

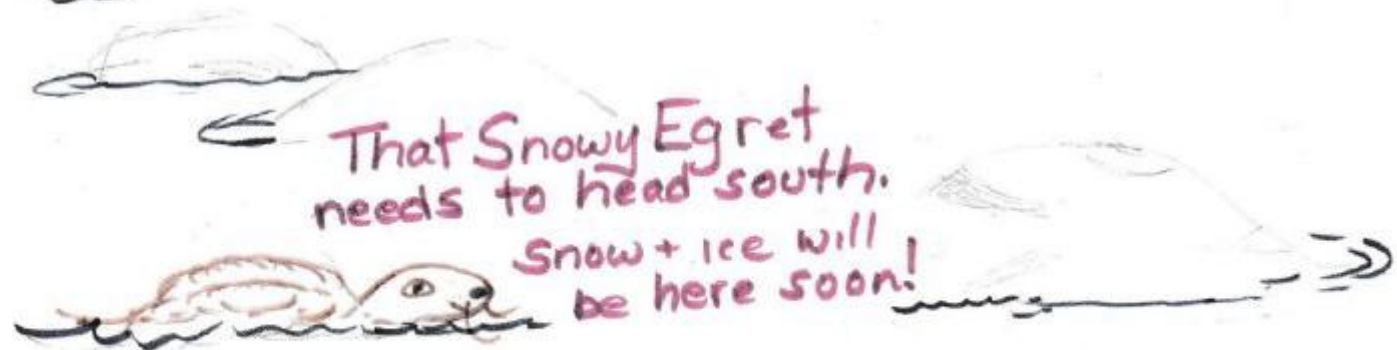
MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

NOVEMBER + DECEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Should I stay
around for
the **DEC 14
CHRISTMAS
BIRD
COUNT?**



That Snowy Egret
needs to head south.
Snow + ice will
be here soon!

A New Year will soon be here too.
Did you
RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?
mzw



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

Your 2025 membership in the Williams Lake Field Naturalists will expire on January 1st, 2026

Please renew your membership on time. Membership forms can be downloaded from the WLFN website at <https://williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca/become-a-member/>. New this year, you have the option of using this site to renew your membership directly on line without having to download a membership form. A form has also been attached for your convenience. Membership dues can be paid via e-transfer to membership@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 later in January 2026. 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



Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count

On Sunday, December 14th we will be conducting our 58th annual Christmas Bird Count. The count period runs from Dec 14 to Jan 5, so we have set our dates to the first Sunday hoping to get the count underway before extreme cold sets in and the lake freezes over.

For the most part the strategy works well but many is the time, with high hopes and a good crop of waterbirds, we wake up on count day to a solidly frozen lake.

Last year fortune smiled on us; the lake remained open and we added 3 new species to go towards our second-best total of 64; a Tundra Swan and a Yellow-billed Loon on the lake, and 2 Virginia Rails in the marsh at the gravel pit ponds in the lower river valley.

This year (at the time of writing) we have 2 vagrant birds tempting fate. A misguided Great Egret has been at Scout Island since the beginning of November, and while it would be great (unprecedented) to have it on the count, our hopes are that it gets out while it can.

Another bizarre bird that has been present in town in November is a Painted Bunting coming to a feeder at a location disclosed only as close to Pinchbeck Park. This is only the 9th record for the Province of BC, and were it not for



Painted Bunting

the Terra Ridge Scarlet Tanager on our 2012 count, would be considered an absolute impossibility.

The 3 new birds bring our aggregate to 127 species. We also lost one species when the American Ornithological Society concluded the Hoary Redpoll was a sub-species of the Common Redpoll, and the species renamed simply, 'Redpoll'.

Sean Donahue has contacted all our previous participants but there is always room for more. For more information you can contact Sean at donahue9@telus.net or call (250) 267-2800. The post-count gathering and pot luck will be at Scout Island Nature Centre this year with doors opening at 5:00. Please contact Betty Donahue at (250) 267-3353 to help us co-ordinate dishes.



