

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
MAY + JUNE 2012 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@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 Website <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>
Scout Island Nature Centre Website <http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca>

Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists: president Fred McMechan, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, 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 muskratexpress@midbc.com

Mushrooms with Bill Chapman

Sunday June 24th

Join Bill Chapman for a mushroom foray on June 24th followed by a mushroom identification session. The location will remain flexible depending on weather. We may be able to foray near Williams Lake and have our id session at Scout Island if the June moisture brings out the mushrooms, otherwise we will head east to Sue Hemphill's place. Call Kristi at 250-396-7403 to finalize the meeting time & place. An email announcement will be made.

Native Bees of British Columbia

7:30 pm Scout Island Nature House, Friday, July 6

For this special summer presentation, entomologist Gord Hutchings will share his enthusiasm and extensive knowledge about native bees. Did you know that there are over 450 species of native bees in British Columbia, and these bees still perform the majority of pollination, especially for native plants? Come and learn how native bees are perfectly equipped to pollinate the vast diversity of flowering plants within our various climatic conditions, having evolved here together for thousands of years.



Carpenter Bee

Dragonflies at Scout Island Field Trip

10:00 am – 12:00 pm, Saturday, July 7.

Meet at the Nature House and set out with dragonfly expert, Gord Hutchings, to seek, identify, and learn the habits of the dragons and



Darner Dragonfly

damsels of the marsh. Gord will also be watching to show us native bees too! Hopefully it will be a sunny day so come prepared to be out in the open for a couple of hours.

Field Trip Report

By Rocky

I had a great time going to the Fraser River on Wednesday evening May 9th, fresh air, scents of spring and enjoying nature, exercise and good company. We left Scout Island and drove to the last parking lot in the Williams Lake Creek Valley. I am always excited heading down the hill to the parking lot. The Creek Valley is one of my favourite places to explore. The weather did not look promising but it turned out to be a perfect evening. We did not see the Pelicans feeding on the Fraser River as we did last year. I wonder if they visited the Fraser this year? Also bird sounds and songs were not obvious as the rush and roar of the creek over powered them. The five bikers and I did see some cattle and deer and watched the ducks and several shore birds on the ponds. I was not allowed to chase anything but did sneak in a little wash in the creek. Hope to see you out on a field trip soon.

Report: Young Naturalists

On April 15, 2012 the Young Naturalist club went on a field trip to Moose Meadows Farm for surgaring off time, as was it ever a treat. We started off in the sugar shack where we had a lesson in how the birch sap is turned into syrup; the smell of the steam was absolutely delicious. Next we went out to tap some trees, an experience so interesting that the resident alpacas had to come and look over our shoulders to watch what the kids were doing. The birch trees were naturally dispersed throughout the farm's woodlot, so it was a nice way to see agroforestry in action, a creative way to use the non-commercial tree species.



An interesting group of characters came out to watch a birch tree being tapped at Moose Meadows Farm

This trip provided an excellent opportunity to experience nature (a treasure hunt in the forest to find birch trees), then see a direct application as to how nature can affect your life (the food on your table). In the end we couldn't resist taste testing some of the finished product. Yum!

Our latest field trip at the end of May had a different flavour. We visited the Alex Fraser Research Forest with Cathy Koot. We hiked up to the top of a bluff exploring along the way. We saw many neat things, different types of insects and where they live, beautiful flowers, edible plants, evidence of forest fires past, we learned how to age a tree, and la piece de resistance we saw a skunk wandering around below. At the top of the bluff we had an amazing view of the valley. While we were resting and enjoying the view we were treated to a spectacular show by a turkey vulture. There were so many curious minds, and so many neat things to see and hear. Our next trip will be a voyageur canoe trip on Rose Lake at the end of July.

Report: Yard Sale May 2012

Thank you to everyone for helping earn approximately \$1200 at the yard sale. Initially I was a little worried as many regular helpers were away or busy with other activities (like fishing!) but loads of help and support and sale items were provided. You all did a super job.

