

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

SEPTEMBER 2013 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, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie and Ray Hornby



From the Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in mid-October. 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@midbc.com.



Fall Social and Potluck Supper:

Friday October 18th starting at 6:00pm

Join us for another Fall Social and Potluck Supper. Our fresh garden produce should all be gathered in for the winter and it will be time to sit back and enjoy the bountiful harvest. Nothing can be better than sharing your harvest and stories of your favourite summer adventure with your friends at Scout Island. Following the meal join Jon and Paula for a Spanish Experience:



Spain, a Paradise for Birders and any Wildlife Enthusiast

Paula Laita and Jon Gaztelumendi come from Basque Country in Northern Spain. They have travelled and birded extensively around Spain and will share some of their experiences.

Spain has a wide range of ecosystems and landscapes due to its geographical location, variation in the local geography and topography, and the diverse climates present in many regions. The proximity of the different habitats, especially in migration corridors, leads to a rich mixture of bird species. They will offer an overview of the Spanish ecosystems and types of birds they are found in them and will point out some of the most outstanding places to go birding in Spain.



Otis Tarda (It's not a Spanish Turkey)

Field Trip Cancellation

Unfortunately Ordell had to cancel the field trip he was to lead to Churn Creek's Lone Cabin Creek on September 28th. This means there is only one remaining trip, Fred's outing to The Junction Sheep Range Protected Area. Unfortunately we forgot to check with Fred on the date for the trip so please watch for the email/newspaper announcements. You can also contact Fred at (250) 392-7680

Helena Lake Field Trip Report

By Cathy Koot

On July 6th our Helena Lake field trip (near Lac-la-Hache) included up-close views of Bonaparte's gulls and black terns and lots of enticing shoreline habitat to explore by boat.



Karen Piffko and Kae Stafford enjoying Helena Lake

HORSEFLY RIVER SALMON FESTIVAL



September 28 and 29, 2013
BC Rivers Day

Come and celebrate with us the return of Sockeye Salmon to their spawning grounds. Activities will include talks with local river interpreters, DFO information kiosks, arts and crafts for children and a chance to walk the fully accessible Horsefly Salmon Habitat Trail Visit www.hoseflyriver.ca for more information or Horsefly River Salmon Festival on Facebook.



Notes from the Executive

By: Fred McMechan, president

This report contains information about issues that the executive has dealt with recently.

Williams Lake field Naturalists Business

- 1) New Prosperity Mine Project

In August we sent a written submission to the Federal Panel of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA). At this time the Panel is preparing its report which will be presented to the federal cabinet. (our submission can be viewed at <http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/050/documents/p63928/91997E.pdf>)

- 2) Programs and field trips

Planning for upcoming presentations and field trips was undertaken. Information will be available in future newsletters and emails

- 3) BC Nature Fall Conference

Fred McMechan will be the representative for our club at this conference in Cranbrook, September 18 to 22

- 4) Land Reserve application

We have sent in a letter to the City to request that it participate with us in applying for the renewal of the Land Reserve on crown lands which surrounds the Scout Island Nature Centre property. This reserve covers the marsh area and the west end of the lake. The present reserve was established as a IOC (Order in Council) reserve in 1984 and has a 30 year period. Hence the reserve needs to be renewed in 2014.

Scout Island Nature Centre Business

- 1) Discovery Preschool

The preschool year started on September 4. Margret Onneken is returning and Amanda Cullum is starting as the new teacher. There is full enrolment with a waiting list. On September 3 there was a day of registration for the parents of the preschool children.

Scout Island Nature Centre News

By Sue Hemphill

Today, Saturday, it is very quiet at the Nature Centre. There is no loud noise of machinery or calls of ospreys. The underground digging to lay Hydro, Telus and Shaw cables has made it to the Nature House and all have taken a break for the weekend. That means, I actually noticed that the Osprey are not calling. There were three chicks this summer, and all did well. They have all been flying for a couple of weeks, but still coming back to the nest to be fed by parents at times. There is only one there today, and I hope that isn't one left behind.

I am impressed with the careful digging they are doing. Not a single tree has been damaged. The digging will start up again on Monday to go all the way to the beach. This means most overhead lines will be down later this year. The oil tank will be removed and a new electrical service and new furnace will go in later in the month. We have raised \$8266 towards the total for the Energy Upgrade (\$38 000 needed) that includes the new energy efficient electric furnace and new insulation in the ceiling. **So we are definitely still fund raising.** There is a tentative promise from a generous community member to match what we can raise up to half of the total cost. The disturbed area along the causeway as a result of the digging, will be seeded with native grasses. To add to the variety of plants, we will spread seeds from a variety of native plants that Sue collected (asters, golden rod, fireweed...). If you would like to help, please collect seed wherever you find it (not too much from one place) and bring it to me. Label what it is so we ensure we are not introducing any invasive plants—call if you have a question.

