

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

OCTOBER 2013 NEWSLETTER



Nov 26  
Presentation  
Birds Singing and communicating

Chocoholics  
Prepare for winter  
order chocolate

Come and join us  
Nov 29+30  
earth  
friendly  
holiday  
event  
down town



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](mailto: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](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, vice-president Jim Sims, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Rob Higgins, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie and Ray Hornby



**Editors:** Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter near the end of November when we will feature information about the Christmas Bird Count and winter evening programs. 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](mailto:muskratexpress@midbc.com).



**Singing through the noise: How birds compensate for the effects of urbanization on their communication**  
An evening program presented by Stefanie LaZerte  
Tuesday November 26<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm

Bird song is an important form of communication and is used in territory defense and mate attraction. However, urbanization may interfere with bird communication. Urbanization results in habitat changes which can alter habitat acoustics, as well as increased noise levels. We know that some birds can compensate for these changes, but we know little about which species are capable of doing so or how. In this presentation, we will explore some of the ways birds are affected by noise and how they can change the way they sing to compensate, including a look at my research comparing the relative abilities two species of chickadee (black-capped and mountain) to vocally adjust to urbanization.



**Singing Black-capped Chickadee**

Stefanie LaZerte is a fourth-year PhD candidate at the University of Northern BC and has completed Biology degrees with a focus on animal behaviour at University of Toronto (BSc) and McGill (MSc). She has been interested in animal behaviour ever since she was little and read ethology classics such as Konrad Lorenz's *King Solomon's Ring*, Jane Goodall's *In the Shadow of Man*, and, of course, Hugh Lofting's *Doctor Doolittle*. She is accustomed to dealing with copious amounts of noise from the three lively budgies who share her home.

## Earth Friendly Holidays a Free Family Event

At the Arts Centre (Old Fire Hall) Friday November 29<sup>th</sup> 6-9pm and Saturday November 30<sup>th</sup> 11:00- 2:00

### JOYFUL, EARTH FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

- Wrapping and Decorating  
[Wreaths-frames provided, natural item decorations, and wrapping]
- Wooden bird feeders for you to paint and take home
- Wonderful Local FOOD: you are welcome to bring some of yours to share (as local as possible), or enjoy what our Local Growers bring!

*Note: If you made a wreath last year, bring your metal frame*

### We Need Your Ideas and Help

- **Do you have a simple craft idea that could be done by a person in 1 hour or so using either recycled items or natural items—let Sue know about it and if you want to lead it one of the days, let her know that too**
- **Can you bring buns, bread, finger foods or a pot of soup**

Let Sue know

- **Can you help out on one of the days for 2-3 hours**
  1. **in the kitchen**
  2. **setting up (12-5 on Nov. 29)**
  3. **guide a craft at a table—we need help at our bird table where we will be making suet feeders and chickadee ornaments.**

## Christmas Bird Count 2013

This year's Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday December 15<sup>th</sup>. More details will be provided in the November/December copy of the Muskrat. If you have questions and can't wait until then you can contact Phil Ranson at (250)392-7110.



### Scout Island Nature Centre News

By Sue Hemphill

We had a great Salmon Trip--Good weather, long days of learning, exploring and being surprised, great people of all ages and good food. It wasn't just about Salmon. These students have stopped to smell the forest. It really did smell great. It was part of the first day's activities--canoeing and looking at the riparian edge, walking ½ of the new trail at Gavin Lake, identifying aquatic

invertebrates, finding loads of fungi.... New this year, a group of grade 7-9 students (the Greenologists Club), joined us out at Gavin Lake for one night and a day. They got to watch the older students pull in the nets of salmon to try and collect gametes on Thursday. We had no luck even after 5 tries, so 3 students went back out with Guy (DFO) the following Monday and worked all day until there were enough gametes for the Salmonids Program. That evening Williams Lake Band elder, Velvet Tenale, astounded the students with her skill at preparing fish for the fire and then they all roasted fish on a stick (much better than hot dogs). The last day at the QRRC research centre, students spent helping researchers. They got to try some of the research techniques. Thank-you again to Kiwanis Club, PAC, DFO, and Gavin Lake for helping us get these 23 students out and up close to nature.