SINC needs show shovelers

We've had an absolutely beautiful autumn, and winter has come knocking, and depending on how hard she knocks we may need some assistance at Scout Island. Lara, Martin and Denise do the bulk of the snow removal throughout the winter at Scout Island. However, at times they may need some assistance with heavier snowfalls, or when they are unable to be on site.

If you feel that you can commit to a week or two to be on call for such assistance please let me know and I will schedule you in for your preferred week(s). If you happen to be super flexible then please let me know if there are week(s) that you are not available.

Once the schedule is complete, I will send out a package with info and phone numbers to this year's volunteers. If you are interested in giving a call after a dump to see if extra help is needed Denise's (care taker) number will be on the list. On the other hand, if you would prefer to help out at your discretion, please know that your assistance is greatly appreciated by the staff and Field Naturalists at Scout Island.

Brief description of areas to be cleared: (A detailed set of instructions will be sent out with a schedule to volunteers.) The areas around the Nature House ... paths from parking lot to Nature House and parking lot to Pre-School entrance down below. Also, around the Block House and the decks on both bridges on days that Arnold is not on site. Anything after these is a bonus.

Weeks to be covered (Monday – Sunday):

December 15-21	January 19-25	February 23- March 1
December 22-28	January 26- February 1	March 2-8
December 29- January 4	February 2-8	March 9-15
January 5-11	February 9-15	
January 12-18	February 16-22	

Thank you for your assistance,

Kim Zalay 😊

Williams Lake Field Naturalists
kim_mzalay@hotmail.com
 250-296-3220 (home)
 250-305-6227 (cell)

Caribou in the Cariboo: an update on population

An evening presentation at SINC on January 22nd, 2026; Starts at 7:00pm

By: Rachael Stapletonfor

This presentation will provide an overview of the life history of caribou in British Columbia with a particular focus on

the herds that are found in the Cariboo region. It will explore key aspects of caribou biology, including their seasonal movements, and habitat requirements. Additionally, it will address the growing range of challenges faced by caribou populations today such as loss of habitat and predation pressure. Updated population estimates for the Cariboo-region herds will be shared, along with an explanation of the monitoring methods used to track changes in their numbers over time. The session will be led by Rachel Stapleton, a Wildlife Biologist with the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship. Rachel specializes in caribou population monitoring and has experience conducting field surveys and analyzing demographic trends. Her work contributes directly to evidence-based management strategies aimed at ensuring the persistence and resilience of caribou across British Columbia.'



Calm Before the Storm (Junction Sheep Range Field Trip Report)

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN

lmccsiz@gmail.com

Remnants of a recurring Japanese typhoon were forecast to reach Williams Lake on Saturday, October 18th, the day that six Field Naturalists hoped to visit the Junction Sheep Range. At 8AM, we agreed to take our chances, happily climbed into two warm 4x4's with excellent tires, and dreamed of sunshine on the plateau.

After crossing Sheep Creek Bridge and winding our way uphill from 378 meters elevation at the Fraser River to about 915 at the edge of the plateau, we escaped the icy mist but not the clouds. The prairie landscape looked rather bleak and empty, but near Meldrum Creek Road Michaela spied a Northern Shrike, and a short while later we interrupted a group of scavenging birds feasting on roadkill. The guest of honour at the banquet was a mature bald eagle with beautiful plumage. The crows and ravens looked rather handsome as well. I won't describe the deer.



Good Company Overlooking the Chilcotin River

At the ponds along Farwell Canyon Road, we paused to admire a small group of Trumpeter Swans and a raft or two of brown ducks, mainly mallards. Later on, we flushed four Ruffed Grouse. That's it for birds. Lubna would have been very disappointed.

Then again, maybe not. At about kilometer 20 on the Farwell Road, we encountered one young ram, three ewes, and a lone lamb. After snapping some photos, we continued to the bridge that crosses the Chilcotin River. The man who prevents folks from stopping near the river returned our wave.

