

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

JUNE 2025 NEWSLETTER



WHAT ARE
YOU DOING ?
THIS SUMMER.



Riding
the waves





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, muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca 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 <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>

Scout Island Nature Centre Website <http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca>

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 September. 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



Field Trip Reports

Birding at Scout Island

Submitted by Betty Donahue

April 27th was a lovely sunny day as seven people met at Scout Island to look for birds and waterfowl. Spring is a great time with all the birds in their bright breeding plumage. The abundant Red-winged Blackbirds and Yellow-headed Blackbirds were demanding attention with their raucous calls in the marsh. Besides the usual Coots, American Wigeons and Canada Geese, we were fortunate to spot a wary Wood Duck. The highlight of the trip was spotting a least weasel scurrying across the Willow trail while carrying small prey in its mouth. Every trip to Scout Island will reveal delightful surprises.

Chilanko Marsh 2025

Report submitted by Betty Donahue

May long weekend saw 17 naturalists and two energetic dogs meet for a bird count at Chilanko Marsh. Although the weather was cool and unsettled, we managed to avoid most of the showers and the mosquitoes were nonexistent.

We noticed that the total number of birds and waterfowl continues to decline, but we managed to spot 80 species and a total of 580 individual birds. Over the last 41 years of doing the counts at Chilanko Marsh, the average number of species observed is 75, the best year was 89 species and the total number of species observed is 165. Thanks to Jim Sims for keeping these stats over the years.



Little did Jim realize when he led the first trip into Chilanko Marsh in 1984 that he would still be leading it in 2025! It is always one of the highlights of the field trip calendar.

After the field trip, Jim graciously opens his home at Tern Inn on Eagle Lake for a potluck and overnight stay. This year was especially nostalgic as we gathered in the cozy original cabin for supper and ate our meals on the dishes donated to the cabin by Fred McMechan. Fred was always a regular on this trip over the years; and we are sad that he is no longer able to make the trek.

The next day, Jim prepared his famous pancake breakfast for the whole group. With full bellies, we headed on a hike to the north side of Tatla Lake. We were hoping to spot the elusive Lewis Woodpecker, but it was not to be.

Thank you, Jim for another memorable weekend.

Picnic and Kayaking on Lac La Hache.

By Margaret Waring

It was a beautiful Tuesday evening, June 10th. We had our picnic supper at the Provincial beach tables. After this, 4 kayaks, 5 people and one dog headed off for leisurely exploration to the north end of the lake. We watched an Osprey catch a fish and then an Eagle come to get the catch from the Osprey. Neither bird ended up with a fish. There were several Common Mergansers near the shore. It was a lovely evening.



Oceans Ahoy!

Adrien Zimmerman and Martin Kruus

On May 12th, the Nature House welcomed a new batch of intertidal creatures, delivered by Doug Swanston. Doug operates *Northwest Seacology*, a non-profit focused on ocean education. We try to entice him to visit annually to help us learn the best methods to maintain life in our saltwater tank. He spruced up our ocean tank with a variety (53 species?!) of wonderful creatures like a rose star anemone, tunicates, feather duster tube worms, and a decorator crab. Doug finished his visit with an excellent evening presentation to a small group, telling the story of his life and passion for marine conservation, then describing the creatures up close as they entered their new home.



"Where's Waldo?"

Can you spot the plumose anemone, feather duster tube worm, crab, limpet, sea urchin, etc.?



These animals and plants are used to teach children about the water cycle, climate change effects on the ocean (storm surge, acidification, extreme heat in the intra tidal zone), aquatic marine ecology, and the life cycle of Pacific Salmon.

To celebrate World Oceans Day, on June 8th, Martin led a family-focused program. Children and their parents were invited to learn about and gently touch some of the marine aquarium inhabitants (both veterans and Doug's newer ones).

The crowd of fifteen then released some of the Nechako Chinook fry that have been raised from eyed eggs since November at the Nature House as part of the Stream to Sea *Salmonids in the Classroom* program. We slipped them into the Williams Lake River to begin their long journey downstream to become smolts at the Fraser Estuary and then enter the Salish Sea.

Exploring the Puddle Preschool

We are Excited to announce that Scout Island Nature Centre will have a preschool operated by Exploring the Puddle at Scout Island this fall!!