The new furnace is up and running. We are really pleased with the wonderful, careful job all that were involved did. Andrew Hasselaar supervised the entire operation for Hydro and made sure that as little damage as possible was done to the vegetation. There is a “naked” area along the causeway, but it is already seeded with native grasses and herbs and in a year that “scar” won’t show. It was amazing to watch the machine work on the east side of the nature house. They dug the hole, moved all the dirt, and laid the new electric lines without damaging the larch. The City needs to be thanked for that. The overhead wires will come down in time so that birds returning next spring will not have to dodge them. The new insulation will be put in next spring. Our fund raising is going well and all of our partners will be acknowledged soon. We haven’t reached the \$40000 mark yet, but I wanted to say a special thank-you to the Calabrese twins. They donated their Birthday money!



Ali and Matteo Calabrese Donate to The Furnace Fund

### Planned Giving to Scout Island

By Katharine 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](mailto:debkennedy@naturetrust.bc.ca)

### American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

Research by Jim Sims

Sources Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds

and [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american\\_robin/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american_robin/lifehistory)

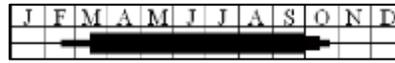
I spent the Thanksgiving week at my Eagle Lake cabin and enjoyed some amazing fall weather filled with visiting neighbours, lots of long walks along the shore, some bike rides and yes a bit of fishing. There was not much in the way of bird activity on the lake; a few Red-necked Grebe, a single Horned Grebe following a Red-necked, a few Surf Scoters, a couple of Goldeneye and the Merganser family; also picked up a Merlin, a male Harrier and another unidentified hawk; very few Passerines, the usual Chickadees, Nuthatch, kinglets, Gray Jays and Juncos. What really stood out was the very large flock of American Robins.



One of the Many Eagle Lake Robins

For the first three days there was a very large flock of Robins dispersed along about 600 metres of shoreline centered in front of my cabin. I estimated there were over 100 birds in the area. They constantly flew back and forth along the first few trees along the

shoreline, never venturing further into the forest cover. Once in a while I observed a pair take off in a short mad chase like you would see during the breeding season but was more half-hearted and they often flew through the middle of three or 4 other Robins resting peacefully. There was constant chatter from early dawn till dusk. Occasionally I would find some down at the water edge or in the wolf brush growing on the newly exposed shoreline. I never did observe them feeding. Tuesday morning was cool and drizzly and after that I never did find the large flock again. I did occasionally see a small flock of 10 to 15 birds.



The *Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds* frequency graph shows the American Robin is a year-round resident and at this time of the year we should find them “fairly Common” (7 to 20 birds per locality per day). However they can appear in larger flocks during the fall as well as the spring migrations. Yes, we will find a few around through the winter each year, often in the lower valleys along the Fraser and Chilcotin River as well as Williams Lake. They are not as easy to locate in the winter as they spend most of the time roosting in trees.

Here are a few more interesting facts that I have found out about Robins:

- Of course we all know them as the early bird of spring and we look and listen for their welcome return as a sign of the end of a long winter. They are also “early” through the breeding season as they begin their territorial declarations well before the sun rises, after all “The Early Bird Gets the Worm”.
- Many of us thought that the Robin standing still on the lawn, with head erect and tilted to one side was listening for worms under the ground. Robins, in some cases do hunt by hearing the prey but most of the time they are hunting by sight and the head is held in this fashion to make it easier to see the worm or grub that is hiding in the grass. Robins tend to eat more worms and grubs during the morning and turn to berries and fruit in the afternoons. During the winter they eat mainly berries and fruit.
- Females select the nest site and also build the nest. They build the nest from the inside out, pressing dead grass and twigs into a cup shape using the wrist of one wing. Once the cup is formed, the nest is reinforced using soft mud gathered from worm castings to make a heavy, sturdy nest. She then lines the nest with fine dry grass. The finished nest is 6-8 inches across and 3-6 inches high. The pair can have up to 3 broods per year.

