

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER.



We are bzzzy bees!

MUSKRATS ARE VERY BUSY!  
SUMMER IS A CUMMIN +



We are busy Beavers

Off-weye



MAY 16 CHILANKO MARSH FIELD TRIP

MAY 23  
PLANT + YARD SALE



MARSH  
MAGIC  
MAY 31



MEMORIAL EVENT  
ANNA ROBERTS  
JUNE 21<sup>ST</sup>





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 Ken Day, Vice President Jane Wellburn secretary Cathie Hamm, treasurer Sue Hemphill and directors Jeremy Vogt, Jean Oke, Michaela Waterhouse, Kim Zalay, Raymond Getzlaf, Shelly Peel, and Johanna Robson



**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)

### Trip Report Alkali Lake First Field Trip

Submitted by Jean Oke

Saturday, April 11, three vehicles with 8 people headed out from Scout Island towards Alkali Lake to look for birds: waterfowl, curlews, and sandhill cranes, in particular. We did see all of these, plus pelicans, swans, gold and ruby crown kinglets, yellow legs (too far away to tell whether greater or lesser).

Being a rookie leader, and thinking I knew the route (which I did). I thought I also knew the names of the usual stopping points. (Which I didn't!) First one is apparently Sorenson Lake on the right as you drop towards Springhouse. (I may still have the names wrong.) Here we saw a variety of waterfowl, including the yellow legs. Then we stopped at the next body of water, on the left, and again lots of ducks, including: ring necks, shovelers, pintails, widgeon, canvas backs and mallards. There were also red crossbills in the trees.



**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**  
Photo by Loyd Csizmadia



**American White Pelican**  
Photo by Loyd Csizmadia

Stopping at Springhouse by the mailboxes we found curlews blending well with the dry grass. At this stop we also heard and saw sandhill cranes, meadow larks, tree swallows and bluebirds.

Carrying on towards Alkali Lake itself we stopped at ponds along the way to watch green wing teal and killdeer, among other species on the water, in the air and in the trees. There were bald eagles soaring above and at least one kestrel perched on the wires beside the road.

Alkali Lake, our destination, with Pelicans, Tundra swans, and rails-Virginia and Sora all recorded. As usual there were rafts of coots, with loon, red-necked and pie billed grebes ducking amongst and around them. On shore and in the sky, we heard and saw ruby and golden crowned kinglets, yellow rumped

warblers, siskins, marsh wrens, song and Lincoln sparrows, towhees, yellow headed and red-winged blackbirds and many other species.

At some point it was suggested that we look a Jones Lake so we turned onto the Jones Lake Road to explore. While we did not make it to the lake itself, we stopped at a large pond to the left of the road where we were able to call out more rails.

All in all, a pleasant way to spend an April Saturday. Thanks to all who turned out and thanks to Denise Deschenes for co-leading.

**Trip Report Birding at Scout Island April 26<sup>th</sup>**

Report submitted by Betty Donahue

April 26<sup>th</sup> was a beautiful sunny day with a cool northerly wind. Six birders gathered at Scout Island to explore the causeway, the Willow Trail, the Island and Otter Point. The ospreys were busy fishing in the marsh by the causeway, with the male bringing tasty morsels to its mate in the nest near the Coop gas station. We heard an elusive sora, but it remained hidden in the reeds. In all, we spotted 35 species, including a golden crowned sparrow, a wood duck and an orange crowned warbler. Lubna Khan was instrumental in finding and identifying some of the less common species. It was an excellent day for photography with the birds and ducks displaying their bright breeding plumage.



**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**  
Photo by Lubna

**Yard Sale. Saturday May 23rd. Coming up soon!**

By Charlotte Lundeen & Frances McCoubrey

The purpose of the sale is to raise funds for a \$1500. student bursary that we give to a graduating student from Lake City Secondary.

Fill a box or more to donate for the sale. We sell books, art work, household items, sporting goods, camping items, tools and more. We would like to request no large heavy items that are difficult to move.

We feature plants and garden related items. Tomatoes and herbs are popular. When you do yard work remember the plants that you divide can be purchased by others. Rhubarb and raspberry and strawberry plants and small trees and lilacs have been requested by past shoppers. Maybe you have a plant you want to move or do not like. Dig it out and we will find a new home for it. House plants are sold too.

