

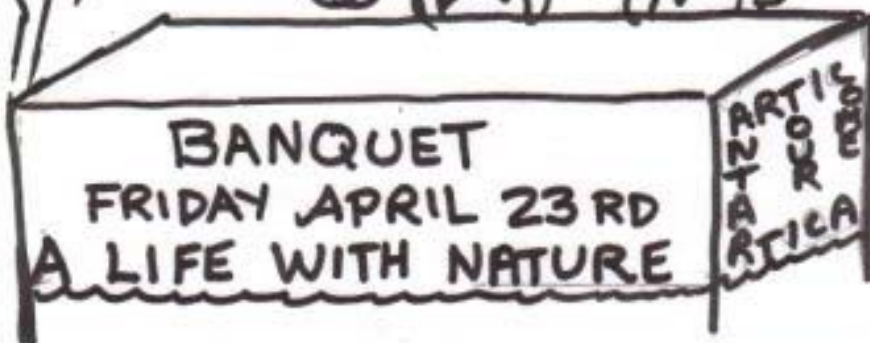
MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2010 NEWSLETTER



IF WE WENT ON A
WORLD TOUR WITH KEN W.
WOULD WE LEARN TO BE
NATURE EXPERTS TOO...???



CHILCOTIN FISHERS

FRIDAY MARCH 26

→ AGM ←

FEATURING
DELICIOUS SUPPER
OUTSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHY



TUES APR 13

7:30 PM



The MUSKRAT EXPRESS

FEBRUARY 21, 2010

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, muskrat@midbc.com 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 Web Site <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>

Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Bev Frittenburg, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Ordell Steen, Rob Higgins, Rick Dawson and Cathy Koot

Editors: If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the Muskrat please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at muskrat@midbc.com

“A Life with Nature “

By: Ken Wright

Annual Scout Island Nature Centre Fund Raising Banquet

April 23rd at the United Church, doors open at 6:00pm for pre-dinner social, dinner served at 6:30
Tickets will be available in early April at “The Open Book”, the Nature Centre or from members of the executive and will cost \$35 for adults and \$10 for students.

Ever wanted to see penguins and humpback whales in Antarctica? How about the migration patterns of Yellow-billed Loons nesting in the high arctic or



Ken Wright Cruising Antarctica

Mule Deer in the Fraser River basin?

Join *Ken Wright* on a vicarious photographic journey spanning both hemispheres from Alaska to Antarctica and many points in between in his quest to explore and understand the natural world.

Ken Wright has been a student of the natural world since childhood. Driven by a deep passion for the natural world and guided by many mentors, Ken has accumulated a wealth of experience studying birds, lichens, mammals, and environmental contaminants in wildlife. His experiences have

taken him to many remote corners of British Columbia, Alaska, Yukon Territory and Nunavut. He has also recently done studies in coastal Maine and Utah's Great Basin. In the winters, he heads far south to work on a cruise ship in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean and has completed two trans-Atlantic voyages linking South America and South Africa. When not in remote field camps and abroad, Ken makes his home in Lillooet, British Columbia.

A World Tour

Tuesday March 9th

By: Dave Munday and Liz Brown

Dave and Liz are an Aussie couple on a round the world year long trip. Currently they are enjoying a Cariboo Chilcotin experience and have offered to share some of their photos. Their slide show will highlight some of the more remote areas they have visited like Mongolia, Patagonia, Argentina, Chile, and Peru.

Mountain Caribou Current Status and Recovery Action in the Cariboo Region

By: John Youds, Regional Ecosystem Head, Ministry of Environment

March 18, 7:30pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

Mountain Caribou numbers have declined substantially since the early 1900's and the population is listed as threatened under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA). John and Jim have worked on caribou conservation initiatives for over two decades. They will present current knowledge on Mountain Caribou sub-populations in the Cariboo region and identify efforts that are underway to affect recovery of these herds.



