

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALIST

JANUARY + FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER



MARK YOUR CALENDAR  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,  
FRIDAY MARCH 27 6PM  
CULTURAL + PRESCRIBED BURNING  
PROGRAM - THURS - FEB 12 - 7PM



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](mailto: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](mailto:muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca)

To everyone that has already renewed their Field Naturalist membership for 2026, a huge thank you! 😊  
If membership renewal has slipped your mind, we understand that life sometimes gets in the way and look forward to hearing from you very soon.

### Ways to renew:

1. Check out our new online fill and submit form available on our website [www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca](http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca)
2. Also on our website is a PDF form that can be printed out and filled in. The completed PDF form can either be uploaded and set to [membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca](mailto:membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca), or snail mailed to Williams Lake Field Naturalists at **1305 A Borland Rd, Williams Lake, BC**.
3. Of course, we still like to see your friendly faces at the Nature House so you may also stop by to pick up a form, drop off a completed form, or pay your 2026 fees.
4. Fees can also be mailed in using the above street address, or e-transferred using the [membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca](mailto:membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca) address.

**2026 Membership Fees:** Student \$10.00; Adult \$30.00; Family \$35.00

- An additional \$5.00 if you would like a paper copy of the BC Nature magazine mailed to your home through Canada Post.

**Reminder:** Please sign both the front and back of the registration form. The online fillable form has boxes for you to check to take care of this.

**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 early March. 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](mailto:muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca)



From Jim at Eagle Lake

The birding at Eagle Lake has been rather quiet this year, at least until I finally broke down and bought hearing aids. The Short-eared Owls from Anaham and Tatla abandoned their areas. Perhaps this was due to the freezing rain early in the New Year that created a very hard snow pack. I expect this made it too difficult for the owls to feed. The only Waterfowl that I have consistently found on Tatlayoko Lake has been a single male Bufflehead.

This year, for the first time I have had Juncos stay for the winter. The flock numbers 8 and they feed on the ground usually amongst the low brush beside the house. I expect they are feeding on the many bits of sunflower seeds that were dropped by the Chickadees. They never feed on the sunflower feeder but will occasionally go to the suet. In the past the Juncos left well before the first snow fall and were one of the first to return in the early spring.



Also new for me this winter has been 2 different Sparrows, Song and a juvenile White-crowned. During the winter months, The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds list White-crowned Sparrows as Occasional (more than 6 sightings but not every year). It has been here since the New Year and can be found most days. I can usually spot it amongst the Juncos by its different feeding habits, especially when the snow is gone from under the brush. They are known to do what is called a "double scratch" that involves a quick hop back to turn over leaves followed by a quick forward pounce.



## **Christmas Bird Count Report (2025)**

By Phil Ranson

The Williams Lake Field Naturalists held their 58<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird count on Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>; on possibly the warmest count day ever. Maximum temperatures at the airport were 5.9°C and a degree or two warmer in the valley. It has been shown many times in the past that good weather and an open lake do not necessarily make for a better count – but not this time. We ended the day with a record count of 70 species, one better than the previous high set in 2021.

With a full complement of 42 observers in the field, all accessible areas within the 12 kilometre count radius were covered. One party (Proulx/Proulx) was on station at 07:00 to listen for owls – and was rewarded with a pair of duetting Great Horned Owls on Chimney Lake Road. Only the third time this species has been recorded on the count. The remaining 17 parties spread out to their designated areas to take advantage of the early morning feeding activity, while feeder watchers topped up their bird seed and gathered by the window with notebooks in hand. Over the years there has been a steady decline in winter bird feeding, but those that do are usually well rewarded.

The most numerous birds in the count total of 4,567 individuals, was the Rock Pigeon with a record high 768. Many of which were straining the power lines above a well stocked feeder on Cameron St. This species has been showing a steady increase in numbers since the count began. Not far behind was the American Crow with 662 which is the highest number since 2001. This species however has been fluctuating between the 300 and 900 mark for well over 40 years.

The anticipated influx of Bohemian Waxwings did not occur until the New Year, even so it had the third highest numbers with 326 – but nothing like the almost 5000 birds that invaded the City in 2021 and made up over half of all the bird numbers that winter. One species that did come as a surprise was the American Robin which although not unexpected in winter, had double the previous high count with 60 tallied.

