

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS  
JANUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER



PROGRAM: FEB 16: Visit Nepal and Everest  
Look for weasels and fishers inside.





## The MUSKRAT EXPRESS

JANUARY 22, 2016

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](mailto: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](mailto: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 February. 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](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)



## Membership Overdue

A friendly reminder from your membership director, Cathy Koot, membership fees and waiver forms were due January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016. If you have not renewed please do not delay. Forms were mailed/emailed with the last newsletter. Forms can also be downloaded from the club website or picked up at the Nature Centre. Thanks for getting this done on time.

## Namaste

Tuesday February 16<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm at Scout Island Nature Centre  
An evening program presented by Heather Rolston and Sue Price  
In October 2015; Heather Rolston and Sue Price trekked through the Himalayan Mountains to Everest Base Camp (5364m), over Cho La Pass (5420m), Gokyo Ri (5360m) and through the Gokyo Valley. Join Heather and Sue for an evening slide show presentation displaying the amazing scenery, people and culture Nepal.



## Williams Lake Field Naturalists AGM Notice

April 1<sup>st</sup>

This meeting will be held on Friday, April 1, at the Nature House, starting at 6 pm. There will be a potluck supper followed by a short AGM meeting and a program featuring presentations by club members who wish to volunteer in a show and tell format. More details will be forthcoming in the next newsletter.

## Scout Island Nature Centre Banquet

April 15<sup>th</sup>

The annual fund raising banquet for the Scout Island Nature Centre will be held on Friday, April 15, at St. Andrew's United Church. The guest speaker will be the nature photographer and biologist, Jared Hobbs, who lives in Victoria. A

silent auction is also being planned for this evening. Details about Jared's presentation and the silent auction will be provided in the next newsletter.

## Field Trip Planning Meeting

### March 22nd

The meeting to plan for the field trip schedule for this year will be held on Tuesday, March 22, at the Scout Island Nature House, starting at 5 pm. Please come and participate in this meeting if you wish to be a field trip leader. If you cannot attend and can lead a field trip, or if you wish to suggest a field trip please contact Jim Sims at [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca) or phone 296-3628

## 48th Annual Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count

By Phil Ranson

The annual Williams Lake Field Naturalists Christmas bird count was held on Dec 20th under variable weather conditions. The 31 participants in the field as well as over a dozen feeder watchers ended the day with a total species list of 59 with 2 additional count week birds seen; a Harris's Sparrow which showed up at a Borland Road feeder the next day, and an American Three-toed Woodpecker reported from Hodgson Road the day before. This was the second best count in our 48 year history with the highest count of 62 species happening in 2008 under more favourable conditions when several ducks, grebes and even a loon were counted on the mostly open Williams Lake.

A snow squall which came across the area in the morning made bird counting close to impossible for a short time. After it cleared the remainder of the day was fairly pleasant but gave no indication we would end up with a record total count of 5,251 birds. Keeping in mind that one third of this number consisted of Bohemian Waxwings; this was still an impressive total. Impressive was also the word used by several parties to describe the spectacle of a swirling flock of well over 1,000 waxwings which appeared over town shortly after the snow cleared and which split and joined as they crisscrossed the city. The final total was estimated at a conservative 1,751 birds.

The previous high total for the count was 4,908 in 2006, another good waxwing year. The average for the last 10 years stands at 4,153. Despite the high numbers there were no new species for the count and less than usual count high species. Not even the waxwings were a count high. Making the list this year were 18 Eurasian Collared-Doves which were not recorded on the count until 2011 and had a previous high of 6. Spotted Towhee (5), White-throated Sparrow (4) and American Goldfinch (102) all exceeded their previous highs by one. The only truly unexpected bird was a Yellow-headed Blackbird on South Mackenzie which had only previously appeared on the count in 1969. Three species of owl is always good to find in daylight and we had a good selection of raptors. White-winged Crossbills have recently returned after a lengthy absence from the local area and Gray-crowned Rosy Finches made their first appearance since 1995. Pine Grosbeaks also made an impressive showing.

Results of this and over 2000 other counts across North America are submitted to the National Audubon Society and Bird Studies Canada which make the data readily available for researchers' studying the dynamics of wintering bird populations. Thanks to all those who participated and to Fred for once again hosting the post-count pot-luck.

