

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
JUNE 2026 NEWSLETTER





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 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, Johanna Robson and past president Margaret Waring



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



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Esketemculucw Cultural and Natural History

By Peter Opie

On a lovely day in May, ten intrepid naturalists ventured off to the local feature known as Cape Horn, just past Alkali Lake. There we were met by Eric Dick, an Esketemic Guardian who served as host and guide. We were privileged to have Eric share his knowledge of the local history. Hiking into two ancient village sites near a small creek, we located many house pits in evidence. We wondered how many had occupied these sites and for what period of time. The second, upper site was considerably farther up a steep hill. From there we walked through old forest along game trails with evidence of elk. Along the way we found a very old tree that appeared to have been culturally modified. By the size and position of the fire scar, we speculated that it could have been used as a campsite, perhaps for hunting. Emerging from the forest we found ourselves on a grassy bench with an excellent view across the Fraser, where we had our lunch after carefully choosing where to sit to avoid cactus plants. In the afternoon, we explored further looking for another potential village site but found nothing but some rolling terrain with aspen copses in otherwise heavily grazed pasture. We had passed through the fence marking the boundary of the Alkali Lake Ranch into the former Circle S. On the way home we did take the opportunity to explore the intriguing, hidden Echo Valley. Overall, a grand day out in field and forest.



San Jose Field Trip Report:

By Rick Dawson

An Evening Paddle up the San Jose Creek on June 10th.

Two kayakers and one canoe enjoyed a sunny warm evening exploring the east end of Williams Lake. They reached the San Jose and found a group of Pelicans. They watched the Pelicans and changed their route so the birds were not disturbed.

Field Trip Report Churn Creek June 14th

By Betty Donahue

Jim Young, a member of Friends of Churn Creek, led five naturalists on the field trip to Churn Creek. Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area Society is a volunteer group dedicated to helping BC Parks protect the cultural heritage and conservation of Churn Creek Protected Area. From the Iron Gate Road, we did a 7 km loop through grasslands, open forest and wetlands to view BC Lake and Hairy Fish Lake. BC Lake is a reservoir, created by a manmade dam, to supply irrigation for the local rancher. It was a hot sunny day with highs reaching 33C, so we were happy to rest often, in shade provided by patches of Douglas Fir. Over the years, fire suppression had increased the canopy of Douglas Fir, allowing encroachment of the trees into the grassland. Jim pointed out the areas of restoration and prescribed burning in this area to restore the grassland.



BC Lake



Chukar Family
Photo by Lubna Khan

We had a lovely lunch spot on a hill overlooking BC Lake. From this vantage point, we looked down into an eagle's nest and watched the eagle feeding its young. There were quite a few songbirds, but surprisingly few waterfowl. Some highlights during the drive were California Bighorn Sheep, a lone curlew, a deer with a fairly new fawn, pelicans at Alkali Lake and a large flock of sandhill cranes. We searched all the usual spots for the elusive Chukars and finally spotted two adults and 16 chicks nestled into a rocky crevice. What a treat to watch them scurry up the hillside and blend into the sagebrush! A big thank you to Jim for leading the trip in this stunning protected area.

Scout Island Yard and Plant Sale

By Charlotte and Frances

The 26th annual Scout Island yard and plant sale on May 23rd was another great success!

Thank you so much to all the volunteers who came to help sort through donations on Friday and to help with the sale and clean-up on Saturday, especially: Joan L., Jen C., Margaret W., Leah S., Jane W., Jeremy V., Chris and Ray H., Leo R., Nola D., Betty D., Sean, Jane P., Darcy L., Becky C., Tanya J., Rick D., and Frances' grade 7 students: Aleah and Leah. And of course, a big thank to all of you who generously donated items and plants. This would not be possible without all of you.

The weather was on our side this year and we barely needed the two tents that Leo R. graciously donated to the event. As always, there were many happy



and familiar faces to chat with and lots of treasures to take home.

All told, the sale brought in around \$3100 which more than met our goal of providing a high school bursary for \$1500. What to do with the additional funds will be discussed at the next board meeting in July.

Thanks again!

Life and Legacy of Anna Roberts

By Margaret Photos from Betty

Sunday June 21st the ashes of Anna and John Roberts were scattered at Doc English Bluff. This is an ecological reserve, a wild, beautiful and dramatic place overlooking the Fraser River. Anna realized the significance of Doc English Bluff and was instrumental in creating the Ecological Reserve.