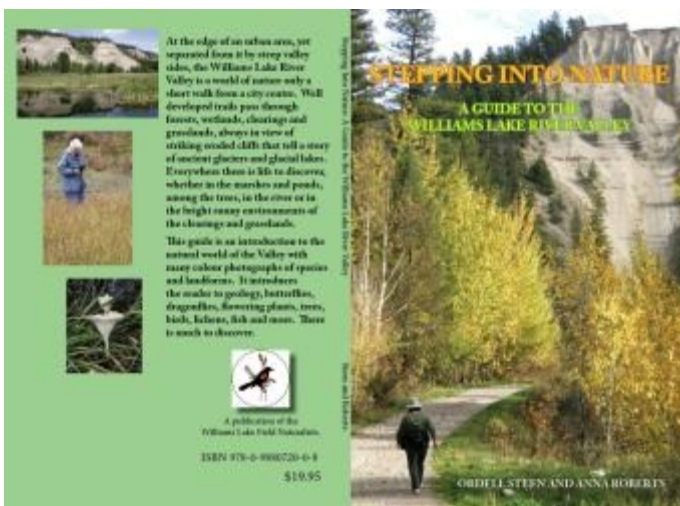
Marg Pulver always starts me off in April helping choose a date and then works setting up and organizing things on Friday night. Verla Atchison donated the leftovers from her yard sale so Rick and I went to pick them up a couple weeks ahead. As well as helping on Friday night Jenny Noble did a great job with advertising. The summer students were great helpers too. Tomato plants, a known feature at our sale were grown by Gloria Atamanenko, Rodger Hamilton, Juergen and Sue Hemphill and others too (but I did not know who dropped them all off). There were some basil plants and other herbs that were popular, berry bushes and seed potatoes. Katie McMahan and Pat Teti delivered more pots of plants. Christie Mayall brought in some of her plants and was the garden advisor, as well as caretaker and seller of the plants the next day. The Groenenberg Family helped with the set up and the sale and were part of the cleanup team too. As well as helping many members did a bit of shopping too! Sandra Stuart helped on Friday night and with Katharine VanSpall handled the money on Saturday at the sale. Jen Clark and son, Stan Navratil and Chris Coates came to do some pricing on Friday night. On Saturday morning we had a lineup of shoppers waiting for the doors to open. Our sign says no early birds so as usual and as trained we started at 9:30 AM, not earlier! Zack Weeks made many trips carrying purchases to cars. Rick Dawson helped set up and clean up. Cathie Hamm and Mary Jo Hilyer were part of the cleanup team. We donated most of the left overs to the SPCA who were having a yard sale in a few weeks (I think Winnie would have approved!). Chris Hornby took the left over books to sell for the potato house. I saw her the next day at the Lions Event where she had them set out for sale and said they were selling well! I thank you, all of you, those I mentioned and any one I missed, everyone who helped and donated goods and purchased them too. I will end with my standard reminder.....Please label a box and start saving for next year!

New book from the Williams Lake Field Naturalists

A guide to discovering nature in the Williams Lake River Valley will be released early this

summer by the Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

With more than 150 colour photographs by Anna Roberts, Ordell Steen and Ray Coupé, the guide is an introduction to geology, butterflies, dragonflies, flowering plants, trees, birds, lichens, fish, mushrooms and more. The book is organized by principal habitats including wetlands, forests, clearings and grasslands. A brief chapter on Secwepemc occupation and use of the area is also included. The book is designed for those who want only a general introduction as well as those who would like more detailed information. It should be available by early July from the Williams Lake Field Naturalists and at local book outlets.



Scout Island Nature Centre Report

By: Sue and Jenny

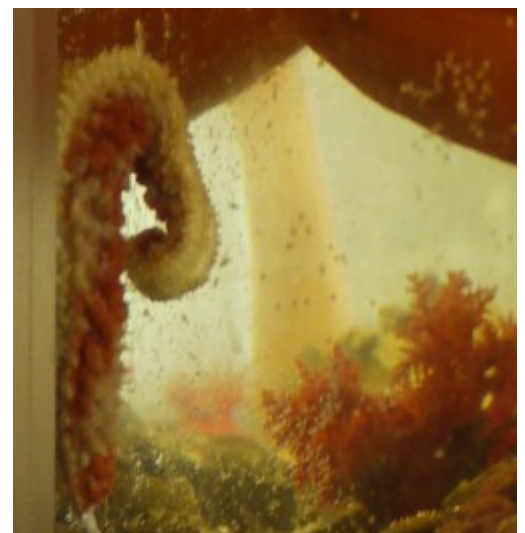
I have the great pleasure 2-3 times a week of being at the Nature Centre very early in the morning. Except for me, it is only the wildlife. Did you know that beavers groom each other like dogs, chewing and pulling on all parts of each other-while in the water of course, quite charming to watch. While watching, my nose is entertained with the smell of cottonwood and willow with other flower smells in the background. Then there is the Kerplunk from the Bittern. The spider webs in the shrubs brush my face. Even the sense of taste is engaged, because the air tastes good at this time of day. I try to convince the staff to come that early just once—no luck yet. They do, however, go out and enjoy the sensual enticements that Scout Island offers. Life is bursting including a lot of people out enjoying it.

