# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

APRIL + MAY 2025 NEWSLETTER



### The MUSKRAT EXPRESS



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, <a href="muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca">muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca</a> or the web site below. For more information about the club please contact Margaret Waring at (250)398-7724 or e-mail muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Website <a href="http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca">http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca</a> Scout Island Nature Centre Website <a href="http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca">http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca</a>

**Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists:** president Margaret Waring, Vice President Sue Hemphill secretary Nola Daintith, treasurer Ken Day and directors Cathie Hamm, Jeremy Vogt, Jean Oke, Michaela Waterhouse, Kim Zalay, Keith Monroe, Kath VanSpall and Jane Wellburn



**Editors:** Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in mid-June. If you stop receiving the newsletter please contact the editors. We always welcome your comments, suggestions, articles and Member's Moments. Please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (778 764-2752) or e-mail us at



muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca

#### Alkali Lake Field Trip Report

By Lubna Khan

On March 14<sup>th</sup> Ray and Kris Hornby led the first field trip of 2025 for the Williams Lake Field Naturalists. They lead us to Alkali Lake and beyond.

I was expecting to see more waterfowls, but it was mostly American Coots. There were few American Wigeons, Ring-necked Ducks, 4 Canvasbacks, 3-4 Redheads, 2 Common Loons (at Alkali Lake), Northern Pintails and few Green-winged Teals seen in various ponds. There were no Pelicans at Alkali Lake.



American Coot Photo by Lubna



Bald Eagle Photo by Lubna

We saw a total of 3 Long-billed Curlews which was disappointing. A dozen or so Sandhill Cranes were present in different fields, and many flew above us at one point. Other birds included Mountain Bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks, very few Tree Swallows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and one Golden-crowned Kinglet.

There were no Yellow-rumped Warblers and no American Kestrel.



VEGGIE AND FLOWER STARTS ANNUALS AND PERENNIALS **BOOKS** 

> HOUSE HOLD ITEMS SPORTS GEAR







SATURDAY MAY 3 9:30-1PM

SCOUT ISLAND NATURE HOUSE, WILLIAMS LAKE BC

IF YOU HAVE PLANTS OR SMALL ITEMS YOU WISH TO DONATE OR HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EVENT PLEASE CALL: (250) 267-4652

OR EMAIL US AT: SCOUT.ISLAND.PLANT.SALE@GMAIL.COM

#### The Yared Sale plan and where you can help out:

As has happened in previous years, we will be meeting at the Nature House this Friday between 4pm and 7pm to collect and organize donations.

If you are able to help out on Friday, could you please connect with me and confirm you are able to come? We are looking for at least two or three volunteers to join Frances and I.

On Saturday, Frances and I will plan to be there by 7:30am to start setting up. We let people know they could drop off donations starting at 8:30am with the sale beginning at 9:30am.

It would be great to have a few folks who could help us set up tables outside and get the four stations organized starting around 7:30am. Please let me know if you are able to join us for that.

We can decide on Saturday who will be helping out at each station

Please let us know if you have a preference and/or if you are only available for specific chunks of time on Saturday

Lastly, we will need a few dedicated folks at the end to help with tear down and loading unsold items to trucks to be transported to various charities around town.

Please let me know if you are able to help with tear down

Thank you again for volunteering your time! It is always a fun event and we are really looking forward to it.

#### Charlotte



#### **Notes from the President**

By Margaret Waring President

#### March 28th Annual General Meeting.



Sue Volunteer of the year with Cathie

Thank you for coming and supporting our activities and club. We had a happy evening with a delicious potluck supper and some great door prizes of birdhouses and a full cookie jar from Karen Day and some books from Fred McMechan's collection. We were challenged by a few quizzes and enjoyed visiting together. We recognized life members present; Ordell Steen and Fred McMechan. The annual general meeting occurred.



Life members Ordell and Fred With Margaret, Lubna and Lara

We honoured and thanked our retiring directors; Ray Hornby, Natalie Swift and Peter Opie. We had reports from the treasurer, the president and education coordinator reviewing the past year. A slate of directors was elected. Sue Hemphill was recognized as the volunteer of the year.