Annual General Meeting and "Nature House Challenge"

Friday March 26th at the Nature Centre

Pot luck supper begins at 6:00pm. Don't miss this annual delicious feast and an opportunity to socialize with the membership. Please remember that we do need as many as possible to attend this meeting. Following the feast there will be a very brief annual business meeting. The main event will "Nature House Challenge" a challenge to celebrate the rich wealth of learning opportunities the Scout Island Nature House provides. Teams of participants will be asked to use their observational and sleuthing skills plus some creativity to go through a series of question stations. The event promises to be a fun and sociable way for our club members to get to learn about natural history and become familiar with our Nature House.

Plus, there is a possibility that AGM participants may get to view the debut performance of, "**Raven-Fire-People**", a comedic skit about the moral of living in a landscape where fire is your neighbour. This is part of the "Spawning Stories, Hatching Change" program the Scout Island Nature Centre is providing.

2010 Field Trip Planning Meeting

Tuesday March 30th at the Nature Centre at 5:00pm

Help us plan another year of great outings for the members. If you can't attend and wish to lead a trip please provide Fred or Jim with dates and details before the meeting. If you would like a trip to a particular area but don't want to lead the trip please pass on your suggestions and we will do our best to find you a leader.

Annual Alkali Lake Outing (first 2010 Field Trip)

trip leader Fred McMechan (392-7680)

Sunday April 11th

Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 9:00am to arrange car pooling. Enjoy this annual field trip to view bird species along the road to Alkali Lake. Be sure to bring a lunch with hot beverage, your binoculars or spotting scope. Birding will be done from the road so expect minimal walking.



A few of the Pelicans at Alkali Lake in 2008

The Ecology of Fishers in the West Chilcotin

By: Larry Davis

Tuesday April 13th

7:30pm at The Nature Centre

Larry has spent several years studying fishers and is a very experienced field biologist who has done most of his work in the Cariboo-Chilcotin including work on forests birds, deer, moose, martin and wolves as well as fisher. The Fisher work was done for his Master thesis which he completed in December. The talk will include some general information on Fishers and their habitat as well as his specific study in the West Chilcotin and will include good pictures of the animals.



One of Larry's assistants, Natsatalia the Fisher

Nature Centre Renovations

The renovations to the north-facing porch on the Nature House will soon be underway. WLFN Member Mo O'Hara is the Head Nail-Pounder, and he could use some helping hands. He'll need general labour help from March 12-14, carpentry help March 15-16 and some painters in the week of March 21. If you have some time to spare and would like to help us keep costs down, please phone the Nature House 398-8532 or email Jenny neptune.noble@gmail.com, (And of course if you'd rather send money...)

Scout Island Nature Centre Report

By: Sue Hemphill

Scout Island Nature Centre will have an interactive booth set up as part of the *Community Science Celebration* at TRU on Saturday, March 27. Mary Forbes is developing the display and will help host it. It will include taking visitors outside for some outdoor games. If you would like to help host the booth and/or help lead the games please contact the Nature House and talk to Sue or Mary (398-8532). **Help us get people outdoors playing!**

You may want to attend the *Community Science Celebration* (10:30-4). It will be a showcase of science in our community. You can share and experience the innovation in science and technology that exists in your own backyard. For more information and to see a video snapshot of a *Celebration* event, visit www.scienceworld.ca/csc.

Mentors Needed

On March 26 as part of the *Community Science Celebration*, there will be a panel discussion and networking session, Science World's Opening the Door program connects students with mentors and encourages exploration of science and technology careers—that's where we need you. Today's youth are tomorrow's science and technology innovators. We need mentors from various scientific fields to help inspire grade 11 and 12 students and we'd like you to participate!

What to expect:

9:15 Registration

9:30 Welcome and Introduction of Scientists

9:45 Panel Discussion & Networking Tips

10:15 Networking Session for Scientists and Students

11:15 Door Prizes & Acknowledgements

11:30 Science Show!

12:00 End of Event

Event Details **Friday, March 26, 2010** Columneetza Secondary School 1045 Western Avenue Williams Lake, BC V2G 2J8

Get Involved

Be a panelist and answer questions about your work experience. Give high school students the opportunity to network with you and ask questions.

Sign up to volunteer and inspire youth—email us with information about your occupation and education at: sisinfo@scienceworld.ca Your event expenses, including mileage or transit fees will be reimbursed.

