured Canada Goose.

The Geese that I heard will most likely return To Eagle Lake and will soon be claiming nesting territory and I expect some eggs will be laid while the lake is still



**Typical Eagle Lake nest**

completely ice covered. Our geese nest on low rocky islands near the Forestry Recreation Campsite. These islands have been recently exposed as the water levels in the lake have been receding. The islands have minimal vegetation. The lake has no cattail marshes that seem to be more typical of Canada Goose nest locations.



About 5 years ago the islands were over-crowded with pairs of nesting Geese. My nesting Geese surveys revealed over 70 nesting pairs. It was a constant, day and night roar of honking geese as they warned neighbours to stay off their property. It was nearly impossible to hear the many songbirds in the area. But that may be due to my age-related hearing issues. Since then, there has been a decline in the number of nests to the point where we now have no more than a dozen nests. There were even a few silent days in the bay last spring.

Another interesting observation I have made is that the lake is never over run with many families of goslings. I am a bit confused by this and often wonder what is happening. It seems like 2 or maybe 3 gosling families appear on the lake and all of the remaining incubation stops. The non- successful adults join the successful families and follow them around

the lake feeding with the families in large mixed groups of Goslings and adults. Do the non-successful adults prefer the roll of God Parents? Do they know that if they keep going there will not be enough food for the young? Do they change their minds after seeing how demanding it is to be a parent? The families travel widely around the shore of the lake stopping to feed on the grasses. When I approach too close, they may swim across the lake to the far shore or take the gosling away to hide in the riparian zone.



Did you know:

- There are at least 11 subspecies of Canada Geese. The 4 smallest of the Geese are now considered to be a separate species called the Cackling Goose.
- Some of my unsuccessful or non-breeding adults may migrate north after the breeding season. They may travel as far as 1500km in search of more nutritious plants in an earlier stage of growth. This is thought to help them fuel the molt.
- They most often mate for life but this does not mean there is no extra-marital activity. They usually select a mate of similar size and the male is often slightly larger than the female.
- Canada Geese can live to over 30 years. The oldest known Goose was a female that was at least 33 years old

**Taking the kids away to hide in the forest**

No more Booming of the Canada Goose, save Boos for the Trump Eagle.

## Annual General Meeting and Potluck Supper

Your presence is requested for this **important event on:**  
**Friday March 28th at 5:30 PM at the Nature House.**

We need your support for our club and you can enjoy an evening with a potluck Supper followed by the Annual General Meeting (AGM). We have some door prizes and a few games too.

At the AGM we will present brief reports about the past year and consider plans for the next year. We look for input from the membership. You will elect a slate of directors to guide the organization forward. If you would like to be a director or more information please contact Kim Zalay ([kim\\_mzalay@hotmail.com](mailto:kim_mzalay@hotmail.com)).

## 2025 Field Trip Planning Meeting

All members are invited to join a Field Naturalists meeting on **Tuesday March 25** starting at **4:30 p.m.** to begin planning field trips for the coming season. If you can join us in person, we will meet at Scout Island Nature House. If you would like to join us on-line via Zoom, please let us know ([wlfldnat@gmail.com](mailto:wlfldnat@gmail.com)) well ahead of time and we will provide a Zoom link to you.

Join us to describe a trip that you would like to lead or request that someone else lead. If you cannot join us but have a request for a trip, please let us know via the above email address. Of course, trips should have a natural history theme and be doable by our members. Trips could be led by more than one Naturalist member and may be only a part of a day or be a full day or more. Help us to explore and enjoy nature together.

## Alkali Lake first field trip of the year

**Sunday April 13 (Leader Ray Hornby 392-2271)** Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 9:00am to arrange carpooling. We will view bird species along the road to Alkali Lake and spend most of the day viewing the large variety of birds which can be seen early in the season on the open water and in the marshes of Alkali Lake. Be sure to bring a lunch and



your binoculars or spotting scope. Birding will be done from the road so expect minimal walking.

### April 27th Birding at Scout Island

Trip leader Betty Donahue (250-267-3353)

Scout Island attracts an amazing variety of songbirds, marsh birds, ducks and wildlife. Are you new to the wonderful world of birding and want to learn how to identify our feathered friends? Spring is a great time for birders as the birds are more brightly colored during breeding season. Come join us for a casual two-hour morning stroll around Scout Island as we practise identifying birds and ducks. Bring binoculars so you can enjoy close views. Please leave pets at home. We will meet at the parking lot by the Nature House at 9 AM.

### Spring Plant and Yard Sale

Saturday May 3rd, 2025

I look out and see signs of spring and I want to let you know planning is underway for the Spring Plant and Yard Sale. It will be at Scout Island on **Saturday May 3rd from 9:30 AM until 1:00 PM.**

Drop off for sale items will be Friday night and Saturday morning before 9AM.

**Your help is needed to make this event a success.**

Plants are what we have been known for and are best sellers. Tomatoes and herbs are popular. Please start some seeds now and share your plants. When you do yard work remember the plants that you divide can be purchased by others. Rhubarb and raspberry and strawberry plants and small trees and lilacs have been requested by past shoppers. Maybe you have a plant you want to move or do not like. Dig it out and we will find a new home for it. House plants are sold too.

I encourage you to start by putting out a box and add items to donate for the sale. We feature plants and garden related items but also sell books, CDs, DVDs, vinyl records, art work, household treasures and decorations, sporting goods, camping items and tools as well as craft items and children's toys. There are other local outlets for clothing and linens so we encourage you to donate them elsewhere. We would like to request no large heavy items that are difficult to move.