#### 2024 President's Report for the Williams Lake Field Naturalists Club (presented at the AGM)

My goal has been to support our club and the Scout Island Nature Centre. It was a year of challenge and change.

Club activities have included some excellent field trips and evening programs. Six copies of our Newsletter, The Muskrat Express were published. We had a yard and plant sale in May and the funds raised were given as a bursary to a graduating grade 12 student. The Directors met monthly. Members who are not directors are welcomed to help us. Loyd C. has been working on bluebirds, organizing routes, and arranging house building and writing articles for our newsletter and the Tribune. Our Christmas bird count was organized by Sean D., Phil R. And Lubna K. Jim S. produced the newsletter and sent periodic email updates to you. I, along with other directors were supporting and learning with our new Executive Director for Scout Island Nature Centre.

We met with the City several times, updating each other regarding the management of Scout Island. Discussions and meetings occurred about Marie Sharpe Kindergarten use of the Nature House downstairs classroom and time available for other Marie Sharpe classes to have weekly visits. We met and shared information with our Nature Trust representative and local First Nations.

We are managing the funds that come from donations, grants, the City, regional district and School district for the management of Scout Island. We continue the ongoing battle to control the spread of invasive weeds and to establish native plants. A successful public event, Marsh Festival took place in June. We did not have a banquet in 2024 as we did not have someone to lead this event. I have had a number of inquiries about us having another banquet and hope someone will step up to be a leader. We are beginning to look at financing from grants and donations for the Otter Point Bridge that needs replacement.

We welcome and need you, your ideas, suggestions and participation.

It is a privilege to be part of this dedicated, knowledgeable, hard-working and skilled group of members and volunteers.

Respectfully submitted by Margaret Waring President of the Williams Lake Field Naturalist Society **Notes from the Director's Meetings.** 

We had some great resumes for our vacant position of part time Nature Centre Manager. I am happy to report that Lara Roorda has been hired as the new Nature Centre Manager. She is already busy at work in her new job. She will be at the Nature House most Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Email Addresses are in the process of changing.

We have been working on this and receiving some professional help. We will establish up to ten free accounts with some aliases in Office 365 and options for you to renew your membership and make donations electronically.

Lara's address will be manager@scoutisland.ca

Martin can be reached at ed.coordinator@scoutisland.ca

You can contact the president and directors of the Field Naturalists at <a href="mailto:directors@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca">directors@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca</a>
The newsletter, The Muskrat Express, will be sent from and can be contacted at <a href="mailto:muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca">muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca</a>
Keep an eye on your junk mail as that is where new addresses sometimes take your mail.

We will still be using paper and snail mail too!

Changes are occurring regarding use of the basement classroom in the Nature House. Starting in September the kindergarten students from Marie Sharpe Elementary school will be welcomed to the upstairs area by booking their time with the education coordinator. Exploring the Puddle Early Learning Centre will be having preschool programs in the basement classroom. I will let you know about registration in a future newsletter. You can contact them at 250-398-8410.

Officer positions were established at the March 11th directors meeting with Nola Daintith as Secretary, Ken Day as Treasurer, Sue Hemphill as Vice-President and Margaret Waring as President. Along with the Officer positions we have Cathie Hamm, Jeremy Vogt, Jean Oke, Michaela Waterhouse, Kim Zalay, Keith Monroe, Kath VanSpall and Jane Wellburn as Directors.

This morning in the sunshine in my back yard I saw yellow rumped warblers and white crowned sparrows as well as blossoms on my haskap berries. I am now sure spring is here.

#### **SINC Education Coordinators Annual Report**

By Martin Kruus

The past twelve months as Education Coordinator for Scout Island have truly flown by. It's never dull - I love the variety of nature activities that I get to take part in, and most of all I love being with the kids. Their questions still crack me up (though no laughing out loud is usually permissible) and their enthusiasm for and wonder at nature in all its magnificence is motivating as a constant reminder of why we prioritize this work.