The Nature Centre has been busy in January and February with winter programs despite the lack of snow. We have had classes outside checking tracks in the ice, sliding on the mud, playing Deer and Cougar, and inside working on stories. Mary and Sue have both enjoyed helping students (grades 1-10) develop stories for our "Spawning Stories Hatching Change" project. We hope to share some of these with you at the WLFN AGM in March. The first Family Explorer Saturday took place on January 30th and a number of people enjoyed looking for and learning about wildlife signs (tracks, poop, pellets). These Family Explorer days are open to the public but also offer our local Young Naturalist Club members to work on their Explorer Action Awards. Do you know of a young person that would like to join the Williams Lake Young naturalist Club? Contact Sue or Mary at 398-8532 or email yncwilliamslake@gmail.com

Upcoming Programs

Winter Wildlife Olympics February 27 1-4 pm at Scout Island Nature Centre

Bear vs. Squirrel, Lynx vs. Hare, and Mouse vs. Marmot... Who has the right stuff to survive and be declared the champion of winter in the Cariboo Chilcotin? Meet the contenders and re-enact their skills and struggles in games that will keep you warm and stories that will fuel your imagination. Kids ages 5 to 15 with their adult Guardian, Pal or Parent are invited to join our dynamic new Naturalist **Mary Forbes** for some **Free Fun** Winter Saturdays!!

Spring Break Program that will have participants outside exploring, playing games and having adventures every day –

March 9, 10, 11 between 9:30-3:30 each day For ages 6 to 13

We will be outdoors as much as possible actively exploring and playing.

March 9-Owls Hoot and Song Birds Sing

March 10-Skulls and Tracks—Be a Detective

March 11-Spring is Coming

The cost is \$15 a day or \$40 for all three days

Call 398-8532 to register

Wood Duck Boxes

Darryl Grams has constructed some new and replacement wood duck, merganser and kestrel boxes. He will be scaling the fir trees on the lake in short order to place them. They are for rent, and come complete with wood shaving bedding "Lakeshore homes, great views, beach access....for amorous couples only". Contact Sue for details.



Once Again “Where have all the Salmon gone?”

We are all aware of the seriousness of this issue to our local run of Horsefly River Sockeye and it is very important that we do not allow our governments to delay making steps to resolve the problem. Recently we received the following appeal from Michelle Young, Salmon Aquaculture Campaigner with the Georgia Strait Alliance. Please consider visiting the two web sites listed at the end of the article and responding. The sites include a lot more details on the issue and the research around the issue. You will also find convenient links that will help you respond.

The Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform has been working toward a transition of the salmon farming industry to sustainable closed containment technology.

We are asking for your support in our latest campaign to clear the Wild Salmon Narrows of open net-cage salmon farms. This would mean the removal of all fish farms and the relinquishment of tenures from Okisollo and Hoskyn Channels, which are on the east and north coasts of Quadra Island (see attached map). This year's disastrous Fraser River sockeye returns call for immediate emergency action.



Eventually all net cages must be removed from coastal BC waters to protect wild salmon, other marine species, and the marine environment, and we think this is the best place to start in order to provide some emergency relief for juvenile salmon migrating north through the Strait of Georgia. This is the narrowest route travelled by many out migrating juvenile salmon as well as adult salmon returning to spawn from their magnificent journey at sea.

At least eight salmon bearing streams in this passage are home to pink, chum and coho salmon. Clearing this channel of open net-cage salmon farms will help protect these salmon at their most vulnerable when they first leave their natal streams. Many other juvenile salmon stocks use this route on their journey to sea, including salmon from as far away as the Fraser River and south of the border. Ensuring that one wild salmon migration route is free of elevated levels of sea lice from fish farms in this region will provide these small fry some relief and improve their chance at survival.

The Wild Salmon Narrows is a highly productive area of magnificent ecological significance and is at risk of devastating impact from open net-cage salmon farms. Still rich in marine life such as rock fish, ling cod, scallops, crab and herring, it is easy to understand why it is necessary to protect such a precious region.