What a busy, wonderful summer we had. The four summer staff (Paula, Caitlin, Patrick, and Laura—with help from Georgia and Geneva) were busy every day with the Nature Fun program (410 children took part). The full day program for older children (8-13) on Wednesdays was popular again. It included art activities (thank-you to the Central Cariboo Arts and Culture Society). The staff was very creative with this and included, pinning insects on painted backgrounds, casting footprints, and even dance. There was a three day Explorers' Camp (9 children) that included an overnight at my house. It was perfect weather so that we could play in the river below Moffat Falls, pick and eat Saskatoons and raspberries until we burst, and catch sight of the bats (but not the beavers). Four of the girls slept in the tree house and the rest in tents.



Explorer's Camp Playing at Moffat Falls



Environment Club Members Plant Trees along the North Shore Trail

Fall is here and schools are already booking. I will be working directly with schools to design ways to get students outside right at their schools starting with a Professional Development discussion/workshop on how to do this. Mary and Julianne will be leading family and Young Naturalist events. Mary, Sue, and Paula (staying on from the summer staff) will be offering a variety of programs at SINC and at schools.

The North Marsh work continues. Peter Opie and Fred McMechan lead a crew of volunteers to put up three deer exclosures. Then they dug 33 holes in very hard soil and carted in top soil (donated by the City). This was to prepare for the grades 7-9 Environment Club who came on September 12th to plant 33 trees. The students did this after school and did a great job. This was their "application" to take part as juniors on the upcoming Salmon Trip. The three day Salmon Trip is for seniors but new this year we will have the Juniors there for one day and night. More about the Salmon Trip in the next Muskrat.

Planned Giving to Scout Island

By: Kath Vanspall

Did you know a donation to Scout Island can be made through a life insurance policy? If you are considering ways to make a significant, meaningful donation, this might be an option for you. Although the donation is not made until the end of your life when the insurance policy pays out, you may be able to realize a much larger donation than if you made cash contributions throughout your life.

The donation is actually made to The Nature Trust (TNT) of BC's *Scout Island Nature Centre Endowment Fund*. The Nature Trust of BC is named as beneficiary of your insurance policy (all or only a percentage of the policy, it's your choice), and then it is best to indicate in writing to TNT that you wish the funds to go towards the *Scout Island Nature Centre Endowment Fund*. The letter can also specify how the funds are to be used by SINC executive, for example: "These funds are to be left in the Endowment Fund until requested by the executive of the Scout Island Nature Centre, for use as the executive deems most appropriate", or "I wish the funds to be used for children's programs". The letter should also list the insurance policy holder (e.g. Manulife Financial), the policy number and the amount that will be received.

An additional benefit to making the donation in this way is that upon your passing your estate will realize a receipt for the charitable donation that has been made.

Although the process is as simple as described above, before you set up such a donation I advise you to contact Deb Kennedy at The Nature Trust of BC, at 1-866-288-7878 toll free, or debkennedy@naturetrust.bc.ca

Cedar Waxwing

Researched by Jim Sims

The Rose Lake neighbourhood kids are definitely not suffering from NDD (Nature Deficit Disorder). In fact some might describe their condition as NHD (Nature Hyperactive Disorder). From dawn till dusk they are outdoors, riding bikes, going for walks, rowing, paddling, swimming... Most of the time they are looking for butterflies, frogs, salamanders, toads, birds, anything that moves and even if it does not. It is never very long before they bring me something to see; a Morning Cloak, a handful of snails, a baby robin, a wood frog or their favourite, toads.

One day Zack showed up with a juvenile bird resting contentedly on his shoulder.