We will start accepting drop-offs at 2pm on Friday May 22nd. Bring your donations upstairs to the Nature house.

If you want and need to do drop offs earlier, please connect with Charlotte or Frances to make arrangements: [scout.island.plant.sale@gmail.com](mailto:scout.island.plant.sale@gmail.com) or 250-267-4652

Needing volunteers for the following jobs!

- 1) Organizing donations on the Friday (Two shifts: 2pm-4pm and 4pm-6pm) 3-4 people
  - 2) Set-up on Saturday (8-9:30am) 3-4 people
  - 3) To help with actual event on Saturday (9:30am-1:30pm) 4-5 people
  - 4) Tear down @ 1:30 pm 4-6 people
  - 5) People with pick-up trucks to take donations to various locations following the event 4-5
- We hope you are able to participate in this positive fundraising event.





### **Invitation to Memorial Celebration for Anna Roberts**

June 21st at 1PM at the Scout Island Nature Centre

There will be an outdoor event under the shelter roof behind the Nature House. John Christoffersen from the United Church will lead the prayers and spiritual portion and the Eulogy will be presented by Sage Birchwater.

Slides taken by Anna, compiled by Ray Coupe that were seen at the AGM will be set up in Nature House.

An open Mic time will be included with an opportunity for others to speak and share memories.

Potluck afternoon tea (and coffee!) and snacks.

Please bring a chair and a plate of goodies or snacks to share.



### **Presidents Report to the Annual General Meeting on March 27, 2026**

By Margaret Waring

I credit the success of this year and of this organization to the hard-working dedicated staff, directors, club members and other volunteers, city staff and other groups who support us.

Our two employees; Lara Roorda Nature Centre Manager and Martin Kruus Education Coordinator are hardworking and truly outstanding. We have some skilled contractors and had a great team of summer students providing education programs to children. We hire several high school students who help with programs and the care of the creatures who live in the Nature House. They have also been opening the Nature House on Saturdays.

Club activities have included grassland hikes and bird watching trips, a field trip list and a variety of informative evening programs. Lead by Jim S. six editions of our newsletter the Muskrat Express were published. Loyd C has been an active leader for the bluebird program. Charlotte L. and Frances M. coordinated a very successful yard sale in May. Kim Z. And Cathie H. take care of memberships. Ken D. with Lara takes care of the money. We had our annual Christmas Bird count and potluck in December organized by Phil R., Sean D. and Lubna K.

Planning for a new major project, the replacement of Otter Point Bridge generated a successful fund-raising drive. We applied for and received grants and donations. Thank you to Ken Day, Sue H. and Lara R. for leading the action. The current plan is for the replacement to happen in June or July 2026. Following this event, we will begin to plan for replacement of the next bridge to Scout Island.

It has been a year of growth and change at Scout Island with a new manager, new email system, new door keys, and new ideas. This September Exploring the Puddle Early Learning Centre started a preschool program using the Nature House basement classroom as their home base. We continue to have schools visiting Scout Island and the Nature House. Fisheries support for the Salmon in the school program involves many children.

I thank all the Directors for their dedication to the Field Naturalists and Scout Island. I thank all of you, the members for your ongoing support. I am privileged to be part of such a knowledgeable, skilled group.

Respectfully submitted

Margaret Waring (Past) President of the Williams Lake Field Naturalist Society.



Willows with narrow leaves are known by some as osiers.

Willows can be a challenge to distinguish because of within species variability, presence of only pollen or seed flowers on a single plant, and frequent hybridization among species. Although this challenge may frustrate some, those who persist can find great rewards and enjoyment from learning the willows.

On Scout Island Nature Centre, there are at least 10 species of willows, a greater number of species than for any other plant genus on the island. A great place to find most of these species is along the Willow Trail but the Bulrush Trail is also a good place to check. Anna Roberts excellent guide to the willows of the Cariboo-Chilcotin (available on the W.L. Field Naturalists website) is a good source for identifying willow species on Scout Island, especially the portion of her guide using vegetative (leaf and stem) rather than fruiting characteristics. A magnifying glass or hand lens is an important if not essential tool. Although the flowers and young leaves of willows are great fun to check in the spring or early summer, the guide may work best for some species in mid to late summer when the leaves have matured. Visits through the season are always helpful. Principal vegetative characteristics used by Anna's guide include leaf shape, leaf length to width ratio, presence of teeth (serrations) on leaf margins, presence and size of stipules (appendages at the base of leaf stems), presence of hairs on leaves and twigs, and colour of twigs and leaves. If catkins are present, they can be used in Anna's guide to identify or confirm the vegetative identification of species. The guide provides definitions and drawings and descriptions of most species.



