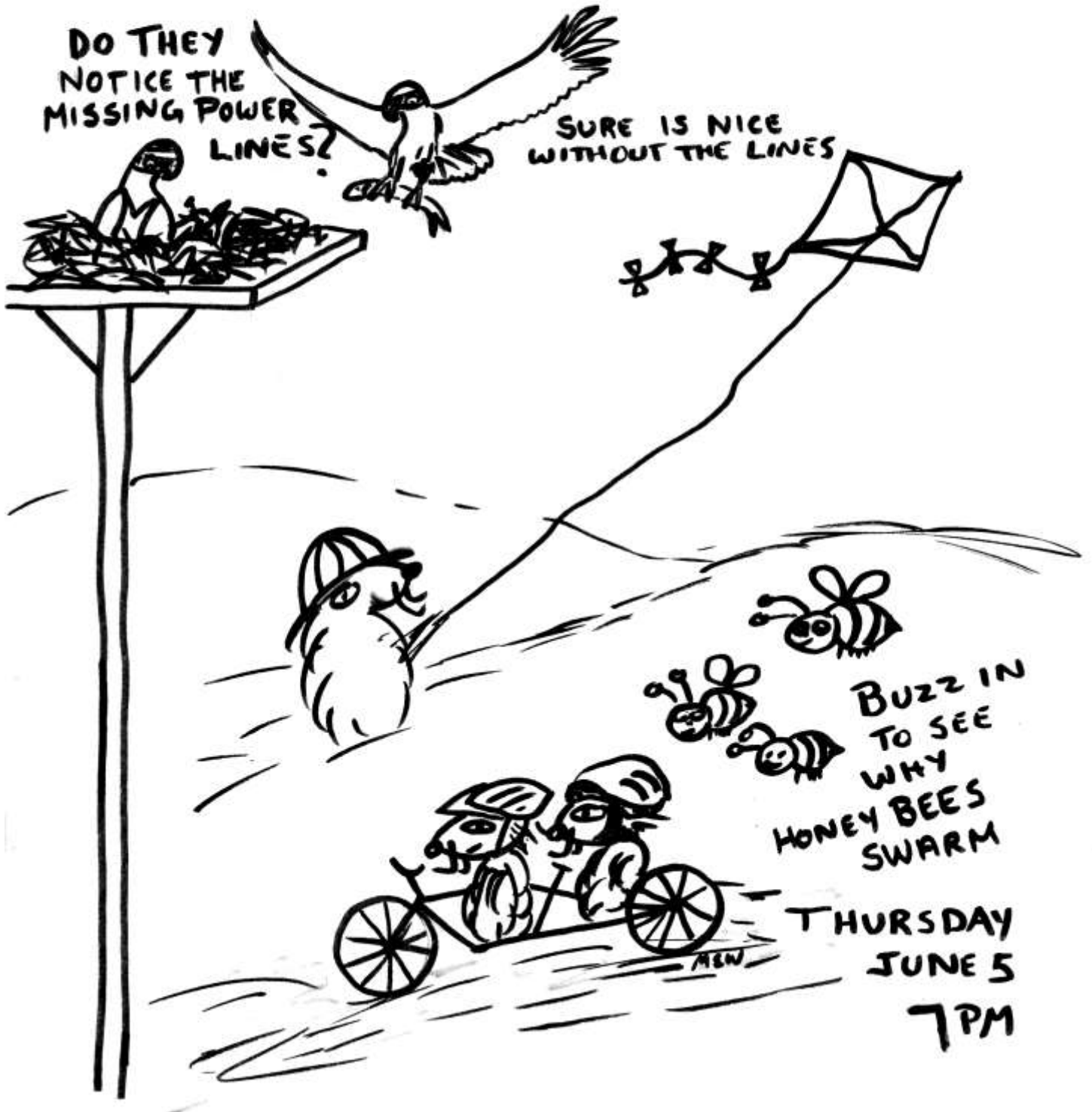


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
MAY 2014 NEWSLETTER





The newsletter for the:
Williams Lake Field Naturalists
1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC, V2G 5K5

Membership fees: Family (\$30), single (\$25) or student (\$10) memberships can be mailed to the above address. Please complete the membership and waiver forms available at the Nature Centre (250) 398-8532, muskratexpress@shaw.ca or the web site below. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail Fred_McMechan@telus.net

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 Fred McMechan, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Christie Mayall



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in late June. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at muskratexpress@shaw.ca.



Much Ado about Swarms

Presented by Diane Dunnaway

An evening program on Thursday, June 5 at 7pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

- Why honey bees swarm.
- How to prevent swarming, some history and a video.
- What to do if they do swarm, including a couple of inexpensive demonstration swarm catching kits.
- Swarm research: How scout bees select new home sites.
- How to care for a newly caught swarm colony.