This summer I found a Robin had built a nest in my sawmill shed. The nest was located on a beam directly above the saw. Robins often build their nest on human made structures like this. The male Robin from this pair was a very aggressive defender of the family nest. I found it impossible to get near the sawmill without risking serious damage to the top of my head! I had to abandon the need to run the sawmill until the Robins abandoned the nest. Unfortunately for the Robins the nest failed and I found it empty a few days later. This was fortunate for me and the top of my head. I was able to get the logs cut in time. Perhaps the unnecessary commotion directed at me attracted a predator like the local crow or raven to the nest. Robin eggs and young are often targeted by Crows and Ravens. Hope you enjoy your next Robin adventure!

## Algae

Research by Jim Sims

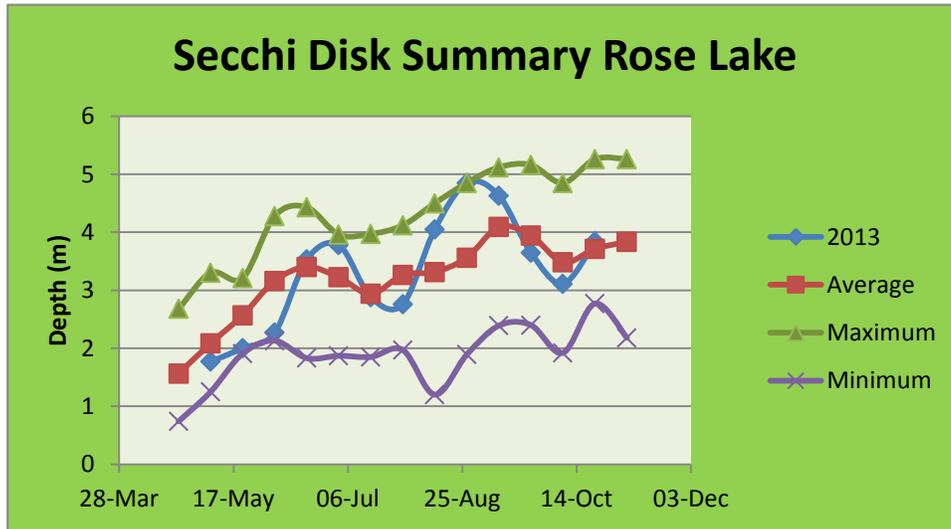
Since my retirement algae has become one of my favourite plants! Did you know that Algae are a very large and diverse collection of plants that range from single cell to large seaweeds such as kelp? I do find kelp interesting but it is the green algae and blue-green algae that I find on Rose Lake that interests me more.



**Kelp is a form of algae**

For the past 11 years I have been gathering water quality data on Rose Lake for the Ministry of Environment. One of the surveys I complete is called a Secchi disk reading, a measure of the water clarity. A Secchi Disk is about 8 inches in diameter and is divided into 4 black and white quarters. The disk is attached to a tape measure. To complete a reading the disk is lowered into the water until it is no longer visible, the depth is observed on the tape measure, the disk is then raised until it just becomes visible again, this new depth is averaged with the previous to become the Secchi disk reading. This reading changes with the seasons and the amount of green algae in

the water. During a green algae bloom algae particles will be observed throughout the water column as deep as sunlight penetrates the water. The algae particles range in size from single cell (non-visible) to fibrous strings of irregular globs up to a few centimetres in length or diameter.



This graph shows the results from the past 11 years of data that I have collected at Rose Lake. Typically the lowest readings occur in spring as soon as the ice comes off the lake. This algae bloom is caused by high concentrations of plant building materials (phosphorus and nitrogen) released during the winter from decaying plant matter at the bottom of the lake. Once the water is exposed to sunlight and the water begins to warm the first plant to take advantage is green algae. Once larger weeds begin to