The staff has been very busy, first training and then dealing with visits from classes from preschool to high school. They have also taken programs to schools even as far as Tatla Lake. We all worked together to provide a variety of activities to eleven classes that raised Chinook salmon from egg to fry stage. The students ranged from grade 1 to grade 11. Kacie taught them about the new creatures in the salt water tank (thank-you do DFO for replacing the old tank that had sprung a leak and provided us with new intertidal creatures). Sue was busy dissecting fish for all. I didn't know that children of all ages love touching all the slimy and slippery parts. It is called kinesthetic learning. The release of the fry was especially thrilling this year because predators were very present. As some of the fry swam out of their cups, trout swam out from under the dock and ate them. The students loved it. It put real meaning to the fact that I had given them earlier that from 5000 eggs laid, 2 return to spawn.

The teacher of the Personal Planning Grade 10 classes brought her two classes down for the afternoon. This was quite interesting as the teacher wanted us (all 4 summer staff and myself) to discuss the importance of environmental health to personal health as well as to discuss individual responsibility to the health of the environment. They had also had Mary come to class and talk about how she “makes a living” teaching about the environment. It was a most enjoyable afternoon.

Sea Stars STAR at the Nature Centre

Sea stars have been on our minds at the nature center this week. Our painted sea star has separated into five different parts. The legs alone have been seen moving within the tank. After researching we think this may have occurred as defense from a predator or may be a mode of asexual reproduction. A piece of the ring canal must be present in the legs for new sea stars to be formed from them. Also another one of our stars that is either a slime or wrinkled star has produced a clear slime. This star appears to be getting eaten near its tube feet. After further research it is possible that juveniles within the sea stars brood chamber eat their parents. This may explain the missing areas on the star.



Planning for summer programs has started. There will be two evening programs that I will send details out about as soon as they are confirmed, but most likely Aug. 23 will be the rides in the voyageur canoes followed by the Bat Talk at the Nature Centre. The themes for each week of Nature Fun have not been decided but the basic outline is as follows.

Nature Fun

Ages 3-8
Mornings 9:30- 11:30am
Afternoons 1-3pm
\$10 per session

Ages 8-13
Wednesday 1-3 (\$10)
Or 9:30-3pm (\$20)
This day will include art activities lead by our resident artists

**Nature Explorers Camp
Ages 7-13**

Wednesdays in July plus one overnight at the end of the month
(dates and cost to be announced shortly)

We will hike a new trail in the region every week (Bull Mountain, Horsefly and others). We will explore the areas, learn skills for being in the outdoors, play games and learn about the life of each area. For more information or to register for either program:
Call: (250) 398- 8532 or Email: scoutisland@midbc.com

Weed Warriors Needed

As in the past, we need volunteers to adopt an area to dig the thistle and burdock and stick weed out of. Contact Sue if you can adopt an area to spend 2-4 hours on a month.

Our Summer Staff

Our enthusiastic summer staff members have already led dozens of classes through a variety of programs on birds, insects, predator-prey, plant life, fry release – always with games, walks and gentle sustainability messages. We are delighted at the way they’re connecting with the kids and creatively developing as teachers under Sue’s guidance. Please introduce yourselves when you encounter them at the Nature Centre, and make them welcome. Now it’s their turn to introduce themselves to you.

My name is Kacie Young. I just finished my third year at UNBC in Prince George. I am back at Scout Island for a second summer. During the first weeks we had an opportunity to go on excursions with many of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists. I am extremely excited to be teaching school lessons again and for our Nature Fun program later this summer. It’s great getting kids outdoors so they can discover the amazing world around them!



left to right, Kiera and Laura in front, Kacie and Caitlin in back

My name is Caitlin Langford and I have just completed my first year of university at UNBC in Prince George. I am in the biology program and was so excited to have this opportunity to work at Scout Island. I have learned so much in my first weeks of work and I am sure my knowledge will only grow in my time here and I love sharing what I have learned with the children I teach. Along with teaching, I'm enjoying my project involving the painted turtles that live on the island.