Other count highs were generally in response to 95% of Williams Lake being ice free. This included 17 Trumpeter Swans, 33 Bufflehead, 7 Greater Scaup, 6 Barrow's Goldeneye, 27 Common Mergansers and 4 Great Blue Herons. Other high counts that could be attributed to the relatively mild winter were 4 Short-eared Owls, 61 Song Sparrows and the doubling of numbers for the American Goldfinch with 237. For the second year running, the Donahue/Donahue/Khan party found 2 Virginia Rails at the gravel pit ponds as well as the only Marsh Wrens (2) on the count - which they felt was just reward for the 12 kilometre slog they put in down the river valley.

Almost every year we add new species to the overall count total and this year was no exception. A Red-breasted Sapsucker visiting the Waterhouse/Csizmadia feeder on Fox Mountain became our 128<sup>th</sup> species to be recorded since the count began in 1969. Although it is normally very unusual to find this species in the interior in winter, the Quesnel Christmas bird count also had one this year and 100 Mile House had one last year. It will be interesting to see if a trend is developing. It should also be noted that Michaela and Loyd put in 17 km on foot in snow depths of up to 30 cm.

A special mention to some unsung heroes on the count; Nola and Rodger have uncomplainingly covered the same 'west end of town' route for well over 25 years. This year they put in 13.5 kilometers, mostly on icy sidewalks to make sure - it must seem to them, that the pigeons and crows get their rightful spot at the top of our list. Also, thanks to our 'out of towners' who came in from 100 Mile (and beyond) and Quesnel to make this - the best count ever!



**Red-breasted Sapsucker photo by Loyd**

## **Cultural and Prescribed Burning Education Opportunities**

SINC February 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm

The City of Williams Lake, Williams Lake First Nation and the BC Wildfire Service will be hosting a presentation on Thursday, February 12 at 7 pm at the Scout Island Nature Centre. This presentation will focus on how Scout Island, as a centre for public education, can support ongoing education opportunities on the benefits and history of cultural and prescribed burning. Deepen your understanding of the history of fire as an ecological restoration tool and how cultural and prescribed burning practices can benefit and influence positive environmental changes, and how we can continue to educate our community on these practices.

## **Spring Break Nature Camp**

This spring break our small group will dive into the wonderful world of nature as creatures begin to wake from their winter slumber. Spring Break Camp is a week-long program offered at Scout Island Nature Centre led by educator Mark Gill. Children, aged 7-11, can register for the week and participate in child-led creative projects/games, form friendships and explore nature. As creatures begin to wake from their winter slumber, we'll lean into the opportunities that variable spring weather presents and get curious about birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, rocks and water.

Monday to Friday March 23-27, 2026

Drop off 8:30-9:00 (Program 9:00-3:00) Pick up 3:00-3:30

Registration link [Spring Break Nature Camp \(ages 7-11\) March 23-27th, 2026 Tickets, Multiple Dates | Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/spring-break-nature-camp-ages-7-11-march-23-27th-2026-tickets-145300301007)



## **Notes from the President**

By Margaret Waring President  
January 2026

Hello and Happy New Year to all club members,

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership, and if you haven't yet we always welcome new and returning members of all ages. We hope all the glitches have been sorted out and we are happy to have you on board. Thank you to the membership team of Kim and Cathie and Lara and BC Nature and others. I am hoping you will like the new system.

Since I last wrote to you, we have had two meetings of the directors, December 16th and January 13th.

We had a successful Christmas bird count followed by a potluck on December 14th. Bird count results will be in this newsletter.

On January 22nd Rachael Stapleton gave an evening presentation on Caribou and their history in B.C. Several other evening programs are being planned so be watchful for events to be announced.  
Have you been able to check out the new updated web site for Scout Island?

Lara and others post announcements as well as great pictures and interesting stories on Facebook.  
Following popular demand, we are looking into options for a fall banquet. I would welcome ideas and suggestions.  
The new Otter point bridge plans are progressing and it might be put in late this spring rather than in the fall as we previously thought.

Plans are underway for our **Annual General Meeting**. The date is **Friday March 27th**. It should be an enjoyable and interesting evening. The event will start with one of our famous potluck suppers. Several special presentations will be included. Maybe another quiz and prizes too. Our annual general meeting is an opportunity to report to you, the membership. We welcome your input and questions and hope to see you there.

Your donations, work, support and input are all greatly appreciated.  
Please reach out to me if you have any new ideas, questions or concerns.