Crossing the bridge at a crawl, I leaned out the window to study the deep and lengthy crack in the broad, unstable wall of rock that would inevitably tumble into the river. My foot hovered over the accelerator even as I craned my neck, hoping to spot the petroglyphs. Apparently, one was



Chummy for the Time Being

illegally removed some years ago and then thrown into the Fraser before the authorities arrived. Does anyone know the story? (I would love to hear it.) Given the current situation, I wondered about the fate of the rest. Too late for pictures, I suppose.

The washboard on the switchbacks was beyond awful this year. After a rattling decent, the return up-hill was like riding a jackhammer. Happily, after hopping, fish-tailing, and ratta-tat-tatting past the first herd of aloof sheep, we encountered a second herd—three rams, three ewes, and two lambs—who appeared equally unperturbed by our approach. When I popped out of the truck with my camera, I swear they even posed for me!

At the top of the hill, we escaped the incessant hammering by driving to the viewpoint. From there we could gauge the weather. Other than a squall or two in the heights of land above the Chilcotin River and the odd snowflake fluttering by, we saw little evidence of an approaching tropical storm. The grassland exists because the Coast Mountains to the west deflect incoming Pacific systems, and any residual moisture is typically funneled away through the network of deeply eroded, dendritic gullies that channel both moisture and wind toward the Fraser River. A diminished typhoon, however, might power through, so to be on the safe side, Michaela and I consulted the group and we adjusted the trip in order to avoid any steep tracks that could become hazardously muddy. That meant not driving into the park where the sheep gather for the rut. Judging by the chumminess of the rams in the second herd, we were too early for any head-butting anyway. Besides, everyone was ready for a hike.

(pic 3)

Some jolly soul in a walking group once said, “Shared footsteps make the hours vanish.” So true. We spent a few pleasant hours hiking to the north-west end of Junction



The Kind of Butting We Got to See

Sheep Range Provincial Park and back. There were no birds, no deer, no sheep, but no one was counting the minutes. Lunch break happened well past noon. Inside the park’s western boundary, we sat or stood or wandered in the tall, golden, ungrazed grass overlooking the grandeur of rolling prairie and gnarled interior fir. Nourished by more than our sandwiches, we were ready for the trip home.

(pic 4)



A Nourishing View

During the drive back, we encountered rain. By the time we reached Scout Island, the remnants of a recurving Japanese typhoon were darkening the sky, soaking the hills, and blowing foam from the peaks of churning waves. After hurried “thank-yous” and drippy hugs, we retreated toward the warmth of our houses.



Notes from the President

By Margaret Waring President
Hello Members,

The days are quite short, festive activities are starting and the New Year will be here before we know it.

I walked at Scout Island Saturday November 29th and did not see the Great Egret but I did see Kris Andrews who was looking for it too. She had seen it the day before and was hoping it had left town as there is now ice along most edges of the marsh where it feeds.

I hope you are looking forward to the Christmas bird count and the Pot Luck Supper at the Nature House on December 14th. Please contact Sean Donahue (250 267 2800 and donahue9@telus.net) if you want to join the activity or need more information. The team leading the bird count are Sean, Phil Ranson and Lubna Khan. Bird counter or not, you are welcome to come and join the pot luck celebration.

Many activities have been underway. Ken, Sue and I went to the joint council of the City and CRD to request final funds for replacing the Otter Point bridge. Be sure to thank Ken and Sue and Lara for all the time and effort writing grants, collecting donations and all they have contributed toward creating a new Otter Point Bridge. The steel frame for the new bridge has been ordered. Check out the new see through viewpoint from the Otter Point Boardwalk. It was just added this month.

Naturalist members were present at a recent City council meeting supporting the clean air group presentation.

Martin has been busy with Salmon “babies” from the Chilko and Nechako, caring for them, teaching others how to do this and delivering them to schools.