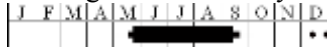
He wanted to know what kind of bird it was? We had a good look at the pale brown on top fading to gray on the wings, the white under the tail, the slight crest that lay flat on the top of its head, the black mask outlined in white around the eyes, the yellow tip on the tail was a definite giveaway! Do you know what bird it was? He had found the injured Cedar Waxwing a few days earlier. There was red, probably blood staining the breast feathers. Most of them were missing and the juvenile bird was unable to fly. Zack had patiently worked with the bird, figured out what it would eat (seeds, berries) he even used a plastic eye dropper to give it water. The bird could still not fly well enough to release as Zack quite proudly paraded around the neighbourhood with the bird on his shoulder. A couple of days later I was asked to care for Steven while Zack and his family went to Barkerville for the day. Before they left I warned Zack that he should not be too disappointed if the bird had flown off before they returned as it had now started to experiment with short flights. I kept Steven in his box for most of the morning and by noon he was obviously not happy with this so I decided to let him sit in my small apple tree for a while. Before I could get him to the tree he flew from my hand up into a branch on a much



Zack with Steven

bigger Spruce tree. He was out of reach so I decide to let him be. It was not long before I heard his Mom and Dad giving their high pitch trilled bzeeee call and when I next checked for him he was gone, hopefully he joined a gang of neighbourhood Cedar Waxwings and was getting his fill of Saskatoons!

In the “Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds” the Cedar Waxwing appears as a Common nesting species with most arriving in late May and remaining until mid-September as shown by the following frequency graph



.. The arrival and departure helps us avoid confusing them with the very familiar Bohemian Waxwings that are common during the winter months from October to March. The Bohemian will have a gray chest, a rufous colour under the tail and lacks the white on the forehead. They are also a bulkier, larger bird. We have had a few December sightings of Cedar Waxwings (Dec. 13th, 2009 one on south lakeside, Dec. 29th and 19th during the Quesnel CBC). It is not easy during a winter outing to check for the differences between the 2 species when you are scanning a flock of 1000 Bohemians but perhaps we do need to look closer at smaller groups or individuals. Cedar waxwings are social birds and are most often observed in flocks. Look for them perched in fruiting trees eating the berries whole or grabbing them from their stem as they hover in clumsy flight. They also frequent lake of river shorelines where they fly out from a tree perch to hawk insects. The name Waxwing comes from a ‘Waxy’ red secretion on the tip of the secondary wings. The wax is not always obvious and was missing on the tips of young Steven’s wings. The exact function of the wax is not known but may be significant for mate selection. Remember the



Bohemian Waxwing



Cedar Waxwing

‘giveaway’ yellow tail, did you know that Cedar Waxwings with orange instead of yellow tail tips began appearing in the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada in the 1960s. The orange color is the result of a red pigment picked up from the berries of an introduced species of honeysuckle. If a waxwing eats enough of the berries while it is growing a tail feather, the tip of the feather will be orange. Waxwings are one of few birds that can survive for a long period of time by feeding solely on fruit. Cowbirds that are being raised by Waxwings often do not survive due to the steady diet of fruit. Waxwings that have been eating overripe fermented fruit can become intoxicated or even die due to the alcohol in the fruit.

Slug Fest

By: Phil Ranson

I took an early morning walk around the garden during the last spell of warm weather. The sun was not yet on the lawn and the dew lay heavy on the grass. I was appalled to see that the lawn was covered in slugs. I have an abhorrence for slugs which is not a rational response because I generally have a ‘live and let live’ tolerance towards God’s less attractive creations. I think it must be innate because my Father waged war on slugs in the garden of my childhood and I have no doubt that his father did before him.



So I gathered up an ice cream pail, added a couple of inches of water and began collecting. Fortunately I have a hunter’s instinct and the slugs were no match for my keen eye and fleetness of foot. They weren’t big slugs, ranging from one centimetre to 4 centimetres at full stretch. Mostly they were around the

borders of the lawn from which I deduced they were approaching from the garden. For what purpose I was not certain. The bucket quickly began to fill but any inattention on my part led to a mass evacuation up the sides as these surprisingly nimble creatures attempted escape. A deft swish of the water generally returned them back to the bottom. I did note that the slugs weren't randomly spaced across the garden but appeared to be in clusters often with pairs intertwined in a particularly gooey slime on a dandelion or plantain (which I also consider God's less attractive creations and on which I also wage a futile war). Deducing that breeding was the ultimate goal of this invasion I redoubled my efforts.

After about an hour and the capture of some 500-600 slugs, the thrill of the chase began to wane and the daunting realization that these creatures would now have to be disposed of. During the hunt I was constantly battling the thought that surely slugs cannot be purely evil and must play an important ecologically beneficial role. I determined to consult Wikipedia. Meanwhile as I considered the means by which to dispatch the quarry, my attention was drawn to two slugs which had eluded apprehension and appeared to be giving chase through the grass.