Young catkins swelling out of buds with one scale

Willow species noted on Scout Island or the causeway include Bebb's willow (*S. bebbiana*, a large willow, small tree height when mature), Sandbar willow (*S. exigua*), Pussy willow (*S. discolor*), Mackenzie willow (*S. prolixa*), Mountain willow (*S. pseudomonticola*), Grey-leaved willow (*S. glauca*), Pacific willow (*S. lucida lasiandra*), Tea-leaved willow (*S. planifolia*), Scouler's willow (*S. scouleriana*), and possibly Barclay's willow (*S. barclayi*)

Willows, along with black birch and mountain alder, differentiate the moist riparian zone from the uplands on Scout Island, as they do throughout much of the BC Interior. These mid to tall shrubs provide essential habitats for many riparian bird species such as warblers as well as many insects, mammals and other species. Early in the season when pollen catkins are first out, swarms of bees are often noticed feeding on willow pollen.

The willows along the Willow Trail have suffered dieback from an infestation of the poplar-and-willow borer, a stout weevil whose larvae bore through the bark tissue of main stems and branches and produce deep tunnels in the wood, causing stem breakage and dieback. Willows are most susceptible to the weevil when stressed such as during a drought. Willows have been used for ages for a variety of purposes by indigenous and European people. Young twigs and bark were chewed to relieve pain. Young willow stems are very flexible and have been widely used for making fish traps, baskets, wicker, sweat houses, and fences. Because healthy willow stem cuttings pushed into moist soil will quickly root and grow, they are often used for restoration and stabilization of streambanks and lakeshores.

## WLFN Field Trips for the 2025 Season

### Annual Chilanko Marsh Field Trip

May 16th to 18th (Leader Jim Sims: (778)746-2752)

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.

**An Evening Paddle up the SanJose Creek**

This will be mid week evening field trip. The date is unknown at this time and will be announced in an email and will also be posted on the club website (*Leader Rick Dawson 250 392-3370*)

Paddle from Williams Lake up the SanJose creek we will start a 6 pm from the steep put in on Grebe drive at the end of south lakeside. Date June 10. Life jackets are required. The creek has some current so paddlers need to be prepared for this.

**Cape Horn, Esketemculucw Cultural and Natural History**

Sunday, May 24 (*Leader: Peter Opie 250 392-1440*).

After an approximately one-hour drive on Dog Creek Road we will arrive at the Cape Horn cattle corral, 11 km past Alkali Lake Ranch headquarters. There, we will meet Esk'etenc Guardians who will accompany us to sites of old Native villages. We'll hike through grassland, past aspen groves and into old Douglas-fir forest. We will find more open grassland with a commanding view of the Fraser River and beyond. If there is time, we may walk through Echo Valley where elk have been sighted recently. Meet at Scout Island at 8:00 a.m. to carpool. Expect to return to Williams Lake by 5:00.

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

Sunday, June 14 (*Leader: Peter Opie 250 392-1440*).

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 and BC Lakes. 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.

**Dry Lake - Churn Creek Canyon - Coalpit Hike**

Sunday, 20 September (*Leader: Peter Opie (250-392-1440)*)

This is an approximately 8 km walk, mostly on gently sloping trails and ranch roads through low elevation grasslands and shrublands of the Protected Area. We will stop by a large, valley bottom wetland (Dry Lake) included in a long-term study by Friends of Churn Creek and then hike to an overlook of the spectacular Churn Creek Canyon. A final ranch road through sagebrush and grassland ecosystems will bring us back to the "Iron Gate Road" and the parking area by Onion Lakes. This is a joint Friends of Churn Creek and W.L. Field Naturalists trip. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the parking area by the A&W at the wye. Bring a lunch, lots of water, good boots and binoculars.

**Junction Sheep Range**

Saturday October 17<sup>th</sup> (*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!