An even bigger thanks to Phil for keeping us all organized and on task! Count results can be found on the last page of the newsletter.



## Notes from the Executive

By Fred McMechan

- 1) Thank you to all who participated in the Christmas Bird Count. We sent a \$150 donation to Bird Studies Canada to be used for the tabulation and management of the results of Christmas bird counts
- 2) The planning for the WLFN AGM on Friday, April 1, is underway. A notice appears in this newsletter.
- 3) The field trip planning meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 22, starting at 5 pm at the Nature House. Check the information about this meeting in this newsletter.

- 4) The annual Nature Centre banquet will be held on Friday, April 15, at St. Andrew's United Church. More information appears in an article in this newsletter and will appear in future newsletters/media releases.
- 5) Fred McMechan will be the club representative at the BC Nature Conference/AGM at Courtenay BC on May 12 to 16
- 6) This spring we will be working on the project of building a new kiosk structure next to the Nature House parking lot. This will include the installation of new vertical pillars, construction of new roof and the repainting of the informational panels.
- 7) We will be pursuing the construction of a new elevated board walkway on the Willow Trail at the west end between the bird blind and the present walkway. Before we can start construction we will need to receive approval from BC Lands since the property is crown land. Hopefully the construction will be done in the fall when the lake water level is low.
- 8) We received notification from the Williams Lake Winter Carnival Committee that they will not be cutting ice blocks from the Lake for the igloo building event. Instead they will be providing an opportunity for children to be involved in a hands-on activity.
- 9) We are working on developing a policy on the non-use of recreational drones at the Nature Centre. We have been in communication with the City and The Nature Trust of BC on this issue.



### Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

#### Minister of Education Visits Scout Island

On Tuesday December 8<sup>th</sup> BC's minister of education Mike Bernier visited Kim Zalay's grade 7 Environmental Class during one of the class's weekly outings to Scout Island. The Minister was accompanied by MLA Donna Barnett as they tour the Nature Centre and the grounds with the students. The students enjoyed sharing with the minister many natural history facts that they have discovered during their visits to Scout Island.



#### Our Day at Scout Island (Home Schoolers Visit on January 12)

by Jacob Shoults, Dillon Russell, Shanda Russell, Maddy Salt, Timu Kruus, Kaydin Sheppard, Hattie Holmes, and Lauryn Marklinger (grade 4-6 students with SD#27 Distance Education, Schooling at Home)

First we went swimming and we got wet...Hattie did a belly flop! We arrived at Scout Island and started piling snow for quinzees. There were whompers, scoopers, and slackers. The two huge mounds were behind the trees by the power poles. We tried some cooperative games, "4-Up" and "Quick Shuffle". Jacob was being annoying and throwing snowballs, so we enjoyed face-washing him. That sure felt good. After lunch, we played a game where we made up riddles for inanimate objects in the Nature House. We trotted off to Mystery Island (across the ice), throwing snowballs at our teacher all the way. "Man Tracker" (or hide-and-go-seek-tag) was fun. Three or four of us hid at a time, some up in trees, then the others tracked them down (after counting to 85). Our wildlife for the day included a pileated



woodpecker, lots of deer tracks and pellets, and some of the usual winter birds. Working in two teams we began our quinzee excavations. Three of us (and our teacher) took turns crawling in to dig out the central chamber. Kaydin broke the entrance to the other snow shelter and was given a "timeout" by his coworkers. The quinzees were comfy for four when we finished (see photo). We enjoyed a vigorous game of "Fox and Goose" to end our lovely winter day at Scout Island. Thank you!

**Ice Fishing to Collect Data**

By: Roy Argue

'Students from LCSS' Enviro Club spent a cold and windy half day ice fishing on Chimney Lake with Todd Gale, Fisheries Technician for the BC Government. Parker Kennedy and Kyle Gysel along with Scout Island mentor Roy Argue set out to collect data which the government uses to help manage stocking and fish management plans.

The team had a goal of capturing 30 kokanee, for length and weight sampling however they fell a bit short. Students were presented with: fishing techniques, sampling equipment, reasons and methods for stocking lakes in this region. There was some discussion of kokanee biology and the use of genetic manipulation to produce sterile fish which will grow larger, without putting energy into developing reproductive organs'

**More News**

The Nature Kindergarten held its parent information meetings last week and there are now 21 students registered to be in the class starting September 2016. This is exciting news.