The small group left Scout Island with two vehicles while Pelicans were taking off from the lake. The group arrived at Doc English Bluff and again watched Pelicans. Sage described it as a bit of magic watching the flock of pelicans catching the updraft and ascending to the heavens.



In the afternoon the celebration to honour the life of Anna Roberts took place at Scout Island. More than 60 people attended. They included Frances and Allan Vyse from Kamloops and Rosamond and Jim Pojar from Smithers. There was a dedication by John Christoffersen from the United Church and the eulogy by Sage Birchwater. Thank you to the Potters for a \$400. donation from a sale of Anna's Pottery. Memories of Anna, snacks and fellowship were shared. Thank you, everyone, for creating this successful event.



Steve Walker on top of Doc English Bluff

Fund raising dance for Scout Island by Cariboo Gold Dance Band

Saturday Night May 9th was the night. Decorations in place, a silent auction set up, the bar was open and a tasty selection of snacks and goodies was available. Time to dance and enjoy some great music. This all happened at the Curling Club. It was a positive and successful event. Our net profit was just over \$2000. Many thanks to all who donated to the event, especially the Musicians of Cariboo Gold Dance Band and the curling club (who did not charge us for the venue). We thank our club members who were the ticket sellers, who organized, prepared and sold the snacks, who decorated, who made donations and ran the silent auction.



The Magic of the Marsh

By Lara Roorda

May 31, 2026 didn't just bring sunshine to Scout Island — it brought *magic*. The second biannual **Marsh Magic Festival** turned the island into a buzzing, laughing, exploring, nature-soaked playground for roughly **350 adventurers of all ages**.

From **10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**, families, kids, grandparents, and curious wanderers fanned out across the island, passports in hand, ready to collect marks and discover what each corner of the island had to offer. With **16 booths**, **Fabiola's Food Truck**, Cookies by Donation and a lineup of timed nature events, there was no shortage of things to see, taste, or try. Every booth offered something hands-on — art, science, exploration, or a little bit of all three.



The more stations you visited, the more entries you earned for the festival's two big draws. Prizes included:

- A **small greenhouse** donated by Canadian Tire
- A **gift basket** filled with donated goodies and **family swim passes** from the City of Williams Lake

The Marsh Magic Festival is a true team effort. More than a dozen partners came together to create this family-friendly, hands-on celebration of the marsh's unique ecosystem. This year's partners included: Air Aware, Cariboo Chilcotin Orienteering Club, Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy, City of Williams Lake, Climate Circle, Exploring the Puddle Preschool, Go by Bike, Hungry Plants, Invasive Species Council of BC, Provincial Government, Scout Island Staff and Volunteers, Tales and Trails and Wild and Immersive (UBC).

By the end of the day, the marsh had worked its magic once again. People left with full passports, full bellies, and fuller appreciation for the vibrant, dynamic ecosystem that makes Scout Island such a treasure. Thanks to everyone who came out, volunteered, partnered, explored, and celebrated. You made the Marsh Magic Festival a success — and a whole lot of fun.

A Busy Summer Incoming for Scout Island Educators

By Lara

Scout Island has been hiring three university students each summer as teacher naturalist for decades. This year, the nature preserve in the heart of Williams Lake welcomes Ella Kruus, Aubreigh Gentles, and Evelyn Lee: Ella is a York University student studying screenwriting and political science, Evelyn is studying biochemistry at the University of Alberta, Aubreigh studies dental hygiene at The College of New Caledonia.

Currently, the students teach school classes a nature program of the teacher's choosing. Popular programs include Life in the Marsh, an exploration of aquatic invertebrates with a highlight dipping for and identifying creatures in the marsh, and Bees, Flowers and Pollination, which features a lesson using preserved specimens and bug eye simulators to immerse students in the life of a bee. Schools from across the region have attended these programs: including schools as far away as Horse Lake Elementary and Eliza Archie School. These nature programs will continue to run until the end of June, with a couple of classes even planning to stay overnight at the nature house!



Another program running at Scout Island is Stream to Sea which involves classes from around the district raising salmon from egg to fry and releasing them into Williams Lake River. Martin Kruus, Scout Island education coordinator, usually

begins this program in his iconic salmon hat with a fish dissection.