Exploring the Puddle Early Learning Centre  NATURE PRESCHOOL  Recognizing the importance of outdoor & nature play, the children venture out for daily explorations on the trails.

Email us today to book a tour!

info@exploringthepuddle.ca

Ages 2.5-5

Brimming with engaging activities and provocations, our learning space embraces exploration, curiosities and discovery.



Scout Weed Warriors Needed at Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

You can help control invasive plants at Scout Island by taking part in the July 12 Weed Removal being lead by BC Invasives at the Cotton Site (details attached). This is not technically Scout Island, but walkers from the site bring the invasive plants with them when they cross the bridge. So weeds removed there does help prevent the spread.

We also continue to need help with weed control at Scout Island. If you would like to help there, please contact Sue at shemphill@xplornet.com

Scout Island Proudly Presents: a Week of ADULT & FAMILY PROGRAMS

July 2nd – Nature Photographer's Forum 4pm-6pm

Connect with other nature photographers, go for a nature photography walk. Open to beginners. Equipment is not provided

July 2nd – Bird watching for absolute beginners 6pm-7:30pm

Learn how to identify common birds in Williams Lake. All equipment provided

July 3rd – Bird Box Building 12pm-4pm

Learn about the Bluebirds and help us build nestboxes to support the local cavity nesting songbirds. All equipment provided.

July 3rd – Plants Make the World we Live in 5pm-8pm

Learn how to identify plants, what they give us, and what we can give back. Paint with plant dyes. All equipment provided

ISC Invasive Species Council of BC

Invasive Weed Removal Day

SATURDAY, JULY 12TH 2025

- 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.
- Refreshments provided
- No cost, materials provided

WORKSHOPS DETAILS

- Learn to identify invasive weeds
- Hands-on skill development
- Safe-space environment

**All Ages Welcome*

Questions? Contact Alex
amutch@bcinvasives.ca | 587-384-9602

Williams Lake Community Centre

July 4th – Bat Box Building Workshop 10am-4pm

Learn about bats and help us to build bat boxes to support local bat species. Please bring a drill if you have one .

Programs are aimed at adults, but children 12+ are welcome to attend with parents. All programs are free.
250-398-8532 or email inquiries@scoutisland.ca



Family Fun!

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN
lmccsiz@gmail.com

My two grandsons are a pair of rambunctious preschoolers. Running, rolling, climbing, chasing; throwing, kicking, leaping; squirting, splashing: how does a grandpa inject a little calm into the day?

“Look! A Tree Swallow.” “Where Grandpa?”

And so, for about 10 minutes we observed the parents flying in and out of a nestbox, their beaks alive with wriggling insects. Hoping to prolong the calm, I asked, “Would you like to help grandpa build a bird house?”

It was the first time I had invited them into my workshop. They entered cautiously, wide eyes flickering across the organized jumble of projects and tools. Before awe could explode into action, I handed each kid the 6 parts we would need to build a nest box. Swiftly, I gathered the drill, screwdrivers, screws, rubber mallet, measuring tape, straight-edge, and pencils; then we headed for a less hazardous space in the basement.

Having pre-cut, ready-to-assemble parts meant no saws! I also had a handy jig to hold the wall-boards in place, meaning the battery-powered tools would be easier to control and the boards wouldn’t twist or fall over onto little fingers. Grandkids are precious!

Lining up the two wall-boards in the jig required light tapping with a rubber mallet. The boys enjoyed this, one tapping the first wall and the other the second. Next, we measured the position of the backboard. During construction, the backboard steadies the two walls so that they can be removed from the jig. But later, it will be used to mount the finished house to its post, thus the need to measure 2 inches of holding wood at the bottom and 1 & 3/4 inches at the top. I measured; the kids made the marks. Then we rested the backboard on top of the walls.

Attaching the backboard to the walls requires alignment. I started with the right wall. Together, we wiggled the backboard until the measured marks and the long edge formed a smooth fit; then I drilled the first screw-hole. The hole is just under a ¼ inch from the edge, and the drill must penetrate into the wallboard in order to prevent splitting. The drill was a little scary for them, so I made a second hole and invited them to help me with the hand-held screwdriver. They didn’t know about “righty-tighty, lefty-loosey.” They also didn’t have the strength to twist the screws all the way in. I completed the task with the electric screwdriver. They were impressed!