Scout Island Nature Centre will once again be having help from teacher candidates from UBC that are taking part in community field experience. They join our summer staff leading school programs. These prospective teachers will be in Williams Lake April 25-May 13 and June 6-25. SD 27 works with UBC and provides placements for 12-15 teacher candidates each spring. These people are in the last months of their training and several of them from the past two years have become teachers in our district. This year the district may be billeting the students in private homes as the dorm is not available. If you are interested in hosting one of these teacher candidates, please contact me.

Once again we are looking for Summer Staff—teacher Naturalists. If you know of a university student interested in biology and/or teaching please have them send me a cover letter and resume. They can email me if they would like more information about this great summer job.

**Up Coming Events:**

**GEOCACHING with your kids AT SCOUT ISLAND NATURE CENTER**

**February 27th 12-2pm**

A fun winter walk meets hide and seek using your Smartphone. A great outdoor activity any time of year with the secrets of winter success revealed in a day of play and adventure outside, please dress for any weather. A free event for families with children aged 4-12 Contact Mary-- [themaryforbes@gmail.com](mailto:themaryforbes@gmail.com) Please bring a GPS or smartphone to this event.



**Be Wild this Spring Break at Scout Island Nature Centre**  
**Nature Exploring and Art in Nature for Ages 6-13**

**March 14-17**  
**9:30-3:00 each day**  
**\$30/day or \$100 for all 4 days**  
**Call 398 8532 or [shemphill@xplornet.com](mailto:shemphill@xplornet.com) to register**

**Yes she is enjoying retirement**

Here is a picture of Jenny that was taken at her retirement party back in September. That is Pat Teti standing with her and the photo that he took for her retirement gift. Jurgen will be providing the frame.

**Snow Party at Moose House** (Sue and Jurgen's near Horsefly) Sunday Feb. 7 ski, snow shoe, sled If you want to do a long ski (10 k round trip), come by 1:30 to join that. Shorter ski etc. come any time after 1:30. Potluck supper will start at 4:30. Let Sue know if you are coming so we can connect people for car-pooling.

**Cariboo-Chilcotin Fisher translocation to the Cascades**

By Marg Evans

The first fisher that appeared in my life arrived one snowy winter day in November in the 1990's. It was brought to our home by a local trapper who was working on a three year translocation of fisher from the Cariboo-Chilcotin to the Kootenays. Over the next three years my previous ignorance of this creature changed to a competent understanding.

*Background on the fisher:* The endurance and survival skills of this secretive predator can be attested to by researchers who have tracked and studied them for decades. Medium sized animals built long, thin and low to the ground, the fisher has large feet providing excellent traction on the snow. A member of the weasel family (i.e. weasel, mink, martin, wolverine), they are the only predator that effectively preys on porcupine. As well they feed on snowshoe hare, squirrels, mice, voles, birds and occasionally berries. Fisher and marten are the only medium sized predators that are agile enough to follow prey up trees, into hollow logs, brush piles and into underground tunnels. Their life span reaches up to ten years and they are found only in North America.

*The Projects:* Having learned through the first translocation how to care for fisher, Don and I were excited in 2007 to become the coordinators of another translocation, this time over 90 animals re-settled into the Olympic Peninsula, Washington. Working with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington National Parks, Conservation North West, and the Provincial Ministry of Environment we attained great satisfaction in being a part of the restoration effort to re-introduce this state-listed endangered species to its previous range.

Over this time we once again housed, transported and assisted in the vetting adding new techniques such as wooden transport boxes designed initially by local biologist Larry Davis. These transport boxes allowed the fisher a less stressful trip from their capture location to the holding facility. Each box was equipped with fresh water, food and straw bedding. The fishers that are transported into the Olympic Peninsula continue to expand their range and population. In November of 2015 we have begun a further project of moving approximately 30- 40 fisher a year over the next four to six years into the Cascade Mountain Ranges of Washington State. The long-term goal is to re-establish self-sustaining fisher populations in both the southern and northern portions of the Cascades where they existed prior to extirpation through habitat loss and trapping.