## **Salmon, Birds and Bats**

by Faren Lozier

Coming into 2026, our educators have been critically reflecting with the children on where our learning has taken us thus far. Each class has begun long-term inquiries based on their interests and conversations. The educators set up invitations to play and provocations that spark curiosities and wonder, further encouraging our littles to question the world around them. Two of our classes are diving into the journey of salmon and are building their own stream from fabric in our classroom. One class began an inquiry into bats -shortly after beginning, their wonder took us into a comparison of bat houses and bird houses along with the similarities/difference between birds and bats. Our last class built off of our bird/bat comparison and have begun building a bird house in the loft using bird costumes daily.



### **Checking out the Bat House**

**Faren Lozier**

Owner & Educator

Exploring the Puddle, Early Learning Centre

279 3rd Avenue N, Williams Lake BC V2G 2A6 PH 250-398-8410



**Salmon River**

## Nature Kids BC

by Kim Zalay



Do you have children/grandchildren between the ages of 5-12 years and would like outdoor programs or outings geared to this age group? We are reinvigorating the NatureKids BC program in Williams Lake in 2026! Our goal is to have an event each month for NatureKids members to take part in that will include activities at Scout Island or field trips to other nature sites in our area. Although a few events will be family events, open to the community, the majority of events will be only open to NatureKids members. NatureKids is a free membership. For more information on NatureKids BC go to [www.naturekidsbc.ca](http://www.naturekidsbc.ca) where you may also register your child/children. Registration forms will also be available at Scout Island and at our activities.

Our first event will be on Saturday, February 21, 2026, at the Nature House from 1:00-3:00pm. This will be a family event open to the community ... you are getting an early heads-up notice.

**Topic:** Birds and Birdfeeders – Participants will learn basic information about what makes a bird a bird, different classifications, identification/viewing of our winter birds this year through hands on specimens and outdoor observation. The day will wrap up with building a take home birdfeeder for interested families.

Note: Birdfeeder kits are limited so if this is something that your family is interested in, please register at [membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca](mailto:membership@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca) adding NatureKids in the subject line.

## Building Belonging, One Trail at a Time

By Lara

Big thanks to Western Financial Foundation #WesternGives for the \$5000 grant that allowed us to complete this wheelchair accessible trail from the parking lot to the Nature House here at Scout Island in Williams Lake, B.C.! This piece of trail was gently graded, packed with fine crush, and railed to ensure it would safely make the Nature House and the trails on this half of Scout Island more easily accessible for those with mobility challenges.



Skuratow Backhoe did a great job with the grading and packing. Fine crush was generously donated by United Concrete and Gravel (#UnitedConcrete) and the railings were completed at a discounted rate by Autumn Fencing (#AutumnFencing). Such fantastic community support and workmanship!



This project was completed over 3 months in 2025 (August to December) and we've already received a lot of positive feedback from those using strollers, wheelchairs, and walkers. In addition, many of our walkers who prefer to avoid stairs have enjoyed its ease of use. Scout Island's journey to improve access for all will continue this spring/summer as the Otter Point Bridge is replaced and accessibility improvements are accomplished. Scout Island, and all who enjoy visiting this natural oasis in the heart of our city are thankful to #WesternGives .



## Tales and Trails welcomed new and returning families on January 7th.

By Lara

So far, we have had 46 children and 26 adults in attendance.

The program has been starting sessions inside the Nature House. The families have enjoyed this opportunity to explore the centre, as well as have the space to dress their children in the appropriate winter gear.

On our winter walks we have had fun searching for animal tracks and scat. Shuffling like penguins and sliding like river otters has helped us to navigate the icy patches!

This month Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy gave each family a take home book. Everyone was excited to add this book to their at home libraries.

We would like to thank CCPL for their continued support!



## Under My Wing

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN.

Typically, I see a lot of red heads and red mustaches during a Cariboo winter, but this year has been redder than most. Frequenting our feeders have seven woodpeckers sporting varying degrees of red on the head, and four flickers, some with bright red mustaches and others with a red crescent where the head meets the neck. Until this year, I would have argued that the regal Pileated Woodpecker with its fiery scarlet crest and prominent red mustache is the most colourful of them all. But on November 30<sup>th</sup> 2025, a new redhead flew into our yard.



**A Delightfully Acrobatic Bird**

Red Breasted Sapsuckers do not winter in the Cariboo. He should be in Baja or somewhere along the warm Pacific coast. Quite possibly, back in November, he was on his way when strong winds altered his course. Luckily, he landed in our crab apple, but soon the apples will be gone.



**A Living Jewel in Our Crab Apple**

Slightly smaller than an American Robin, a most striking Red-breasted Sapsucker landed in our crab apple tree. In the winter sunlight, the plumage on the head and breast burned with a deep, velvety crimson, more magnificent than a crown jewel. Shortly after landing, this male Sapsucker revealed that he was colourful in other ways as well. A talented acrobat, he maneuvered himself onto a partially frozen cluster of crab apples and, while hanging upside down, repeatedly sank his sharp pointy beak into their juicy flesh. This delightful display was a daily ritual for nearly a week, until one very chilly, overcast afternoon only a few withered, mangled "fruitcicles" clung to the branches. How was this bird going to survive?

Red Breasted Sapsuckers do not winter in the Cariboo. He should be in Baja or somewhere along the warm Pacific coast. Quite possibly, back in November, he was on his way when strong winds altered his course. Luckily, he landed in our crab apple, but soon the apples will be gone.

I needn't have worried. This bird has brains. From his elevated feast in the crab apple tree, he probably observed the comings and goings of flickers and woodpeckers—birds not unlike himself. One day, he flew over to the fat feeder and liked what he tasted. By December 6<sup>th</sup>, he not only feasted regularly on beef fat, he also aggressively defended it from all other foragers.

This bothered me. Over the years I had grown accustomed to the various woodpeckers and flickers warily sharing the space. They respected one another, and took turns. Occasionally they fed side-by-side.

But this fierce character wielded his chisel-like beak against Downey, Hairy, and Flicker alike. Only the male Pileated Woodpecker forced the Sapsucker to grudgingly yield the feeder.

Then, on December 9<sup>th</sup>, the Sapsucker's fierceness almost killed him.

I was eating my lunch on a gorgeous, sunny day while watching the Sapsucker feast on frozen fat. Two times he amazed me with his aggression towards the larger flickers. Moments later, however, he became perfectly still. I expected a Pileated was nearby or a hawk, but the Sapsucker suddenly turned his blazing head and stared straight through the kitchen window at me. Without warning, he launched an attack! Horrified, I leaped up with my arms raised, but it was too late. The Sapsucker collided heavily with the glass.

**Not so sweet****Mine even if I freeze**

Racing outside, I expected the worst only to discover that the bird had vanished. I searched the entire yard, and finding nothing gave me hope. An hour later, he was upside down feeding on a straggly cluster of crab apples. But why had he attacked me?

Eventually, I formed a hypothesis: he hadn't attacked me; he had attacked himself, or more precisely, a reflection of himself in the glass. I remember watching birds battling their own reflection in the side mirrors of parked vehicles, sometimes so fiercely that they broke the glass. Fortunately for this Sapsucker, he didn't break his neck!

Weary of the on-going battles at the central feeder, and worried that the next collision with a window might be fatal, I busied myself with the construction of a new feeder exclusively for the Sapsucker. But how would I tempt him to switch?

Knowing that on sunny days the Sapsucker warmed himself on a particular snag determined the location. On the south facing side of the snag's trunk, I built a walled, narrow feeder, hoping to discourage Pileated Woodpeckers. Within two days, the Sapsucker began defending his personal feeder. I felt pleased with myself—for about three days. Then I realized I had created a war-zone!

I had forgotten that this snag was a favourite sun-roost for nearly every bird that visits our yard. When I added a fat feeder, I gave them something to fight about. The Sapsucker expended a lot of energy shooing away the little Downey, posturing aggressively against the pair of Hairyies, and pecking at the four hungry Flickers. And whenever four Pileated Woodpeckers began fighting amongst themselves over ownership of the fat (yes, they figured out how to access it!), the Sapsucker had to hide. But it was the mob (or should I say Murder) of crows which arrived two or three times daily for a try at the fat that forced the Sapsucker to flee. This riled me, and it became my mission to repeatedly chase away the

**Sun-Roost on a Sub-Zero Afternoon**

crows. Soon, the Sapsucker realized that he didn't need to flee far because his champion would scare off the invaders. Sadly, I had created an unsustainable situation.

Early January was unusually mild, and I noticed that the Sapsucker was spending less time at the fat feeder. I also noticed that some fruit I had added to an unused feeder nearby was partially eaten. The old fruit was quite dried out, so I replaced it with a generous chunk of fresh Ambrosia apple and half of a juicy orange. Guess what? On rare occasions, the Sapsucker returned to "his" fat, but for much of the morning and late afternoon, he feasted—without competition—on fruit, the other birds showing no interest in apples or oranges. In between meals, he went exploring, and by January 12<sup>th</sup>, he was spending less and less time at the feeders.

Then, on January 14<sup>th</sup>, he didn't arrive until the late afternoon. During this single feeding, he ignored the apple, but devoured the orange. It was his last meal in our yard, where he had lived for the last 46 days.

At sunset, I saw the Red Breasted Sapsucker one final time. He was enjoying the warm rays of fading sunlight at the top of a Lodgepole Pine. The plumage on his head and breast burned with a deep, velvety crimson, and for the first time since his arrival, he pecked purposefully at the bark of a tree. In between the dark green needles, he looked stunning.

I like to believe that he was saying good-bye. And I like to imagine him—fuelled by fruit-juice and fat-reserves—winging confidently through the immense star-lit night to somewhere with a tree full of oranges. Perhaps he'll be back in the spring.



**Sugar High Will Fly**

## 2025 Motus Station Report



### Pinging along: thank you to our wonderful station hosts

A big thank you from the BC Motus team to all our dedicated station hosts! Your participation within the Motus network directly contributes to migratory research, giving us a better understanding of animal movements and behaviours—not just in BC, but around the world.

We've summarized your Motus station's detection data into this annual report for your viewing pleasure.



**Data Disclaimer:**  
These data have not been quality checked. They may be preliminary and incomplete, and may be subject to significant errors. We welcome any feedback or corrections.

Any or all of this data can be accessed at [motus.org/explore/](https://motus.org/explore/)



### Scout Island Nature Centre Station

Deployment date: 2022-05-12

Latitude: 52.1222

Longitude: -122.1205

Year	Species	Individuals
2024	1	1
2023	3	3
<b>Species name</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	
Swainson's Thrush	1	
Bank Swallow	1	
Ring Spp. sp.	1	
Western Tanager	1	



### Map of animal movements



Visit the Motus Explore Dashboard and find your station to view each animal and their associated movements (<https://motus.org/explore/#/profile/leadstations&st=2024>).

1	Canada Goose	2	
2	Trumpeter Swan	17	(6)
	Northern Shoveler	cw	
3	Gadwall	4	(3)
	American Wigeon	cw	
4	Mallard	134	
5	Ring-necked Duck	3	
6	Greater Scaup	7	
7	Lesser Scaup	12	
8	Long-tailed Duck	1	
9	Bufflehead	23	(22)
10	Common Goldeneye	29	
11	Barrow's Goldeneye	6	(4)
12	Hooded Merganser	7	
13	Common Merganser	27	(21)
14	Ruffed Grouse	22	(19)
15	Pied-billed Grebe	3	
16	Horned Grebe	1	
17	Red-necked Grebe	1	
18	Rock Pigeon	768	(718)
19	Eurasian Collared Dove	7	
20	Anna's Hummingbird	1	
21	Virginia Rail	2	
22	American Coot	3	
23	Great Blue Heron	4	
24	Golden Eagle	2	
25	Northern Harrier	3	
26	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	
27	Bald Eagle	20	
28	Red-tailed Hawk	8	
29	Rough-legged Hawk	1	
30	Great Horned Owl	2	(1)
31	Short-eared Owl	4	
32	Belted Kingfisher	1	
33	Red-breasted Sapsucker	1	
34	Downy Woodpecker	16	
35	Hairy Woodpecker	24	
36	Northern Flicker	76	

37	Pileated Woodpecker	30	
38	Merlin	1	
39	Northern Shrike	4	
40	Canada Jay	3	
41	Black-billed Magpie	27	
42	American Crow	662	
43	Common Raven	235	
44	Black-capped Chickadee	179	
45	Mountain Chickadee	153	
46	Golden-crowned Kinglet	2	
47	Bohemian Waxwing	328	
48	Red-breasted Nuthatch	102	
49	Brown Creeper	1	
50	Marsh Wren	2	
51	European Starling	128	
52	Townsend's Solitaire	60	
53	American Robin	60	(31)
54	Varied Thrush	2	
55	House Sparrow	164	
56	Pine Grosbeak	16	
57	House Finch	288	
58	Purple Finch	2	
59	Redpoll	1	
60	Red Crossbill	41	
61	White-winged Crossbill	9	
62	Pine Siskin	31	
63	American Goldfinch	237	(120)
	Snow Bunting	cw	
64	American Tree Sparrow	6	
65	Dark-eyed Junco	464	
66	White-crowned Sparrow	3	
67	White-throated Sparrow	2	
68	Song Sparrow	61	(52)
69	Spotted Towhee	3	
70	Red-winged Blackbird	17	
	TOTAL individuals	4567	
	New species to count		
	Highest count number - (#) Previous		
	Tied for highest		