On hands and knees with reading glasses on I watched the pursuit unfold. Both slugs appeared to be identical. Several questions immediately came to mind: Was one a male and the other female? Was this two males in a territorial dispute? Having developed something of a relationship with these two, should I spare them? And how would you go about writing a movie musical score for a slug chase? These two were anything but sluggish and with the use of a marker stick and watch, I determined the rate to be something like 3 cm per minute. The pursuer would catch up to the pursued and grasp its tail with mouthparts at which the pursued would wriggle its tail vigorously to free itself and take off at a high rate of speed.

This occurred on several occasions until the chase formed a tight, head to tail loop. After 3 circuits resulting in the giving off of much mucus, the pursuer became the pursued. As interesting as this was I had a grisly task ahead of me and with the use of a lid, I deferred action, headed indoors and Googled 'Slugs'.

There was quite a bit of information readily available but I thought I would be remiss unless I imparted this little tid-bit gleaned from Wikipedia. This could well come in useful if you are looking for a fascinating topic to impress friends at social occasions: *"Apophallation is a commonly seen practice among many slugs. In apophallating species, the penis curls like a corkscrew and during mating, it often becomes entangled in the mate's genitalia. Apophallation allows the slugs to separate themselves by one or both of the slugs chewing off the other's penis. Once its penis has been removed, the slug is still able to mate using only the female parts of its reproductive system"*.

I wonder how I was able to reach a pensionable age without knowing this? But that's probably a good note to end on without having to go into how 502-602 slugs were ultimately dispatched.

Some Interesting Summer Bird Reports

By Jim Sims

On August 20th Phil reported on the Cariboo Chilcotin Birders Google Group that "Rod Sargent and Pantage Lake have done it again. Rod photographed a Ruff, a Eurasian shorebird vagrant yesterday. More accurately, it was a Reeve which is one of few bird species where the female name is distinct from the male. I think this is the third shorebird found by Rod at Pantage Lake which has added a species to our checklist area."

At Eagle Lake we have been seeing an increase in the number of Pelicans for the past few years I was hoping they might decide to start nesting on one of our small rocky islands. Well it turns out we are too late as a small group have been confirmed nesting on Puntzi Lake. A photo of pre-fledged juvenile Pelicans was taken on August 25th by Ingrid Myckatyn, a Puntzi Lake resident. Another resident reports kayaking on the lake and quite frequently



Pre-fledged Pelicans with short gray bills Photo by Ingrid

she saw the 3 young birds that had been on the island since they were 'fuzz balls'. This is the first confirmed British Columbia nesting site for American White Pelicans other than the well know colony on Stum Lake.

On another Pelican front, that I expect most of you have read about, Julie Steciw reported in a September 13th Tribune article that there has been a total nesting failure at the Stum Lake colony this summer. In May Julie had counted 500 nests on the Stum Lake nesting Island. When she returned in July she was expecting to find a "Sea of White" on the islands but instead there was nothing, a complete failure of the colony. The same thing occurred in 2009 and since then there have been more partial failures. At this time Julie is not certain of the cause for the failure this year. The successful breeding on Puntzi lake is a very bright light for the future of the Pelicans in BC as Stum Lake was the only known nesting site for Pelicans in the province until this summer. As



A few of the 180 nesting Pelicans that Ordell and I counted in May of 1992 at Stum Lake (Photo by Jim Sims)

Julie's report points out the success of the species is threatened by total nesting failures at the only known nest site. Hopefully the Pelicans will return to Puntzi Lake next year and perhaps more investigation will reveal additional nest sites.

Another nesting failure occurred at Eagle Lake but this time it was the Arctic Tern. I did report in the June newsletter that I had observed the Arctic Terns breeding at Eagle Lake on June 3rd. A neighbour Margaret MacKenzie reported seeing the terns on June 14th and there was no defensive dive-bombing activity however on June 22nd they were chasing the Herring Gulls that were nesting nearby as well as any other birds that approached the island (an indication of nesting perhaps young present). On June 2nd Terns were flying around the island, no sign of young or defensive behaviour. On July 3rd no Terns were observed and Margaret did not find anything when she went onto the island. The adult Terns did remain in the vicinity of Tern Island until August 15th. My sister and I saw them daily during the 1st two weeks of our August holiday. During the day the pair would be roosting on exposed rocks in the lake and could be approached very closely. When we saw them in the evenings there were usually 3 adults and they were flying around the Recreation Site bay. I expect the 3rd Tern was spending the day at the East end of the lake like it did last year and then joined the nesting pair late in the evening. This is the first time the Terns have remained at Eagle Lake after August 1st and remained at least 2 weeks longer than previous years.



When there are no juvenile Terns the roosting adults tolerate very close approach