My name is Kiera Dolighan, and I will currently enter into my third year of sciences at TRU Kamloops. As someone who is getting a degree in the life sciences, Scout Island is nearly the perfect job for a budding biologist. I have already learned more than I could have imagined in my first weeks, and have had the opportunity to meet some brilliant experts in the field. I am presently working on observing and collecting data involving the osprey at Scout Island, i.e. numbers, possible mating behaviors, and general activity at the osprey nest. I relish teaching my classes and watching them grow, while they are exposed to the notions of an eco-friendly, and waste-free environment.

My name is Laura Ulrich, and I am going into my fourth year of biology at SFU in Burnaby. I am thrilled to have this opportunity at Scout Island – it's hard to stay passionate about Nature when you are sitting in a lecture hall. The first week was exhilarating – with many excursions and discussions with experts in the field. I am also making a study tracking nesting swallows, and other birds. It's wonderful to share my knowledge and rekindled passion with kids, and getting them to see some of the scientific wonder in their own backyards.

Adopt a Little Nature

It's been our vision for some time to develop a walking trail on the north side of the Scout Island Nature Centre marsh. Eventually this trail will connect seamlessly with the River Valley trail, so one could walk the whole length of the creek from lake-outlet to the Fraser.

One of our member/volunteers, Roger Hamilton, has made a wonderful beginning on re-establishing native vegetation along this proposed trail. Last year he built 4 exclosures (protective fences to keep deer and beaver away from plantings), set up a drip watering system including a holding tank, drove back the grass/reed sods in two of the exclosures and planted some lovely trees and shrubs within them. He is maintaining these plantings now and was pleased to see that they survived the winter.



Roger busy building exclosures

We are inviting individuals, families, church congregations, youth and community groups to adopt a little piece of our dream. Sue will show you how to prepare the ground, how to plant the native trees and shrubs we provide, and how to maintain your plot. Once a month, you'd need to check the health of trees and cut the grasses back.



Volunteers plant trees

We also have an area around the osprey nesting pole that needs adopting. You would plant trees and then keep back weeds for a few years, again about once a month during the growing season.

The initial clearing and planting work would make a good 1/2 day project for a group of 4-10 people. If you are working on it alone, you could work at your own pace until the site is ready. After the enclosure is established, there is only the monthly monitoring and weed cutting to do. Our watering systems take care of the irrigation.

Does this sound like a good community service project for your group? Is it something you'd like to take on as an individual? If so, please contact Sue Hemphill by phone (398-8532) or email (shemphill@midbc.com). If you like, your stewardship can be acknowledged with a small sign.

Discovery School Graduation

Fifty-three mini-naturalists and their adoring fans celebrated another joyous year of Discovery Pre-school at the Nature House during the last week of May. Of those, 35 graduated to the big world of kindergarten, but they'll surely never forget the love of nature that their teachers, Margaret Onneken and Barb Langford, have nurtured through play and exploration.

The program is so popular that it's already fully subscribed for 2012-13, and the waiting list is closed. If only we could clone our teachers!



Each student received and decorated their own bird house at the graduation party.

Our View of the Night Sky August 2012

Planet Review

By: Steve and Lynn Capling

On August 13/14 Saturn, Mars and the star Spica form a line low in the west – look around 8:30 p.m. Interesting both because of their location (triple conjunction) and they have similar magnitudes (brightness). In August, Jupiter is visible in the early morning.

Other neat happenings

In mid-July, between 11 p.m. and midnight, look south for the shape of the constellation Sagittarius (the Teapot). Just to the right of the teapot's spout is the center core of the Milky

Way which is our galaxy. With a telescope you can see a number of interesting Messier objects in this area of the sky.

The Perseid Meteor shower peaks in the early morning hours of August 12th (after midnight until dawn on the night of August 11th).

Breeding Bird Atlas – Point Counts

By: Phil Ranson

Spring migration is always an exciting time, listing off the expected birds as they arrive from southerly wintering locations – some from a different hemisphere. Some will stay to breed and others pass through on their way to the land of the midnight sun. Most arrive within an almost unerringly predictable time-frame despite the challenges of vast distances and inclement weather. With a limited season the males usually arrive a few days ahead of the females to claim a territory and defend it against challengers. This is when bird song is at its peak and when that true marvel of nature - the dawn chorus, can be heard.