The purpose of the sale is to raise funds for a \$1500. student bursary that we give to a graduating student from Lake City Secondary.

Our two coordinators for the sale are:

Charlotte Lundeen - [charlotte.lundeen.slp@gmail.com](mailto:charlotte.lundeen.slp@gmail.com) and 250 267 4652

Frances McCoubrey - [fmccoubrey@gmail.com](mailto:fmccoubrey@gmail.com) and 778 961 0144

I thank them both for taking this on.

Margaret Waring



### Notes from the Director's Meetings.

By Margaret Waring President

Last month Megan our Executive Director advised us of her resignation. March 21st is her last day at work as Executive Director for Scout Island. She and her husband Don are moving to Vancouver Island. I have had a variety of learning experiences working with Megan. My insect knowledge and appreciation were minimal and has been expanded. I had never seen a Black Widow spider before! I hope Megan has gained from her experiences here and enjoys life by the ocean.

We are advertising for a new Nature Centre Manager. If you know someone who is suitable for the job, please encourage them to apply.



## The Birds, the Bears, and Our Helpful Community

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN

[lmccsiz@gmail.com](mailto:lmccsiz@gmail.com)

Do you remember the classic *Far Side* cartoon that portrays two Polar Bears opening an igloo? Gary Larson's caption reads: "Oh hey. I just love these things, a crunchy outside with a chewy center." Well, that is how I imagine the Black Bear that gnawed his way through 30 of the 60 nest boxes on our route last year. Fourteen contained Mountain Bluebirds, 11 contained Tree Swallows, 1 a Mountain Chickadee, and 3 were too mutilated to be determined. Incredibly, the Mountain Chickadees survived, even though the box was on the ground. The other birds were not so lucky. Roughly calculated, the bear ate 70 Mountain Bluebirds and 66 Tree Swallows. Other managers have reported bear damage on their routes as well, meaning the number of birds lost in 2024 could be above normal.

Thankfully, I was able to repair many of the boxes and immediately return them to their posts, but as I did this, I wondered about improving the design so that the "chewy center" would be less accessible. "No reward, the bear gets bored;" that's what I believe.

Fortunately for our Mountain Bluebird Program, the big-hearted LCSS woodworking teacher Andrew Hutchinson agreed to construct a tougher house. After purchasing expensive, heavy-duty plywood, he instructed his class to use extra glue, longer screws, and more nails. The goal was to build something that wouldn't readily pop open with the bat of a powerful paw. On the four occasions that I visited the woodworking class, I was very impressed by the coordinated assembly line of activity. Before January was over, 73 small fortresses were ready for the spring of 2025. Route managers can find these boxes in the two outdoor lockers at Scout Island.

Last year, Mr. Hutchinson and his students built us 64 bird houses. When I checked the lockers at the end of breeding season, only 3 of the LCSS boxes remained. Good work route managers! The boxes don't help birds by sitting on the shelf. Every year over 1000 houses on 30-plus routes need to be cleaned, repaired, or replaced. And once in a while, routes are expanded and added. Phil Ranson, for example, added 24 houses to his route between Roundup and Rock Lakes, and I am currently experimenting with a new route on the clearcuts of Fox Mountain.

So, when should the boxes be cleaned and maintained this year? I have heard reports that waves of male Mountain



**Typical Swallow Nest Ready for cleaning**

Bluebirds are already here, but don't

panic. When the snow is a memory and the land has recovered from the melt, gather your tools, masks and spare houses for the annual maintenance. Any time between March 24<sup>th</sup> and April 18<sup>th</sup> will be the least disruptive. Once the Tree Swallows arrive, any disturbance becomes an opportunity for swallows to displace bluebirds. The other challenge after April 18<sup>th</sup> is deciding whether or not the nest is new or old. Bluebird nests are made of woven grass. Old nests that contained babies will be compressed to some degree. Such a nest can be safely removed. Old Tree Swallow nests are easier to identify. Typically, the fledglings leave behind a mess of flattened, poop-encrusted feathers on top of coarse grass. You will need a putty knife to pry it free. Be sure to wear gloves.



**LCSS Students build and donate 74 Nestboxes**

In closing, I want to thank all our members for supporting the Bluebird

Program, especially those who volunteer one or more days to ready their routes for the returning birds. I also want to thank the community of Williams Lake for its support, in particular the landowners who allow us to use their fences, Ruth Lloyd for enabling our club to educate the public about the Program, and Andrew Hutchinson's LCSS woodworking classes for donating 137 nest boxes to our cause.

By the way, there are at least two routes available this year. If you would like to manage a route, please contact me at [lmccsiz@gmail.com](mailto:lmccsiz@gmail.com).

I wish you all a safe and happy season. Tread gently on the land, and please be "Bear Aware!"

### **Member's Moment from Lubna and Betty**



### **Time for a Snack**

What a great winter it's been for spotting owls! One cold February day, Lubna was prowling through RC Cotton Site, hoping to find one. She took this wonderful photo of a Northern Pygmy Owl with a freshly caught vole. It ate some of the vole and then stashed the remainder in dense brush for a future snack.

Photo by Lubna Khan

Written by Betty Donahue

"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](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca). A special thanks to Lubna and Betty for sharing your special moment,