Looking towards the summer, the three teacher naturalists have already begun planning programs for kids. Aubreigh plans to kick off the summer with nature crafts and painting with her “Nature Art” program and explore bones, tracks and even real-life animals in “Marvellous Mammals” week. Ella is planning a bird-centric and paleontology program which she coined “Birds, Birds, and Dinosaurs” and a performing arts-orientated week which features creating a play about nature called “Fine Art and Theatre.” Evelyn's program “Out in the Wild Skills” seeks to hone kid’s outdoor expertise and “Water World Wonders” will explore oceans, waterways, and wetlands. These programs vary in length and age, but the age range is 5-12 and programs are 5-8 hours a day typically.

The new addition to the Scout Island summer programming this year is the “Guided Local Day Hikes.” Kids take the school bus from the nature house to a local hiking trail and participate in nature activities before, during, and after the hike. Don’t miss this program: the first two hikes are on June 30 and July 3!

Go to scoutisland.ca/community-programs to register for all summer programs now!

LCSS Woodworking Students Construct a Record Number of Nest Boxes in 2026

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



Three pieces of 5/8ths plywood, when placed in the hands of capable carpenters, can be transformed into 32 bird houses. I am not a capable carpenter. So, our Mountain Bluebird Program relies on the generosity of others who are. For years, Fred McMechan and Jim Sims annually filled the lockers at Scout Island. I happily remember opening those lockers and inhaling the pitchy scent of their new houses as the plywood responded to the longer, warmer days of April and May. For me, this has been a Spring ritual for at least 37 years.

In 2024, Fred and Jim stepped back from nest box construction, and Lake City Secondary woodworking teacher Andrew Hutchinson stepped forward. Andrew believes that students benefit from projects which enrich their community, and on Valentines Day of that year, his class donated 64 boxes to the Williams Lake Field Naturalists. Every house immediately found its way onto a Bluebird route, and if each box fledges two broods of young birds in 2024, 2025, and 2026, there will be about 1,920 more Mountain Bluebirds in the world, gobbling grasshoppers. Of course, the fledglings could just as well be single broods of Tree Swallows. Imagine 448 new Tree Swallows filling the skies each year, hungrily hunting mosquitoes. LCSS students, please keep those boxes coming!

And they did. In 2025, Andrew’s students provided 73 more bird houses, and in April of this year, they restocked the lockers with 98, totaling 235 over three years. LCSS, over three years, your generosity has helped lower the concentration of grasshoppers impacting ranchers and has helped curtail outbreaks of mosquitoes. Our community thanks you!

And I thank you. It has been rewarding to observe the planning, the measuring, the cutting, and the assembly of so many houses. This is a complicated project, one that requires problem-solving and teamwork in a group setting. My experienced educational eye noted that a lot of learning occurred among the participants, giving me hope that Mr. Hutchinson will fill our lockers once again in 2027.



One Locker Can Hold 48 Boxes



2026 LCSS Woodwork Class Proud of Their 98 Nest Boxes

Time for Grad

More from Loyd Csizmadia
Bluebird Program Coordinator

In high schools across our province, June is about graduation; it is about young people spreading their wings and flying into the future. Here in Williams Lake, for example, the Class of 2026 crossed the stage on June 12th, and by July, LCSS will have fledged another cohort of individuals into the wider community. Anthropologists call this a liminal moment—an instant between identities.

Young birds also experience liminal moments. Mountain Bluebird hatchlings in their nest boxes on Fox Mountain, for example, leaped through a portal into open skies between June 9th and 17th, around the same time as the LCSS Grad. For anyone lucky enough to witness a fledge—in particular a Tree Swallow fledge—you will not soon forget the experience.

Unlike Tree Swallows, Mountain Bluebirds graduate quietly and privately. The clumsy fledglings aim for the nearest tree or fence, but often end up on the ground, where they wait for parental guidance. Both adults remain near, feeding the fledglings and coaxing them into the safety of nearby shrubs. There, while waiting to be fed, the young adults calmly preen their feathers and stretch their wings, readying themselves for the first true flight into a wondrously new world.

Tree Swallow grads, on the other hand, burst through the threshold and soar into a joyous, aerial celebration. Other families quickly arrive, creating a communal swirl that is nearly impossible to photograph. To my mind, some of the adults appear to be hugging and kissing each young bird as it flies for the very first time. Then, after the last graduate launches into the sky, the colony with its six or seven new members flies elsewhere, leaving an empty nest box beneath a quiet sky.

What a beautiful experience!
Congratulations to the Fledglings of 2026.



Newly Fledged Female Mountain Bluebird Privately Contemplates Her New Surroundings (Photo by Loyd Csizmadia)



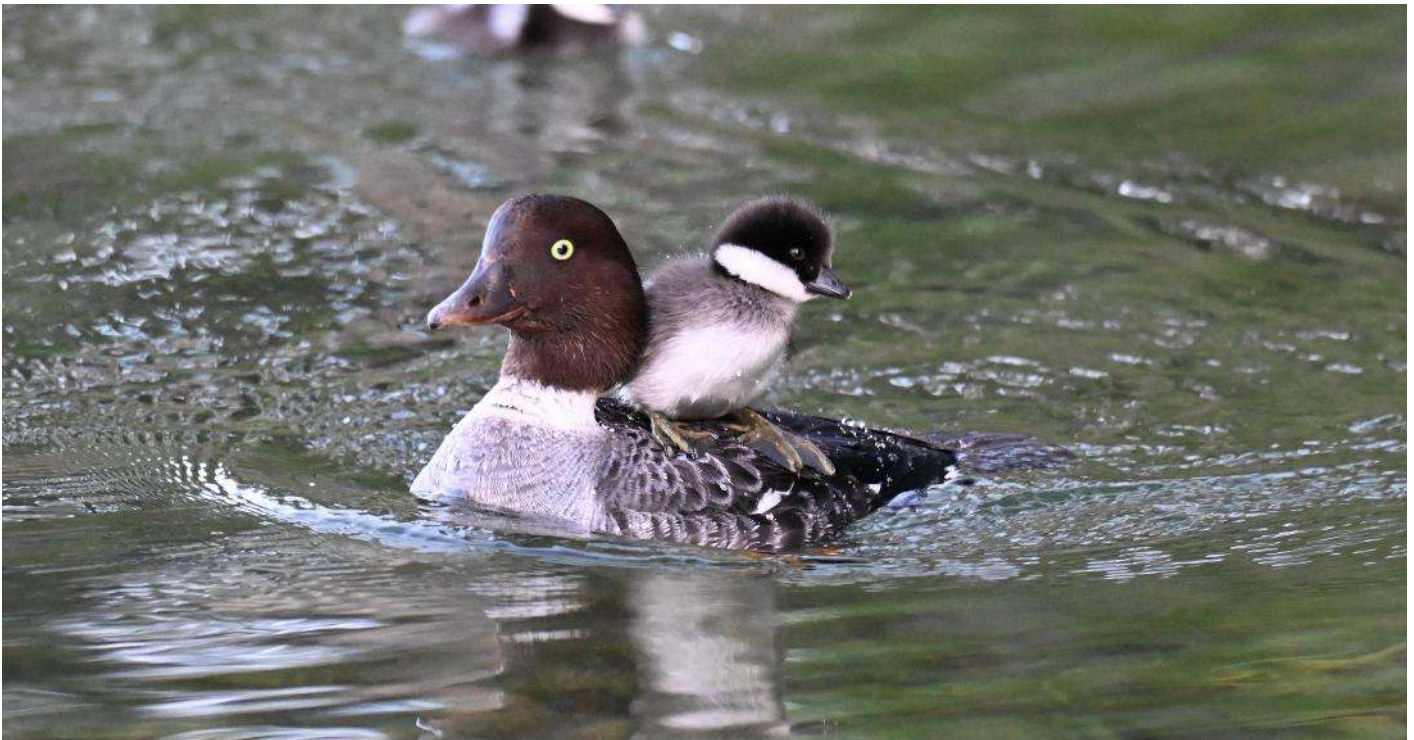
A Celestial Celebration Over Becher's Prairie in July 2025 (Photo by Loyd Csizmadia)

Glimpses Through the Lens



Marsh Wren

Photograph by Barry Porter, 100 Mile House area, May 9, 2026



Common Goldeneye

Photograph by Susan Gower, Sulphurous Lake, May 31, 2026



Hudsonian Godwits

Photograph by Sandy Proulx, East Lake, May 3, 2026



Killdeer

Photograph by Monika Peterson, Springhouse, May 9, 2026



Spotted Sandpiper

Photograph by Loyd Csizmadia, Chilanko Marsh, May 16, 2026