To speed things up, I quickly repeated the procedure for the left wall, but didn’t twist the 2 screws all the way in, since the insertion of the floor requires flexibility in the walls. With the alignment firmly established, we added holes for 2 more screws, the boys taking turns pulling the triggers, first on the drill and then on the screwdriver, while I held each power-tool safely in place. That done, I pulled the partially assembled unit out of the jig, and we measured for the floorboard.

This is the most challenging piece to insert. And since the kids were just learning to use a tape-measure, I kept the



Adult Tree Swallow Watches the Watchers

numbers simple: 1,1,1, and 1; which translates into 4 dots 1 inch from the bottom on the inside of each sidewall. After marking the boards, I held the straight-edge, and the oldest grandkid penciled a line connecting two dots on the right wall and two dots on the left. The youngest grandkid then inserted the floor so that the lower edges paralleled the lines and the back edge connected with the rear wall. I then marked the positions of the 4 screws.

“1, 2, 3, 4, 5.” The oldest is now 4, and he likes to count. So, it was his job to open the container of 2-inch screws, remove the exact number, and then close the lid again. The floor was soon in place, and we had one screw to spare! I decided to add one more, thereby securing the floor to the backboard. “1, 2, 3, 4.” The roof was now attached, leaving only the door.

The two wall boards have pre-drilled holes for the hinge-screws. The door has a pre-drilled circular entrance that is 1 9/16th inches in diameter, the perfect size for a Tree Swallow or Mountain Bluebird, but less compatible with squirrels, cowbirds, starlings, and other less desirable occupants.

For the sake of simplicity, the boys and I measured 1 and 1, meaning a pencil mark 1 inch from the bottom of the door on each side where the hinge-screw will enter the wood. Using the marks as a guide, I held the door in line with the hinge holes while one helper turned the right screw a couple of partial twists into the door and my other helper did the same on the left. Carefully, we tested the door. The small gap at the top not only prevents the door from binding on the roof, it also provides ventilation. The bottom of the door should swing freely underneath the floor. Two checkmarks for our workmanship! After removing the door, I drilled two guide-holes, and then we hand-screwed the door into place. Other than checking that all 17 screws had been tightened, we needed to complete two final tasks. First, each grandkid drilled a mounting hole, one in the top and one in the bottom of the backboard. These holes make it easier to attach the nest box to a post. And finally, I drilled 2 pinning holes for the locking pins required to secure the door. I like to drill these downwards at a 45-degree angle with a 1/8th inch drill. Each hole must be deep enough to accommodate most of a 2-inch galvanized nail, and each nail must fit snugly, not tightly.

That’s it! To the right is a photo of the box my grandsons helped me build (or I helped them build!) from a kit. We will paint it the next time they visit. Blue would look nice, don’t you think?



Six Boards, 17 Screws and a Couple of Nails

I have also included a photo of what is included in the nest box kit available for an introductory cost of \$20 at the Scout Island Nature Center (old chair not included!). These kits help to fund both the Mountain Bluebird and the Education Programs sponsored by the Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

My grandkids and I would like to thank the generous donors who provided the dollars needed for plywood, nails, and screws. Not only does your generosity fund the bird house kits, but it also means there will be houses available for the Bluebird Program in years to come. We would also like to thank Jim Sims and his Eagle Lake crew who measured, cut, drilled, and grooved enough plywood for 32 nest boxes. Some of these kits will become part of a workshop during a family day at the Nature Center in July. For more information about that, contact Martin Kruus, the Education Coordinator for the Scout Island Nature Centre: 250-398-8532.



Paint it Blue

Happy Summer Solstice, Everyone!

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



Common Poorwill by Moonlight

Whoever said that birding was exclusively a daytime activity? On June 7th, Lubna, Sean and I headed out after sunset to do a Flammulated Owl survey on Moon Road and English Road. This annual survey data is used by Birds Canada to monitor population trends and identify species at risk.

Under a nearly full moon, on a clear night with no wind and the sound of the Fraser River in the background, it was an amazing time. We heard eleven Flammulated Owls on our route! As an extra bonus, we got close views of several Common Poorwills. Our talented photographer was able to capture this wonderful shot.

Photo by Lubna Khan

Written by Betty Donahue

The remaining 2025 Field Trip List

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!