Many thanks to Bev Sellars for showing us her beautiful and informative film on Salmon and the Fraser River.

Our membership team of Cathie H. and Kim Z. are working on updating membership forms and payment to be available on line as well as by paper. Please remember to renew your membership for next year.

Nola has been the lead to update the Scout Island Web Site and we hope to have this ready for the end of December.

We appreciate all the donations, work, support and input from our members.

Please reach out to me with any new ideas, questions or concerns and if you would like to be a director next year.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

By Jim Sims

This rare visitor to Scout Island, for the past month, has been causing a lot of excitement amongst the local birders. If you have not seen it, a trip down to the island is well worth while. This Egret is a bit smaller than our more common Herons and can be found around the island at any of the places you might expect to find a Heron. I was fortunate to get this photo right in front of the blind at the start of the Willow Trail.

On May 24th, 1987 I was participating on a club field trip to Stum Lake. We were canoeing and I believe we were attempting to count the number of nesting Pelicans. I



Definitely not a Snowbird

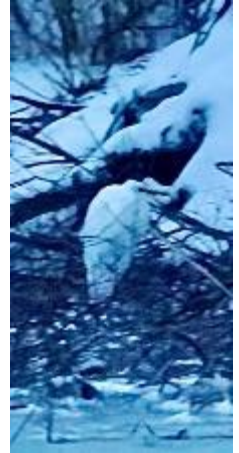
observed an albino Heron along the cattail shoreline. I was promptly corrected by Anna Roberts as it was a Great Egret. At that time this was the only sighting of this Egret in the Cariboo Chilcotin region. Three years later, on May 18th a second Great Egret returned to the East end of Williams Lake. It soon found its way to Scout Island and remained in the area until the end of June when high water in the marsh may have encouraged it to move on. Since then, there have been a few more sightings in the Cariboo Chilcotin Region and most have been at Scout Island. The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds now designates this Egret as an "Occasional" species, more than 6 sightings but not seen every year.

At this time of the year the Egret should be settling in for the winter far to the south of us. They nest in the south east of the United States but also in scattered locations in the rest of the US as well as southern Canada. They nest in colonies and the nests are located in trees similar to the Great Blue Heron. Following nesting they are known to disperse great distances from the nesting site. This desire to disperse may explain why they have visited the Cariboo.

Early in the 20th century their numbers in North America had dropped by more than 95% as their Plumes were desired to decorate hats. This was banned early in the 20th century and since then their numbers have bounced back. The population has been increasing by 1.5% each year and is no longer a species of concern. Perhaps this is why we see more of them in the Cariboo in recent times.

We all hope our rare visitor decides to join the snowbirds and head south for the winter. The snow and ice might help it with the camouflage but it might have more problems finding food. Yes, it was still here for the snow fall on the weekend, photo by Kris Andrews.

References: *Muskrat Express* (Jun. 1987, May 1990 & Jun 1990)
Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds
The Birds of British Columbia Vol. one



Support Scout Island Nature Centre

Feeling inspired to give back? Looking for a meaningful way to make a difference *and* enjoy a tax benefit? Consider a donation to **Scout Island Nature Centre**.

Your generosity helps us:

- Stay open and accessible to the public
- Provide engaging nature and educational programs
- Maintain our trails and protect our wild spaces

How to donate:

- Send a cheque to Scout Island Nature Center: 1305A Borland Rd. Williams Lake, BC V2G 5K5
- E-transfer to payment@scoutisland.ca (remember to include your mailing address in the comment)
- Or donate securely through Canada Helps: [williams-lake-field-naturalists](https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/williams-lake-field-naturalists/) | [CharityProfile](https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/scout-island-nature-centre/) | [Donate Online](https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/scout-island-nature-centre/)

Thank you for helping keep Scout Island Nature Centre vibrant, well-staffed, and thriving for future generations.

Lara



🦋 Enjoy a Merry Holiday Season and we hope to see you all in 2026 🦋