If you happen to have navigated to a predetermined Bird Atlas point count location in the pre-dawn to record the bird species taking part in this wonder of nature, your view on the phenomenon may be slightly skewed. Hearing birds isn't impaired by mosquito netting but the drone of the insects which miraculously found you within seconds of stepping out of a vehicle can have a destabilizing effect. It may be more mental than physical, but any distraction during the 5 minutes of pure concentration needed to identify every song coming from all directions can set your nerves on edge, especially when the name of the first bird singing a quite familiar song has suddenly escaped you.

Recognizing the song and failing to retrieve the name is bad enough, but not recognizing the song or calls can be excruciating. This will usually involve trying to ignore it while picking up the other songs as the allotted 5 minutes, no more – no less, ticks away. Then it's time to track down the unfamiliar song, usually in heavy, wet, bush and try and put a name to what is undoubtedly a new bird for the region. Chances are the bird has now stopped singing or, as is most often the case, it's something quite ordinary and your aural faculties have once again let you down. But not to worry, at least we learned something as long as we can retain that song we concentrated so fiercely on despite the biting insects – but chances are it's lost by the time you reach the next point count.

Fairyslipper (*Calypso bulbosa*)

Researched by: Jim Sims

A few weeks ago I was talking with Fred about the Fairyslippers that used to grow on my lakeshore lot here at Rose Lake. Unfortunately the orchid is very susceptible to disturbance due to its very fragile fine root system. Long after they stopped growing here I actually relocated the driveway over the spot where they had grown. If the Fairyslipper flower is picked for closer inspection or used in a wildflower bouquet the plant will most likely die as the roots will be damaged. These are examples of why the plant is rapidly disappearing from populated areas of the



province. I did find this one growing on my 10 acre property and it has managed to survive several years of sheep grazing. When Jean Oke was out here canoeing last weekend she found a small group of them growing on the south shore of the lake where there has been no reason for disturbance. This is a prime time of the year to find this beautiful orchid although we are now nearing the end of their season. I have already found a few flowers that have started to fade.

Calypso is the Greek goddess, daughter of Atlas. She was a beautiful sea nymph hidden in the woods. She was found by Ulysses when he was shipwrecked on the island of Ogygia in Homer's 'The Odyssey'. Calypso means 'concealment' which is appropriate for this flower that we find hidden in moist to dry forests, usually with abundant leaf mould. Don't expect to find them in dry or very wet forests. The specific epithet, *bulbosa*, refers to the bulb-like corms.



The Fairyslipper is a perennial 10 to 25 cm tall with a round or oval bulb like corm. The single dark green pleated leaf grows close to the ground. The stalk is yellow to brown-purple and is covered with thin leaf-like bracts. The single fragrant flower is a rose-purple colour. The lower petal is slipper-like, tinged with purple and shows definite magenta lines. It also has a cluster of yellow hairs. The 2 deep pink to purple upper petals are narrow, twisted and sit erect above the lip. Once the flower fades and dies, the leaf will also die. When the flower fades and dies the corm will also die and next year's corm will begin from this year's. The new corm will produce its single leaf in autumn. The sequence of corms will persist for several years. Most colonies of Fairyslipper contain only a few plants. Reproduction is from seeds. They are very difficult to

transplant as it is virtually impossible to move them without disturbing the roots. The plant also grows in association with a fungi that will most likely be absent in the new location.

The corms have been used as a food source by North American native peoples. The Thompson River Indians (Nlaka'pmx) used it as a treatment for mild epilepsy. The Lil'wetúl of Pemberton peeled the corms and ate them raw. The Okanagans called this plant 'a bunch of little hearts'.

Sources: **Plants of Southern British Columbia** (Parish Coupé Lloyd)
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calypso_\(orchid\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calypso_(orchid))

Long-eared Owls

By: Phil Ranson

The Long-eared Owls that were seen in early May at Scout Island have nested and fledged 3 young. The owlets are often quite exposed and can sometimes be seen from the trails while the adults tend to stay secluded. This is an extremely vulnerable time for them while they are flightless. Any unnecessary disturbance should be avoided as the parents are quite protective and any alarm calls or movement on their part will attract mobs of crows (which are nesting close by) in seconds.



Photo by Rita and Sandy

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to another edition of *The Muskrat*. The editors are taking a well-deserved summer holiday and will not publish again until September. May all of us enjoy a grand summer!