Diane Dunaway has kept bees since 1998. A Master Beekeeper, she runs close to 100 colonies from her Bee Happy Honey farm in the Soda Creek valley of the Cariboo. Diane produced and edited BeesCene, the BC Honey Producers Association (BCHPA) quarterly journal for five years. Dedicated to the health and welfare of honey bees and the environment that supports them, she advocates for organic integrated pest management methods. Recently she became a BCHPA Certified Instructor of Introductory Beekeeping. When she's not chasing swarms around the countryside Diane can be found at home with Dave, her husband of 22 years, and their menagerie of rescue animals.

Reason readily admits that, at the moment, some things aren't yet known. It even hypothesizes that because of the limits of our brain, some things might never be known. I need to embrace only one ambivalence: to permit reason its work of transferring items from the heap of unknown things to the pile of known things, while allowing love to enjoy the search for meaning in the mysterious. *Robert Weeden in Country of Heart Eye and Hand*

Field Trip Report Creek Valley Biking

Wednesday May 7th (after work for some!) six bikers with five bikes (hmm how could that be?) headed down the creek valley to the Fraser River. The air was fresh and the world very green with new leaves on many but not all trees and plants. At the River a stately mature Bald Eagle was there to greet us. It is always a lovely route to travel with interesting, varied and changing sites in a beautiful environment.

Spring Yard and Garden Sale

From Margaret

Another successful event with thanks to all of you and so many of you as it takes a large team to make this happen. Val Biffert and Debbie Coombes got me started with the first offers of things to sell. Jim Sims turned down a fishing opportunity to work on setting up tables on Friday afternoon. Marg Pulver, Jenny Noble, Kathryn and Ordell Steen were busy pricing Friday afternoon. Scout Island Summer students helped us set up and clean up and Stephanie vanderLaan and her daughter Tianna came to help too. It is always a pleasure to have input from Michael Wynne who supports us most years. Rodger Hamilton, Fred McMechan, Rick Dawson and others too were available helping as needed during the entire event, set up, clean up and sale. The selling team with many years of experience was Sandra Stuart, Katharine Van Spall, Betty Donahue and Nola Daintith. Clean up, not always the most fun of jobs was efficiently led by Rick Dawson, Sean Donahue and Christie Mayall. Most left overs that were not taken back by donators were distributed to the share shed, Salvation Army and second hand book store. We had fewer plants than some years and they are always the most popular items. The plants we had included tomatoes, peppers, raspberries and other berries, herbs, lilacs, garden transplants, perennial flowers and indoor plants too. They were sold very quickly. Some customers come specifically every year to purchase plants. Many thanks to all the gardeners. You are an essential part of this bursary fund raising event. We earned just over \$800, which I believe is the amount required for the bursary. Thank you to those mentioned and those I missed (sorry if I forgot you) and those who helped and donated and shopped. A job well done by everyone!

Field Trip Report Chilanko Marsh

By Jim

In spite of the damp weather we all felt that our Saturday morning at Chilanko Marsh and Sunday morning at Choelquoit Lake were well worth the outing. The pot-luck supper and pancake breakfast were outstanding. At the marsh we counted 64 bird species on Saturday after having to leave early due to a heavy rainfall and added another 12 on a latter visit. All the regular birds showed up and there was nothing new. The birding highlight was the sighting of a covey of Sharp-tailed Grouse at Choelquoit Lake.



Participants enjoy the potluck

Farwell Canyon Balsamroot Tour

Report by Peter Opie

We had a lovely day on the grasslands and caught many spring flowers at their peak. The weather was fine, the trails were good, balsamroot magnificent; however, there were fewer balsamroot blooming than last year. We also saw lots of Dodecatheon (shooting stars), Delphinium and Hedysarum. Enjoying the outing were our new members from Prince George, UNBC PhD candidates, Stephanie and Alex. They loved the landscapes and ecology of the area.



Farwell Canyon Balsamroot

Sustainable Leadership Program

From: Bette McLennan, RSBC Board member.

Do you know someone...

- ? who is between the ages of 18 and 35
- ? who enjoys being out in nature
- ? who is community minded and believes in sustainable living
- ? who would like to work on a project with Scout Island Nature Centre
- ? who would like to travel down the Fraser River in August this summer for 3 weeks while developing that project

Then this person may want to become a participant on the annual Sustainable Leadership Program sponsored by the Rivershed Society of BC, a non-profit organization founded by Fin Donnelly after his initial swim of the Fraser River in 1995. To find out all the info about this opportunity, go to www.rivershed.com, or contact Bette McLennan at 250 392 6423.