grow they take over and the water gradually clears. In early summer the sun is higher in the sky, there is longer exposure to sunlight and the water warms up. Once again conditions favour the growth of green algae. The highest readings usually occur in mid-September as the days shorten and the water cools. By October the lake begins to experience a partial fall turnover that brings nutrients back to the surface from the larger plants that have died off due to cooler water and reduced sunlight. Once again we see another less significant green algae bloom. The very low minimum readings reflect major algae blooms that persisted throughout the years of 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Recently some of my neighbours have been complaining to me about the stinky blue paint/oil that is covering the lake. This is actually blue-green algae that rises to the surface of the lake. Blue-green algae is actually cyanobacteria, a bacteria that gets its energy from photosynthesis and its name from the blue colour. We see it here most often on warm fall days when the lake has been very calm. The slightest bit of wave action will remove it and it usually only lasts a few days. This year it has been around since the start of the nice weather around Thanksgiving. We also experience blue-green algae on rare hot sunny summer days. At this time the swimming is less than desirable. Some species of blue-green algae will release a toxin that can be a very serious health risk for humans as well as animals. Fortunately there are very few documented cases of health issues due to this toxin in the Cariboo Chilcotin area. It is also very gross looking so I'd stay away from it anyway.



Blue-green Algae forms artistic patterns on the water surface

## Our View of the Night Sky – October 2013.

By Steve Capling

### Planet Review

Jupiter is visible late in the evening sky and rises earlier through November. Venus is visible low in the west at sunset – very bright. Mercury is visible in the pre-dawn low in the south-east between Spica & Saturn (try looking for both Saturn & Mercury less than a degree apart on Nov. 25 & 26). Mars is visible at dawn low in the east, and more to the south in late November.

There is a double shadow transit on Jupiter between 1:30 & 3:30 a.m. on Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>.

You may hear mention of a solar eclipse happening on Nov. 3. Unfortunately you would have to be in Africa to see the full eclipse or east of Toronto to view the partial eclipse.

**Meteor showers**

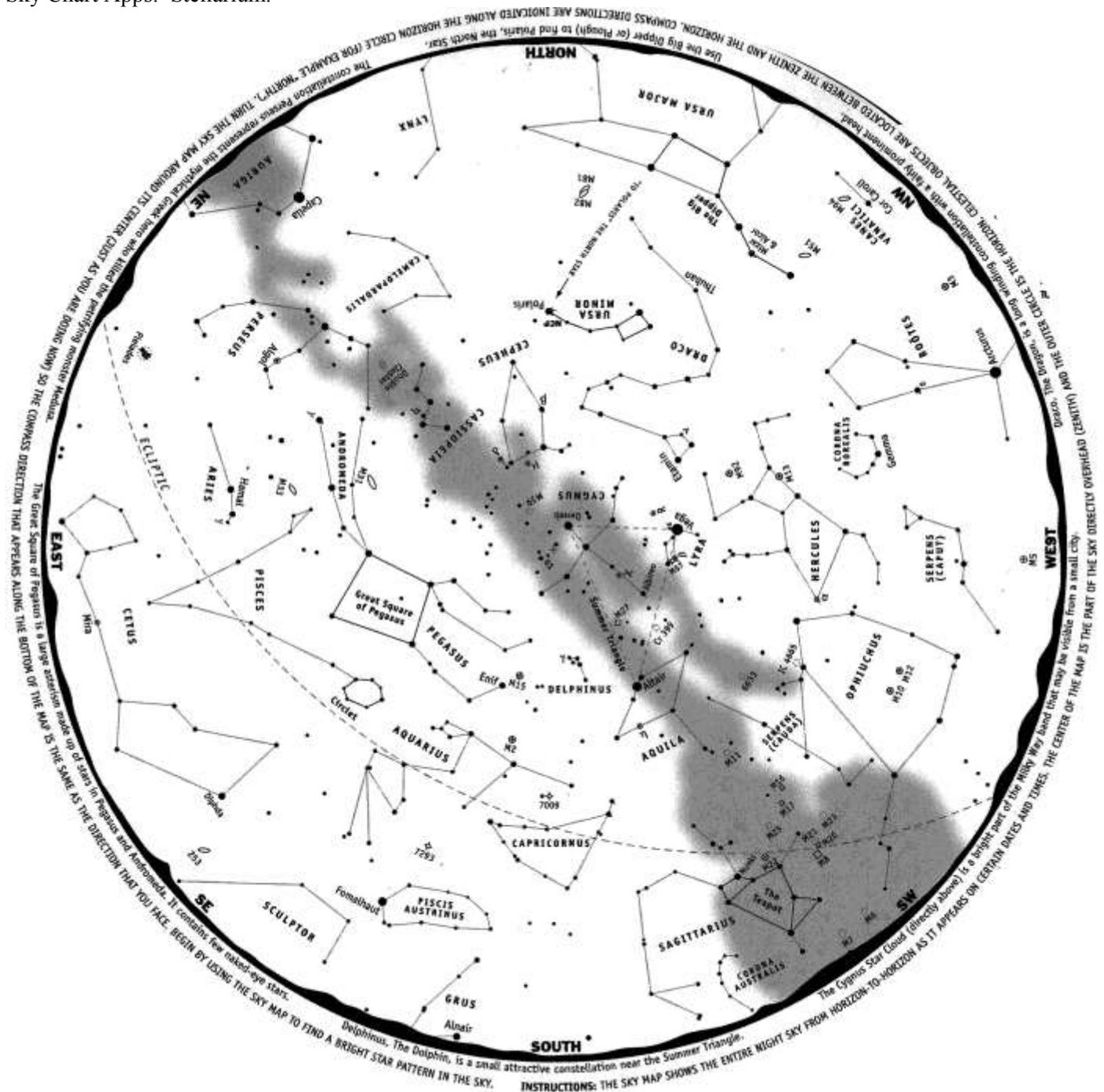
The next forecast meteor shower is the **Leonids on November 17, 2013 before dawn**. There will be a full moon so the meteor shower will not be at its best.