Our project year begins with the enlisting of trappers. The previous six years of translocations established a core list of experienced trappers. Our humble beginning of 8 trappers has expanded to over 25 trappers, including two First Nations Bands, participating with us. The trappers participate in a session or two of reviewing humane live trapping procedures and are all outfitted with live traps and transport boxes. A transfer/pick-up location is agreed on for each. The traps once set up, covered with boughs and supplied with food and moisture, need to be checked daily. When a fisher is trapped it is quickly moved into a transport box and Don is contacted to arrange pick-up. In case of multiple fisher calls at one time, or extreme weather, the trappers become the care givers, supplying food, water and shelter at their homes until pick-up. Arriving at the facility, which is indoors and heated to just above freezing, the fisher are moved through a series of slide doors, into a housing unit. The unit is attached to a wire run that is covered in fir boughs and filled with climbing branches, bark and straw and includes a large water bowl. The house portion is divided into a nest area, layered with fresh shavings and topped in 6 inches of straw. This also serves as a feed area. The fisher's food consists solely of wild game meat. The other divide is a litter section, complete with litter tray. Yes, 90% of them use a litter box, with the odd one choosing to use their run instead. Once two or three fisher have arrived, we arrange to take them into Dr. Magnowski's vet clinic, where we assist him and his staff in measuring, photographing and implanting PIT tags and a radio transmitter. When we have 6 to 8 fisher passing all requirements then Don heads south to meet the Washington biologists who then continue the journey to the release site. The occasional fisher will arrive with old wounds, some of which antibiotics can heal, and it is satisfying to know that a few of these are alive only because they happened into the live trap.

To watch the first release of fisher this year go to:

**King 5 News (Seattle TV)** <http://www.king5.com/story/tech/science/environment/2015/12/03/endangered-fishers-reintroduced-south-cascades/76753568/>



## Our View of the Night Sky – January/February 2016.

By Steve Capling

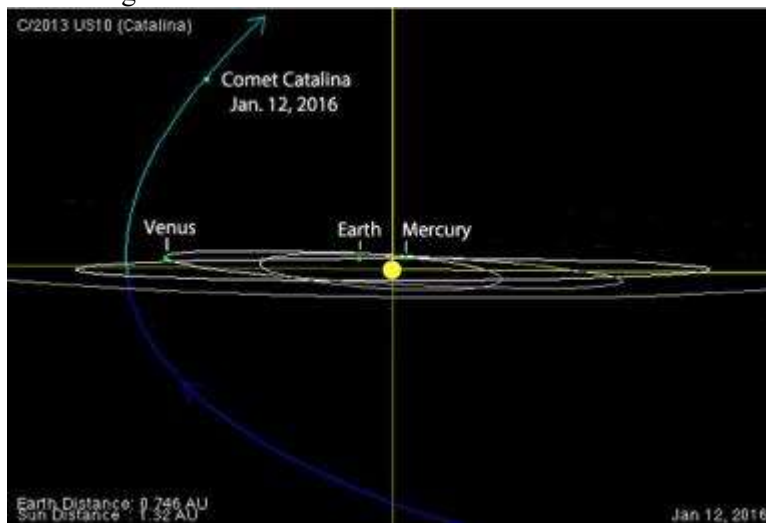
### Comet Catalina

Comet Catalina is still visible in both the morning dawn & evening sky moving up above the Big Dipper. It is visible, but quite faint, in binoculars & small telescopes. It will fade fast once we get into the latter part of January.

On Jan. 12 the comet was at a point closest to earth.

See more at: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/observing/comet-catalina-sails-into-northern-skies111120151111/#sthash.vPCZv4Wk.dpuf>

These diagrams show the orbit of Comet Catalina.



### Planet Review

Mercury is visible low in the eastern dawn sky. It is close to the Moon on Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>.

Mars is visible as a reddish ‘star’ in the dawn sky in the east in the constellation Libra.

Jupiter is visible in the eastern evening sky in Leo. It will be close to the Moon on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>.

Venus continues to dominate the eastern morning sky. It is close to the Moon on Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>.

Saturn is visible in the dawn eastern sky in Ophiuchus.

### Moon

Full moon - Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> & Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>. New moon - Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>. & Mar. 9<sup>th</sup>.

### Meteor Showers

There are no specific meteor showers in February & March.