Scout Island Nature Centre News

From Sue Hemphill
The Summer Staff are back and in their words:

Patrick Newsome is excited to come back for his second year as a Scout Island summer staff. He has finished his second year at the University of British Columbia Okanagan in Kelowna and is working towards a degree in biochemistry. He hopes to one day apply for medical school. Patrick enjoys working in nature and being able to spread the knowledge that he learns onto others.

Returning for her third summer at Scout Island, **Caitlin Langford** is still in awe at the diversity of wildlife we see on a daily basis. She is eager to teach visiting children about the bugs, birds, plants, and mammals that the nature centre has to offer. Caitlin is going into her fourth and final year of Biology at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George and can't wait to begin working towards her teaching degree thereafter.

Breanna Haws is new this year at Scout Island, and is eager to learn more about nature every day. She looks forward to teaching the children about bugs. Like Caitlin, Breanna is also going into her fourth and final year of Biology at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George. After completing her degree, Breanna intends to apply to Veterinary school in Saskatoon.

Paula is also helping out with school programs as a senior staff as we need her.



Left to right Pooh, Caitlin, Patrick & Breanna

As usual, WLFN members stepped in to help with the natural history training. Gina Roberts taught the staff some methods for looking at aquatic invertebrates. Cathy Koot and Kris Andrews took them birding and Sue covered plants. The staff, of course, do a lot of learning on their own and spent considerable time becoming "experts" for the programs they developed and lead.



Vermillion Sea Star, Blood Star, Cookie Star, Painted Star

Scout Island has new sea creatures!!

On Wednesday, May 7, the summer staff at Scout Island had a busy morning introducing our new animals that had via Greyhound to our salt-water tank. Among these creatures were sea stars, anemones, crabs, sea cucumbers, muscles and more! We are quite excited about our new members to the Nature House and these creatures have been the star attraction for many programs already.

We would like to thank the Pacific Salmon Foundation Community Salmon Program for paying for both the creatures and Jackie Hilderling's visit.

Caitlin, Patrick, and Breanna

Now for a few Words from Sue

Thank-you so much to the members who have been volunteer hosts on the weekends: Frances McCoubrey, Amy Penny, Jen and Oi Clark, Zack Weeks, Colleen Hughes and Bert and Alice Groenberg. We can still use hosts for weekends through October if any new people are interested. We also have some sewing that needs to be done to repair charcoal filters and dipping nets. This is a combination of hand sewing and machine work.

And Most Important:

Welcome Back Jenny

Don't Miss:

<p style="text-align: center;">Rivers to Oceans Celebration June 11 7pm at Scout Island Nature Centre</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Come visit the life from the ocean Release a Chinook fry to swim to the ocean Free program for all ages</p>
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Summer is Coming
There will be Nature Exploring
for ages 3-13 at
Scout Island Nature Centre

Nature Fun Programs
Each day of the week
July and August
For more information Call
398 8532 or scoutisland@shaw.ca
Registration starts June 16



Williams Lake Field Naturalists News from the Executive

By Fred McMechan

The executive had a meeting on May 20 and this article outlines some of the decisions made and projects completed on a variety of issues:

- 1) We will help the City to construct a board walkway along the Cattail Trail in the Williams Lake Valley. If the City approves the budget of providing funds for this project then plans will be made to start construction. The first step will be to order the materials needed for the construction. Afterwards we will have to have volunteers available for the construction. Hopefully the project will be completed this year. We also hope to raise funds for the purchase and placement of a dipping dock adjacent to the walkway. It will be used during the time pond and river studies are provided to children.
- 2) We have written two letters to the Minister of Education expressing our concerns about the curriculum changes for environmental education in the proposed BC Science curriculum. In this proposal there will not be a strong environmental structure and hence there is a likelihood that topics in nature studies will not be provided to children. For details please refer to the excellent article by Lenny Ross, "The Loss of

Environmental Education in the new BC Curriculum”, in the BC Nature magazine, Spring 2014, page 13. One letter will be from our club and the second will come from the Scout Island Nature Centre.