**Comet ISON**

ISON is visible at approx. magnitude 10 (in 10" or larger telescopes and keen observing skills!) near Mars and the star Regulus in Leo. ISON's orbit is moving it close to the sun over the next few weeks – it is closest to the Sun on November 28<sup>th</sup> at 1.1 million kms. If it survives this part of its orbit, it may emerge in early December in the dawn sky and be visible in binoculars or small telescopes.

Evening Sky Map –Skymaps.com - <http://www.skymaps.com/skymaps/tesmn1310.pdf>.

Sky Chart Apps: Stellarium.



**Chocolate Bars Case or 1/2 case (12 bars of 100 g = 1 case=\$45**

	#of cases	Total
Milk Chocolate		
Milk Chocolate with sea salt		
Dark with Caramel Crunch 55%		
Dark Chocolate with Coconut (67%)		
Dark Chocolate (55% cocoa)		
Dark Chocolate with Almonds		
Dark Chocolate with Raspberries		
Espresso Dark Chocolate		
Orange Dark Chocolate		
Mint Dark Chocolate		
Bittersweet Chocolate (71% cocoa)		
Panama Extra Dark (80% cocoa)		
Dark Chocolate with Ginger (65%)		
Dark Chocolate –Chili and Spice (65%)		
Milk chocolate with Butterscotch and Sea salt		
Milk chocolate and Hazelnuts		
<b>Baking Chocolate Bittersweet (71%) 10 bars 200 g each = 1 case buy whole (\$60) or 1/2 \$30</b>		

Here are some **Snack bars**. For these, **you have to order a full case of 20 bars**. The cost is **\$25**.

**Chocolate Snack Bars** (20 bars of 32 g = 1 case) #of cases Total \$

Peanut Butter (55% cocoa) (NEW!)		
Almonds & Raisins (55% cocoa) (NEW!)		
Milk Choc. /Puffed rice and quinoa (New)		

**Hot Chocolate Tins** (6 tins of 336 g = 1 case) Cost \$42/case # of cases Total \$

Milk Hot Chocolate		
Dark Hot Chocolate		
Chili Spice Hot Chocolate (No Dairy)		
Drinking Chocolate (No Dairy) \$42		

**Baking Chocolate Bittersweet (71%) 10 bars 200 g each /case**

Use the tables above to order number of each that you want and email or mail the form or call in. You can pay now or pay when the chocolate arrives.

**Order is due by November 7 so we can have the chocolate by the Holidays**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone# \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Send to Sue [shemphill@midbc.com](mailto:shemphill@midbc.com) or phone 398 8532