### Zodiacal Light

The Zodiacal light is visible in the western twilight sky for the next two weeks starting on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>.

### Solar Eclipse

There is a solar eclipse that will occur in Indonesia and parts of the western Pacific Ocean on Mar. 8/9<sup>th</sup>. It will not be visible in Williams Lake.

### Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - [Skymaps.com/downloads.html](http://Skymaps.com/downloads.html) - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “January 2016: Northern Edition (PDF)”. At the end of the month it changes to show the next month’s chart.





**Member's Moment from Nara Riplinger****I just have to share my story!**

I went for a little ski at Bull Mountain this afternoon (Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>) and saw a long white rodent scurry across the trail (about 4-6 inches long). He was popping in and out of the snow on a debris pile. I watched him pull out a squealing vole (?) and kill it fairly quickly. I decided to ski closer as I assumed he would have a bit more to lose if he scampered away and left his prey behind.

He did leave his catch and return to the pile but popped in and out at various locations, reminding me a bit of the 'Whack-a-Mole' game! He returned to his prey and carried it off towards the debris pile but dropped it. After a few more games of 'Whack-a-Mole', he picked up the vole and started scurrying RIGHT AT ME! He dropped his prey right beside my ski (see picture) and then looked as if he was going to climb my ski pole--he had his two front paws right up the pole!

He returned to his prey, ran across my skis with it, and dropped it a few feet away in the snow. He then returned to me to sniff my leg (?!), turned to pick up his prey, and scampered into the bush.

I thought for sure it was a least weasel as there was no sign of black on the tip of its tail. However, once I really zoom in on the pictures, I do see a spec of black. It is a very small animal (slightly bigger than the vole) and the tail is also very short (less than 1/4 the body length) so perhaps it is a least weasel after all.

Sorry the pics are not great quality but I only had my old phone. (*That's Ok Nara; sometimes the "Moment" is the story not the picture quality*)

"Member's Moment" is an opportunity for you to share a special scene, plant, animal, bird or outdoor activity that you have enjoyed and photographed here in the Cariboo Chilcotin. A chance for you to encourage other members to get outdoors and find their own special moments close to home and perhaps share them with all of us. For each newsletter the editors will select one or two photos for inclusion in the newsletter based on the quality of the photo as well as the interesting paragraph you must provide. We will save all submitted unused moments in hopes they may find a place in a future edition. Please email your full resolution photo and paragraph to the [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca). A special thanks to Nara for their winning entry.

### Christmas Bird Count Data 2015

Mallard.	66
Northern Pintail	1
Green-winged Teal.	1
Common Goldeneye	2
Ruffed Grouse	1
Bald Eagle.	19
Northern Harrier	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Northern Goshawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	3
Golden Eagle	2
Killdeer	3
Wilson's Snipe	1
Rock Pigeon	410
Eurasian Collared-Dove	18
Mourning Dove	2
Northern Pygmy-Owl	4
Great Gray Owl	1
Short-eared Owl	1
Downy Woodpecker.	28
Hairy Woodpecker.	28
American Three-toed Woodpecker	cw
Black-backed Woodpecker	1
Northern Flicker	47
Pileated Woodpecker.	10
Merlin	3
Northern Shrike	7
Gray Jay.	12
Black-billed Magpie.	15
American Crow.	342
Common Raven.	379
Black-capped Chickadee.	265
Mountain Chickadee.	163

Red-breasted Nuthatch.	64
Brown Creeper.	4
American Dipper.	21
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1
Townsend's Solitaire.	28
American Robin	12
Varied Thrush	1
European Starling.	201
Bohemian Waxwing.	1751
Spotted Towhee	5
American Tree Sparrow	3
Song Sparrow.	36
White-throated Sparrow	4
Harris's Sparrow	cw
White-crowned Sparrow	4
Dark-eyed Junco.	107
Red-winged Blackbird.	3
Yellow-headed Blackbird	1
Brewer's Blackbird	5
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	10
Pine Grosbeak.	308
House Finch.	282
White-winged Crossbill	35
Common Redpoll	131
Pine Siskin	5
American Goldfinch.	102
Evening Grosbeak	9
House Sparrow.	279
Total Birds	5251
Total Species	59
Observed during Count Week	cw
Record highs for the count	