- 3) We have been planning for the use of the classroom in the Nature House for the next school year. We have not been able to find a full time preschool teacher and hence we will not be able to provide a full time preschool. Instead the School District will use the classroom part time and we are working toward having preschool operating for a shorter time.
- 4) The bathroom in the Caretaker’s House was renovated recently. Thank you to Bill Lloyd and Roger Hamilton for volunteering to complete this project.
- 5) Also thanks to Ray and Nathan Hornby who recently completed the installation of a new wall which encases the outdoor exit structure on the Nature House roof.
- 6) Last week volunteers helped to replace the stakes along the Scout Island Causeway Road with more secure posts. Hopefully these posts will discourage driving on the newly seeded area. Thanks to all who helped with this project
- 7) A decision was made to remove the loose rock on the pathway along the Butterfly Trail and to the Otter Point bridge. This will result in a better surface for wheel chair users. Thanks to the volunteers.
- 8) We have decided to have a BC Nature Field Camp at Tatlayoko Lake in early September, 2015. This camp will center out of the Tatlayoko Ranch owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Over the next few months we will be planning this event. The details will be outlined later this year and next year in the BC Nature magazine, the BC Nature website and our website.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

Researched by Jim Sims

Margaret has been feeding several Tanagers at her back yard feeder this year and has requested an article. The brilliantly coloured males with red heads, bright yellow bodies and black wings stand out as something special amongst the usual “Little Brown Birds” that visit our feeders. The “Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds” classifies the Western Tanager as a fairly common (7 to 20 individuals per locality per day) from mid-May to the end of August. They usually migrate back into our region by early May and can be found in smaller numbers until the end of September. Some years we will experience an invasion when large numbers of Tanagers are found in the lower elevation valleys. Perhaps this is caused by cooler weather further north that delays the migration (or in the case of this year maybe it is all the wet weather). In 1996 there was a remarkable migration through parts of the interior of BC with reports of large numbers of Tanagers that showed signs of possible stress from food shortage. This increase was reminiscent of one that occurred in the San Francisco Bay district of California in 1896. They did significant damage to the cherry crop and many were shot by orchardists. Today it is illegal to shoot native birds and hopefully our Tanagers are safer now.



One of Margaret’s Western Tanagers



Female Western Tanager

During the Chilanko Marsh search for birds I found the first Western Tanager when I heard it singing. The Tanager song is described by John Neville on his CD “Beginners Guide to B.C. Bird Songs” as sounding a lot like a Robin but it has a burrier tone. The next time you hear a Robin calling from high up in the canopy listen carefully for a burry tone, you might be listening to the Tanager. Try to spot it to confirm what you are hearing and you will soon be able to hear the differences in the 2 songs. By the way this brightly colour bird can actually blend in very well with the bright green leaves of an aspen tree and can be very difficult to locate. Once the male has returned to its breeding area it will lay claim to the breeding territory by singing almost non-stop, usually from the perimeter of the territory.

While I was watching several Tanagers that were visiting Margaret’s

suet feeder yesterday I noticed a great variety in the extent of the scarlet feathers on the heads of the males. Most red birds owe their redness to a variety of plant pigments known as carotenoids, the Western Tanager gets its scarlet head feathers from a rare pigment called rhodoxanthin. Unable to make this substance in their own bodies, Western Tanagers probably obtain it from insects in their diet. Perhaps the birds with less scarlet feathers had a different diet?

The Tanager can be found most often in open coniferous or mixed coniferous deciduous forests. They will glean insects from the higher branches of trees or shrubs as they move slowly through the canopy. They are strong fliers with rapid powerful wing beats and can hover for a few moments. They will also catch insects on the fly in flycatcher fashion. During migration they can be attracted to the backyard feeder with fruit and suet.



Note the red head is not as pronounced as in the earlier photograph

Sources: *Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds*, <http://www.allaboutbirds.org>, *Beginners Guide to B.C. Bird Songs* and *The Birds of British Columbia Volume 4*

Arrowhead Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*)

Researched by Jim Sims (I too can write about flowers)

Balsamroot is one of the most spectacular of flowers found in the interior grasslands in the Cariboo Chilcotin. Most of us who travel West at this time of the year have been in awe of the hillsides turned bright yellow with Balsamroot.



Balsamroot in Farwell Canyon

Balsamroot is a member of the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*). Arrowhead describes the shape of the large (up to 30 cm), long stalked leaves. They are silver coloured with dense felt like hairs. Balsamroot comes from the aroma of the long (can be up to 2.5m) woody taproot. The flower is a bright yellow ray flower similar to a Sunflower but smaller (up 10cm diameter).

All parts of the plant are edible and it was an important food source and medicinal plant for interior first nations. The leaves can be eaten raw or steamed and they were also smoked. The leaves were also used as a poultice. The seeds are particularly nutritious and rich in oil. They were dried and then pounded to make a flour. The tap root can be steamed or baked and eaten. The root was also used medicinally as a tea. It is an important browse for deer and cattle, particularly the flower.

Balsamroot does not transplant easily (long root). The seeds are very difficult to germinate and may take between 3 to 8 years to mature.

Sources: A variety of websites and *Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia*