

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

MARCH + APRIL 2026 NEWSLETTER

6PM FRIDAY MARCH 27 - POT LUCK + AGM  
+ MORE!!



WE ARE ALL LOOKING FOR NEW HOUSES

MAY 2  
FAMILY FIRE  
SMART ACTIVITIES  
AT  
SCOUT ISLAND



WE ARE GOING  
DANCING!

SATURDAY  
APRIL 9TH

FUND RAISING  
DANCE  
BY  
CARIBOO  
GOLD  
DANCE BAND  
+  
SILENT AUCTION TOO!

♪ I AM GOING TO  
LISTEN TO SOME  
GREAT  
MUSIC

I WONDER  
IF THEY  
PLAY A  
FOXTROT?





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)

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

## Yearly Annual General Meeting (AGM)

**Friday March 27<sup>th</sup> 6PM**

Pot luck Supper and AGM.

This will start with supper at the Nature House. There will be the meeting, door prizes and I am working on a new quiz. We will have some special announcements and presentation about Anna Roberts. Your support for our past year and plans for next year is very important.

## Field Trips 2026

### Traditional first annual field trip to Alkali Lake

*Saturday April 11<sup>th</sup> Trip leaders are Jean Oke 250 392-7488 and Denise Deshene 250 305-9730)*

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.

### Birding at Scout Island

*April 26<sup>th</sup> at 9am (morning only) 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.

There will be a complete list of our 2026 field trips in the next edition of the newsletter. We are looking for new trip leaders with new ideas so if you are interested, please email your ideas to the [muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca](mailto:muskrat@williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca). We may be able to find someone who can help you with setting up your trip. Please provide a description along with a preferred date and an alternative.

### **As a deterrent for fir beetles,**

Peter Opie will have MCH bubble caps available again this year. The pheromone in these agents mimics what the beetles produce when the tree is full, signaling potential invaders to move along. Fir bark beetle populations are at endemic levels currently. However, if you want protect any valuable, mature Douglas-fir trees as insurance, email Peter at [peter&skye@telus.net](mailto:peter&skye@telus.net) or phone 250 392-1440. The MCH will be available in April.



### **Notes from the President**

By Margaret Waring President

Directors met on Tuesday February 10th and again on March 10th

On March 18 at noon a group of directors will meet, as we do four times per year, with city staff.

Many thanks to Chris Shepard for sharing his pictures and information on the wildlife trade with us. The Tribune did an article about the evening too.

Thank you to the presenters who provided information about doing prescribed and cultural burns. This has led to discussions and increased sharing of knowledge.

Opening the Nature House for several hours on Saturdays has been well received. Plans are being made to open the Nature House on both weekend days for a few midday hours. Would you like to come and volunteer to help with this job? Training will be provided. Contact me or Lara at the Nature House. Lara is often at the Nature House on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

We have some dedicated members who put together a field trip list each year. We need more members to help plan, gather and advertise the trips. New ideas are welcome. Please let me know if you are interested.

I am always interested in your suggestions, comments and ideas. Please keep in touch.

### **Spring Events**

Please come and enjoy.

**March 23-27** Scout Island Spring Break Camp

Yearly Annual General Meeting (**AGM**)

**Friday March 27<sup>th</sup>** at the Nature House at 6PM. As well as the Pot luck supper and meeting we will have door prizes and a quiz and several special presentations.

**Saturday May 2** from 2-4pm **Family Fire Smart** Program at Scout Island (scavenger hunt, activities and information)

**Saturday May 9 Evening Fundraising dance** for Scout Island by Cariboo Gold Dance Band at the Curling Club. Tickets will be available soon. As well as great music to dance to or listen to you can enjoy drinks and snacks and view the remodelled and modern curling club. There is an elevator for access. A **Silent Auction** is being planned and already some members have made donations. Thank you to Jeremy for taking the lead on this event.

**Saturday May 23<sup>rd</sup> Yard Sale** at Scout Island.

Friday May 22 I am assuming there will be evening yard sale set up at the Nature House. Thank you to Charlotte and Frances for making the yard sale happen.

### Get ready to dive into the wonder of wetlands — Marsh Magic is back!

Join us at Scout Island on May 31st, 2026, from 10am to 2pm for a day packed with nature, discovery, and hands-on fun.

Our very first Marsh Magic Festival in 2024 drew in about 300 enthusiastic explorers, all eager to celebrate the unique and ever-changing marsh ecosystem that makes Scout Island so special. This year, we're bringing back everything people loved — and adding even more magic.