The region has supported large populations of First Nations for thousands of years. Commercial fishing is of great importance in the area, including salmon, ground fish, prawns and urchin fisheries. Tourists flock to the area, drawn by the magnificent, abundant wildlife, thus creating many local jobs. These ecological, traditional, and commercial values are being severely compromised by the open net-cage farms. Wild juvenile salmon are afflicted with sea lice. Clam beds in areas such as Waiatt Bay are dying. The fish farms at Cyrus Rocks, Barnes Bay, Sonora, Venture Point and Brent Island must be removed from the Wild Salmon Narrows, and the inactive farms in Hoskyn Channel at Conville Point, Conville Bay, Read Island and Dunsterville Bay must be relinquished. The health of this region depends on this. We need your support to clear this passage and push the industry to closed containment. We are hoping your members and supporters will send letters to their government representatives.

Michelle Young; Salmon Aquaculture Campaigner
Georgia Strait Alliance
195 Commercial St., Nanaimo, BC V9R 5G5 www.GeorgiaStrait.org
Office: 250.753.3459
<http://twitter.com/Wild4Salmon>

Colleen's Visit to Argentina

by: Colleen Langston

Former Summer Staff at Scout Island Nature Centre

As a recent high school graduate, I had plans to take a year off and see the world before starting college. Last fall I decided to go to South America for 6 weeks, and practice my Spanish. Fortunately, Marcelo Navall, a forestry researcher from Argentina, was spending the summer at the UBC Research Forest at Gavin Lake. Cathy Koot and Anna Roberts asked if he could help me plan a trip to Argentina. Marcelo was eager to encourage me. He arranged for me to visit the research station where he works for INTA, the branch of the Argentinean government that handles forestry and environmental research as well as agricultural research. He got someone to meet me in the airport once I got to Argentina, and booked a room for me in Santiago del Estero, a small city in the northern part of the country. The people who live there call themselves Santiaguenos, and they are very friendly and informal people. Marcelo's coworkers greeted me with hugs and kisses when he introduced me to them. I found that rather unnerving, even after Marcelo explained that a kiss on the cheek in Argentina is no different from a handshake in Canada.

Marcelo introduced me to Dario Coria, who is researching bird habitats, and we agreed that I would conduct a study of endangered bird species that were known to live in the research forest, to help determine what habitats are suitable for them. The first day of the survey was the most interesting: we hardly found any birds, but we did find a boa constrictor just as it was catching a lizard. The boa was at least as thick as my arm, but the 1.5-metre lizard was almost too big for it. We were able to watch the battle from a few metres away, and Dario told me all about both creatures. The snake won. We both hoped to see it unhinge its jaw and swallow the lizard, but it was in no hurry. After an hour of careful watching we left them there, and went back to listening for birds. I never did get a look at either of the bird species I was studying, but there were plenty of other interesting things to see in the research forest. It is one of the few refuges for species threatened by hunting, trapping and deforestation around Santiago del Estero. I felt privileged to watch the yellow tortoises that thrive in the protected area, but are very rare elsewhere because they are caught and sold as pets.

During my final week in Argentina I decided to tackle the local lichens. They had caught my interest several times, but I had almost given up on finding out their names, since no one at the research station knew anything about lichens. Finally Marcelo pointed out that any information I could get about lichens would be an improvement over what they had, so I might as well give it a try. He found a checklist of lichen taxa known to grow in Argentina, and a website with labeled photos of tropical lichens. I went and collected some of the most conspicuous types of lichens, and started trying to match them with the thousands of names in the checklist and the thousands of pictures on the website. After a week I had identified about six species with an acceptable level of certainty, and had possible matches for several more. I hope it will inspire someone to start a real study of lichens at the research station.

I spent one interesting morning talking to Dario about the differences in scientific thinking between Argentina and Canada. Dario is the only person studying wild animals at the research station; everyone else is concentrating on grass, cattle, trees, meat, firewood and lumber. We came to the conclusion that a broader view of the environment made more sense.

January, February 2010 Bird Report.