Most of you know that our educational programs are different each season. There continues to be a pattern of peak demand in autumn and spring. Erin Hitchcock (Air Quality), Mary Forbes (Animals of all sorts), and Ben Tudor (Climate Change) are excellent education team members who help me shoulder the load during the school year. Of course our three full-time summer staff as well as the part-time year round high school staff are invaluable. Madi, Cheilene, and Adrien ran a very smooth ship last summer, and Avery, Carys and Ella have become very good at hosting Birthday Parties and showing the public the Nature House displays (it was their idea to stay open at least a day a week year round and that has boosted visitor numbers).

The Stream to Sea Salmonids in the classroom went very well last school year, while this year we have had more equipment issues and mortalities, probably because these are the offspring of the Big Bar Slide chinooks. I also heard last minute in September from two schools who had to temporarily bow out of the program due to staff shortages. Other concerns that hold back School District 27 teachers from participating more often in all of our programs are bussing availability and safety liability.

Our Environment Exposure Experience ("E cubed") high school program, led collaboratively with UBC Research Forest's Wild and Immersive educator, Mark Gill, continues to putter along, with decently attended field trips about organic vegetable growing, fire mitigation, and search and rescue this fall/winter. Our one disappointing hiccup came last May when we couldn't recruit enough students to hold a day trip about Rec Sites and Parks. Mark and I, supported by Lyn Capling, recently collaborated on a family Astronomy night too.

Thank you for allowing me to pursue other "side gigs" - it is satisfying to teach cross-country skiing at Bull Mountain, canoeing at Gavin Lake, and help run the Elementary School Trail run. My involvement as the regional bat coordinator is entering transition as I begin to mentor Ali Waterhouse to take over. This spring I hope we reach fruition on a bathroom mural project which involves the city and school children, and a public archaeology event with WLFN's Sugar Cane Archaeology.

I feel grateful for all the continuous learning opportunities that being a member of the field naturalists allows me. The presentations about Hornbills, Fishers, Arizona Birds, and Wildlife caught on cameras these past months were fascinating. Trail work, mostly on the far island, has also been satisfying, as a volunteer member of the infrastructure committee. The dedication of Margaret and Ray (and any other retiring board members I may have missed) to this organization fills me with a keenness to carefully contribute to make Scout Island sustainable for the animals, plants and people involved.

Yes, I have felt the stress of leadership transition this past year. But I firmly believe that collectively there are so many well intentioned good people involved in the Field Naturalist organization that Scout Island has a bright future.



#### Weed Warriors Needed at Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Spring is here and the invasive plants are beginning to show. The earlier they are dug the easier it is to do and to set them back. We will be focusing on thistle, burdock and night shade this year. There

are two ways you can help with this task—take part in one of the monthly group digs or adopt an area to work on whenever you have the time and energy. If you can help with this task to keep Scout Island habitat in "good shape," please email me and say which type you want to be part of. The monthly digs will be scheduled ahead and happen in the morning. If you adopt a site, I can meet with you and show you the site and train you to recognize the weeds and how to bag them. <a href="mailto:shemphill@xplornet.com">shemphill@xplornet.com</a> 250 620 3498 (home) 778 267 7427 (cell only when I am in town)

#### Thank You!

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN <a href="mailto:lmccsiz@gmail.com">lmccsiz@gmail.com</a>

After spending a pleasant Saturday with three keen, young naturalists who are new to the area, I feel grateful to our club. Michaela and I were around their age when the Williams Lake Field Naturalists accepted us as members. I suspect that Fred, Anna, maybe Ordell and Jim were around the age that Michaela and I are now. We were young and keen; they were energetic and learned. Through fieldtrips, programs, and socials the club gave us so much. Thank you.

In 1989, Anna Roberts convinced Michaela and I to manage a Mountain Bluebird route on Becher's Prairie. Now it's our turn. On Saturday April 26<sup>th</sup> 2025, we introduced Patrick, Deanna, and Rachel to the Bluebird Program. Patrick and Deanna are the new managers of the Toosey route; Rachel will manage one of the Springhouse routes. We spent the day at Toosey, learning about nest-box maintenance, the best locations for paired houses, the gathering of data from old nests, and how to observe the behaviour of birds near the boxes. Before saying any more about our day, however, I will thank Marg and Don Evans who took over the Toosey route from Dave White in 2022. Because the Toosey route is adjacent to my Becher's route, their nest box reports provided invaluable data.



Surprise—a Jumping Jack Squirrel Lives Here



#### Michaela, Rachel, Teanna & Patrick on Becher's Prairie

So, what about Saturday? In a bird-shell, we enjoyed a productive and satisfying trip. And it wasn't all work! Although maintenance and nest identification were a big part of the day, there were other memorable moments. For example, Patrick and Deanna experienced the views along Highway 20 for the first time; all three young naturalists observed Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows building nests and defending territories; large flocks of White Crowned Sparrows fluttered all around us; and everyone enjoyed a laugh when a squirrel startled yours truly with a Jack-in-the Box performance that nearly soiled my pants!

Another special moment was meeting Calvin Palmantier, an elder living at Toosey. He noticed us wandering the grassy verge and wondered if we were maintaining the nest boxes. After expressing his support for the Bluebird Program, Mr. Palmantier shared stories about firefighting, family, and unusual birds in the area—pheasants and chukars in particular. He also warned us to be mindful of some wild dogs. As we parted company, Calvin invited us to visit the band office, saying we would be welcome any time. Later in the day, our

crew happened upon some large, overgrown depressions. I speculated that these were likely winter lodges inhabited by First Nations, possibly before contact with Europeans. One long-dead snag inside a pit house depression looked at least 500 years old. No doubt someone in the band office will enlighten me some day soon.

I want to thank Patrick, Deanna, and Rachel for volunteering to manage bluebird routes. I also want to express my gratitude to all the folks who donate time and money to the Bluebird Program. Recently, hundreds of dollars for bird-house materials came from several donors who subscribe to <a href="mailto:cariboo-chilcotin-birds@googlegroups.com">cariboo-chilcotin-birds@googlegroups.com</a>. Some of this money has already been invested in the construction of 45 Johnson slot houses, which were built without charge by a handy local who wishes to remain anonymous. Almost all of these houses are on routes, as are the traditional houses built by Andrew Hutchinson and the LCSS students. At last count, there were only 16 houses left in the lock-ups. We started with approximately 180! Thank you, volunteers. The houses don't help birds until you put them on routes.

Finally, I want to thank fellow WL Field Naturalist Jim Sims and the members of his Easter crew for cutting plywood into parts for future bird houses, 32 in all. There are plans to make some of these available to the public as kits, and some might be used in a future workshop at Scout Island for families who want to learn more about Mountain Bluebirds. And one more big thank you. April 27<sup>th</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup> is National Volunteer Week. I believe that Williams Lake has more volunteers per capita than most communities in Canada. So, let's celebrate them.

#### Here is Your 2025 Field Trip List

Enter your favourites into your calendar and hopefully we will see you on the trails

#### Annual Chilanko Marsh Field Trip May 17th to 19th

(Leader Jim Sims: (778)746-2752 or smedleysims@gmail.com)

On Saturday we will conduct an annual bird species count at Chilanko Marsh. Please allow for a 2-hour drive and follow the wildlife viewing signs on the next right after the Puntzi Lake turnoff (approx. 200 km from Williams Lake). Please arrive at the tanker base by 9:00 am. After the walk around the marsh, you are welcome to join the party for a pot-luck supper and spend the night at Jim's home (Tern Inn) at Eagle Lake. Sunday morning you will be treated to Jim's famous Tern Inn Pancakes. There is limited room in the home and cabin so you might be more comfortable in a camper or tent. On Sunday there will be another walk and day of birding at one of many interesting nearby locations. Before you head back to town on Monday we will offer a shorter morning walk at another site.

## Balsamroot Flower Tour near Farwell Canyon. Saturday May 24 (Leaders: Peter Opie, 250-392-1440 and Ordell Steen, 250-267-5990).

In mid-May during many years, balsamroot flowers present a spectacular display on the grasslands near Junction Sheep Range Park above Farwell Canyon (see photo on Field Naturalists website Home Page). In some years, an abundance of other grassland plants occurs with the balsamroot, creating amazing colour combinations. To join us on our search again this year, meet at Scout Island at 8:00 a.m. Bring a camera, sufficient water, and hiking boots. Although we will travel mostly by vehicle on a public trail through private land, expect short walks through the grasslands.

## Flowering Plants of Scout Island Nature Centre. Wednesday evening May 28 (leader: Ordell Steen, 250-267-5990)

Meet at Scout Island Nature House parking lot at 6:00 p.m. for an evening walk on Nature Centre trails to discover, identify, and learn some of the many plant species that occur on the island. Bring a hand lens or magnifying glass if you have one and any plant guides you wish to use.

## Picnic and Paddle at Lac La Hache Tuesday June 10th (Leader Rick Dawson (250 392-3370)

We will meet at the provincial park picnic site at 5:30 to enjoy our own packed dinner and then paddle down the lake into the marsh. This area has a rich collection of waterbirds and paddlers can often spot a family of otters.

#### Hairy Fish and BC Lakes, Churn Creek Protected Area

Sunday, June 15 (Leader: Jim Young 398-7987).

With the Friends of Churn Creek, we will hike from Iron Gate Road. A moderate hike will take us through forest, grassland and along wetlands to Hairy Fish, BC Lake, and Grasshopper Lake. A loop will allow us to view a variety of habitats and some areas burned by prescribed fire and wildfire. Bring good boots, a hat, water and lunch. For carpooling we will convene at the wye parking lot west of the A&W at 7:00 am. Otherwise meet at the kiosk on Empire Valley Road at 9:00 am. Expect to return to Williams Lake by 5:00.

Farwell Creek: innovative forest management, a water fall, and an ancient village site. Sunday, July 20

(leaders: Peter Opie 250-392-1440, Ordell Steen 250-267-5990, and Michaela Waterhouse). Join us to view and discuss a forest management demonstration trial near Farwell Canyon in the morning and enjoy a hike along Farwell Creek (2.5 km one way) to the waterfall and village site in the afternoon. The demonstration trial was initiated in 2001 to evaluate innovative forest management practices for improving wildlife habitat, domestic range values, timber production and wildfire risk in densely ingrown Douglas-fir stands. Discussions will focus on the ecology and history of these commonly occurring type of stands, the purpose of treatments, and the results of long-term monitoring of the forests. The afternoon hike will travel along Farwell Creek for about 2.5 km through grasslands and a variety of forest ecosystems to the falls and then back to vehicles. Bring water, good boots, and a lunch. Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:30 a.m. to carpool.

## McIntosh Lakes canoe/kayak trip. Saturday August 9 (Leader: Ordell Steen 250-267-5990).

McIntosh Lakes are about 35 km by good road southeast of 150 Mile House. We will paddle the southern lake, starting from the rec site adjacent to the lake, through the marshes on sides of the narrows to those at the eastern end of the lake, about 4.5 km from the launch. The lake is seldom busy with other boaters. Expect to see waterfowl. Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 8:00 a.m.

#### Koster Lake, - Gooseberry Flats, Churn Creek

Sunday, 21 September (Jim Young 398-7987/Peter Opie 392-1440)

With the Friends of Churn, we will hike from Blackdome Road. A moderate hike will take us through forest and grassland to Koster lake, then through old-growth forest to the grassland of Gooseberry Flats above Churn Creek. Bring good boots, a hat, water and lunch. For carpooling we will convene at the wye parking lot west of the A&W at 7:00 am. Otherwise meet at the kiosk on Empire Valley Road at 9:00 am. Expect to return to Williams Lake by 5:00.

#### Junction Sheep Range Saturday October 18th

#### (Leaders Loyd Csizmadia & Michaela Waterhouse 250-398-5754)

This day-long drive and hike into the park is rather challenging. Dress warmly and wear sturdy hikers. Walking poles might be handy as well. **Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am**. To minimize our impact on the grasslands, we encourage carpooling. If you own a vehicle with good clearance and traction, we will appreciate your services. Don't forget to bring lunch, a thermos of warm liquid or freshwater, as well as your binoculars and camera. The California Bighorns may be in rut, so look forward to seeing some sheep, and perhaps some head-butting!