What's in store? More than a dozen interactive stations featuring:

- Creative nature-themed crafts
- Fascinating displays
- Educational activities for all ages
- Engaging, hands-on experiences that highlight what makes a healthy marsh tick

This festival is all about celebrating the vibrant marsh-lake ecosystem — so every activity is designed to help you learn, explore, and connect with nature in playful, meaningful ways.

Arrive the eco-friendly way: We're encouraging everyone to come on foot or by bike to keep the spirit of sustainability alive.... Plus, it's Go by Bike week!

Start your adventure Swing by the welcome table to grab your passport and map, then set off to explore the stations. Each stop you visit earns you an entry into our prize draw — the more you explore, the more chances you have to win. If you're interested in running a station, gathering prizes or helping out please reach out to Lara ([manager@scoutisland.ca](mailto:manager@scoutisland.ca) or 250-305-7176) or Sue.





## Spring Cleaning Time is Near

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN  
[lmccsiz@gmail.com](mailto:lmccsiz@gmail.com)

They're here! You know what I mean: the Mountain Bluebirds, of course. But so far, only the males. Sandy and Phil reported the first Bluebirds on March 1<sup>st</sup> while on a birding safari to Churn Creek. As they bumped, slid, and splashed down the thawing road through Dog Creek Prairie, two males watched from the clean hydro wires.

The next reports came from Mission Road; up to four males sighted on March 5<sup>th</sup> by three groups of enthusiasts spread over the day. Sandy was the only one to observe all four at the same time. March 8<sup>th</sup> was my lucky day. Michaela and I counted seven males along Mission Road. Mostly they were bathing, preening, and grabbing the occasional insect. It was a warmish day, so long as the sun peeked out from behind the scattered clouds.

Four sleeps later, it's a different story: cooler temperatures, wind chill, and fresh snow. Here on Fox Mountain, the feeders are busy once again, in spite of being filled with fluffy mounds of flakes. Puffs of snow flutter to the ground as the birds jostle for position. I watch the action from the sitting room, a blanket over my legs and a warm coffee cup in my lap. Do birds get cold feet?

According to the folks at Cornell Lab, their tiny toes are nearly frozen! Fortunately, the blood is circulating too fast for frostbite to set in. In addition, there are very few pain receptors in their feet, which are mainly tendons and bone. It probably didn't snow where the early bluebirds gather, but it will be cold. I wonder if the males roost together for warmth? Maybe they huddle in one of our houses, the very ones they will soon be fighting over! Can anyone tell me how they stay warm when winter chills the spring?

Speaking of houses, a fresh batch will soon be available to the route managers who volunteer on behalf of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists. Andrew Hutchinson and his woodworking students are planning to build about ninety houses with the standard round hole. For those who prefer the Johnson Slot, there are about thirty ready to go in the lockers. Remember: these houses are for the Bluebird Program. For personal use, houses and house-kits are available for sale in the Nature Center. Thank you to Donald Trim and to Jims Sims' team for creating these kits.

Has anyone visited their bird route yet? I have driven past part of my route on Fox Mountain, but have not been brave enough to clean any houses. Unlike birds, I have plenty of pain receptors in my appendages!

So, when should the boxes be cleaned and maintained this year?

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.

Two other notes. If you plan to mount a Johnson box on a fence post, you will need an extra-long screwdriver. Unlike our standard boxes, the Johnson Slots do not have a mounting board and must be screwed from inside by opening the



This Way to the Cariboo-Chilcotin Bluebird Routes!

door.

This second note is **VERY** important. The ranchers who kindly allow us to establish routes on their grazing lands want the broken houses removed from the ground. This is the second time I have heard this request, so I hope everyone is doing their bit. Broken houses with protruding hardware can injure not only farm animals, but wildlife as well. If it is difficult for you to do this on your own, contact me and we will find a solution.

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, Andrew Hutchinson's LCSS woodworking classes for donating nest boxes to our cause, and the generous English fellow who builds all the Johnson Slots but wishes to remain anonymous. And this year, I want to express my gratitude to the Cariboo Gold Dance Band who will play at our SINC fundraiser on May 9<sup>th</sup>, and to Sharon Henry who sewed the lovely bluebird quilt for the silent auction at the event. Money raised will support all of our programs, including the construction of bird houses for our routes. I hope to see everyone there!

By the way, there might be one route 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!"