## Glimpses Through the Lens



### Great Gray Owl

Photograph by  
Sandy Proulx  
on Farwell  
Canyon Road,  
March 29,  
2026



### Snow Bunting

Photograph by  
Sharon Henry  
near Riske Creek,  
April 3, 2026



**Red-naped Sapsucker**

Photograph by  
Loyd  
Csizmadia on  
Fox Mountain,  
April 2, 2026

**Horned Lark**

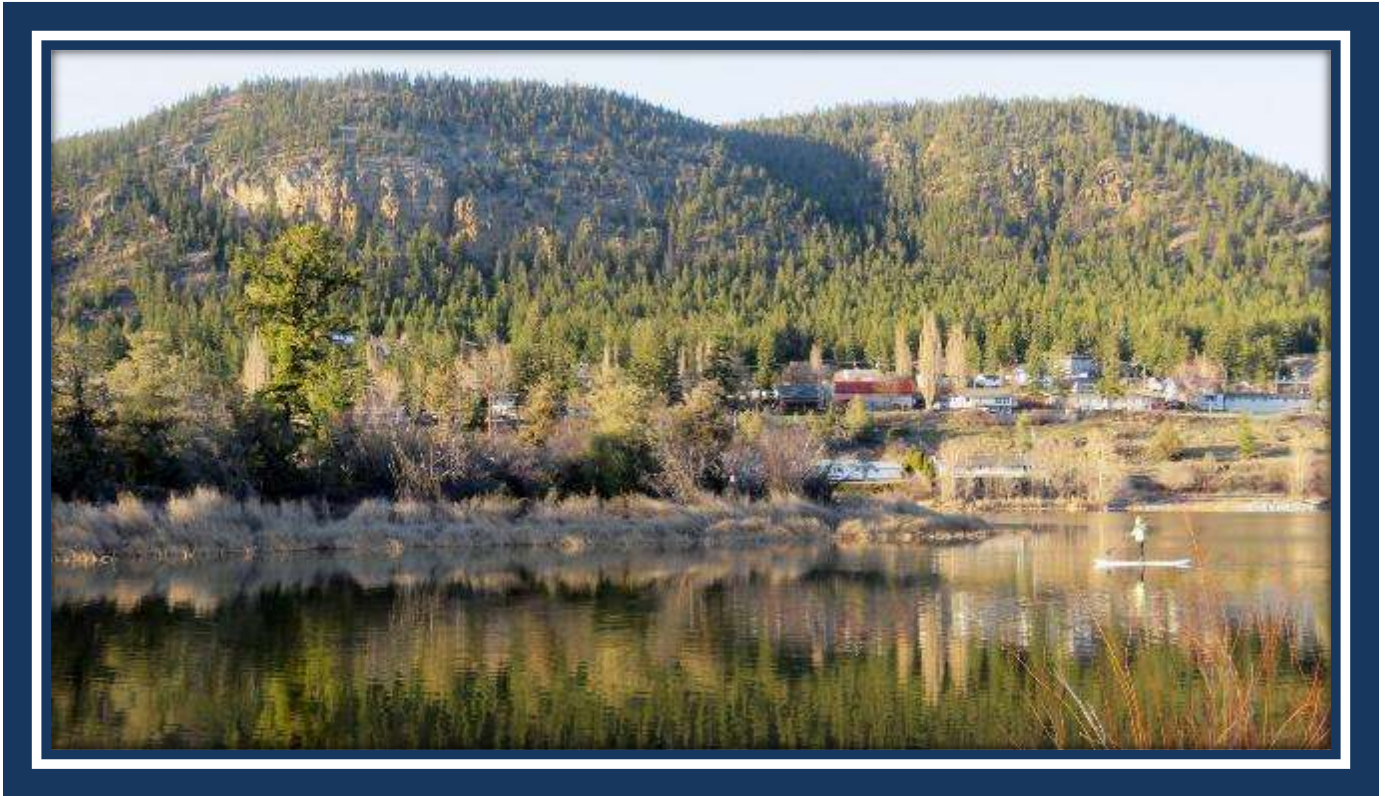
Photograph by  
Phil Ranson at  
Churn Creek,  
March 1, 2026



---

---

**Member’s Moment from Lubna Khan and Betty Donahue**



**“The Paddle Board Queen”**

As the caretaker for Scout Island, Denise Deschene enjoys exploring all the nooks and crannies of this nature preserve. On April 11th, the “Paddle Board Queen “ was spotted on the calm waters near the Island. Perhaps she was hoping for a closeup view of a painted turtle”.