By Phil Ranson

The term 'signs of spring' often pops up at this time of year. The first crocus, the first runner in shorts, the 'ying, ying' of the first dirt bike cutting up the hillsides are all valid observations, but use bird sightings at your peril. 4 Canada Geese and 4 Common Goldeneye at the Williams Lake outlet could seemingly be considered migrants but keep in mind both these species have spent the winter happily plying the frigid waters of Quesnel Lake and could be just making a reconnaissance mission to look for adjacent open waters. A report of a couple of Robins at Alkali Lake recently is certainly new for that area this winter but can it be differentiated from the handful of winter sightings from the Williams Lake and Quesnel areas. But, like it or not, winter is soon coming to an end and the flush of birds will soon begin.

The winter of 2009/2010 will be remembered for what was probably the best incursion of Hawk Owls since 2000 with reports of what are probably 12 individuals. The majority of the sightings were east of the Fraser with 5 roadside birds seen between Miocene and Horsefly Lake, most of these being observed multiple times. To these add 3 birds from the Big Lake area and another on the Soda Creek Christmas Bird Count, one on the Williams Lake CBC at Chimney Valley and another on Highway 20 at the power lines. The one bird west of the Fraser barely made it across the line on the Sheep Creek Hill. The influx of Hawk Owls in 2000 resulted in a couple of confirmed and one suspected nesting record in the local area in the following seasons so it wouldn't be surprising to find the same thing happening again.



Jessica Lake Rd. Hawk Owl

Winter sightings of Common Loons are quite uncommon for the region so one at Cedar Point Park in Likely was of interest but I suspect that keeping a closer eye on Quesnel Lake could make Loon sightings an annual event. The number of wintering Trumpeter Swans at Horsefly Bay also seems to increase yearly with 112 counted in January. Along with the Swans were Canada Geese and a group of 5 Hooded Mergansers. Winter trips to this area will generally turn up Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Steller's Jays and a family of Otters in the bay. Both Barrow's and Common Goldeneye can be found each winter in the Quesnel River at Likely. The Barrow's in particular like to bob down the rapids in groups of up to 40 foraging on the river bed as they go, then fly back to the top and start all over again.



Quesnel Trumpeter Swans by: Kris Andrews

Downy Woodpecker

by Jim Sims

At this time of the year the Downy Woodpecker can be a frequent visitor to your suet feeder. In fact I just returned from taking this photo of a male Downy on my suet feeder. You can identify it as a male by the red on the back of its head. This is absent on the female. The Downy is the smallest of our North American Woodpeckers and is about two-thirds the size of the similar Hairy Woodpecker. Other than size it is almost identical to the larger Hairy Woodpecker. It is also one of the first pair of



birds that beginning birders look for methods of distinguishing. Besides the difference in overall size they do have distinctive bill size. The Downy bill is much shorter than the length of the head while on the Hairy the bill is as long as or longer than the head. The downy may also have some black spotting on the outer tail feathers. This is more common in the eastern Downy and is a characteristic that I would have looked for when I was growing up in Ontario. At first you might think that the two species are closely related but in fact they are not close relatives at all and could well be an example of convergent evolution. It may be relevant that the species exploit different-sized foodstuffs and do not compete very much ecologically .

I recently visited with family in Southern Ontario and went for several birding walks with my brother. On each of these outings we found Downy Woodpeckers and they almost always were travelling with flocks of Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches and occasionally Golden-crowned Kinglets. This is often the case as the less observant Downy takes advantage of the warning calls of the Chickadee and the flocks also make it easier for the Downy to find food. Because they are smaller and lighter they can feed on smaller vegetation and access foods which larger woodpeckers cannot reach, such as insects living on or in the stems of weeds. In Southern Ontario you may see them hammering at goldenrod galls to extract the fly larvae inside. Male and female Downy Woodpeckers divide up where they look for food in winter. Males feed more on small branches and weed stems, and females feed on larger branches and trunks. Males keep females from foraging in the more productive spots. When researchers have removed males from a woodlot, females have responded by feeding along smaller branches.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downy_Woodpecker

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Downy_Woodpecker

Thanks to all who have made contributions.