

# MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

JUNE 2014 NEWSLETTER



Hope your summer Humms  
along Happily!





The newsletter for the:  
Williams Lake Field Naturalists  
1305A Borland Road, Williams Lake BC, V2G 5K5

**Membership fees:** Family (\$30), single (\$25) or student (\$10) memberships can be mailed to the above address. Please complete the membership and waiver forms available at the Nature Centre (250) 398-8532, [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca) or the web site below. For more information about the club please contact Fred McMechan at 392-7680 or e-mail [Fred\\_McMechan@telus.net](mailto:Fred_McMechan@telus.net)

**Williams Lake Field Naturalists Website** <http://www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca>  
**Scout Island Nature Centre Website** <http://www.scoutislandnaturecentre.ca>

**Executive of The Williams Lake Field Naturalists:** president Fred McMechan, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Christie Mayall



**Editors:** Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter in September. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (296-3638) or e-mail us at [muskratexpress@shaw.ca](mailto:muskratexpress@shaw.ca)



## Field Trip Reports

### Williams Lake River Valley (June 15<sup>th</sup>) birding trip report by Phil Ranson

Attendees: Fred, Sandy, Kris, Lubna, Gord, Joy, Sean, Betty, Rick, Margaret, Jean.

The rain stopped and the skies cleared partially for the annual mid June bird walk in the lower river valley. Due to the weather, the venue was changed to the backup route from the yellow gate to the new Missioner Creek settlement ponds below the old dump site which are undergoing landscaping.

Normally several nesting locations are picked out for this trip but lack of time meant we had to search out our own. A Peewee nest was on a horizontal branch overhanging the trail but no bird was incubating (although a bird was on the nest a couple of days later). We had better luck with a Yellow Warbler nesting in a low shrub which watched us watching it. The settlement ponds are not fully developed yet but a pair of Killdeer put on a distraction display on the exposed gravel of the lower pond and a Spotted Sandpiper flitted along the edge. There was speculation that one of the duck nesting boxes may have been housing either a Goldeneye or a Common Merganser that had been seen on the ponds earlier.

A singing Warbling Vireo in the cottonwood overhanging the trail could not be located but closer inspection revealed the bird on the nest singing heartily. Vireos are one of the few species that regularly sing from the nest. Normally birds try to draw as little attention as possible to their nesting location so this is an odd trait. While watching the Vireo, a Goldfinch was seen in the top of an adjacent tree where it made its way to a nest high in the canopy where it was joined by its mate.

First a male then a female Lazuli Bunting flushed from the low shrubs next to the road and gave every indication of nesting but a cursory search failed to find anything. Just before returning to the car park, a pendulous Oriole nest was located but we couldn't determine if a bird incubating.

### Rose Lake evening paddle June 18<sup>th</sup> reported by Jim Sims

Cathy Koot, Margaret Waring and Rick Dawson joined me for a quick barbeque followed by a pleasant evening paddle along the shoreline of Rose Lake. Cathy kept our ears alert by identifying many different species of song birds. Several Black Terns were feeding over the east marsh, no sign of young out of the nest so far.



A list of the remaining field trips for 2014 can be found at the end of the newsletter.

## 100 Mile House homeschoolers enjoy the outdoors

By Kristi Iverson

100 Mile House homeschoolers have been enjoying the outdoors through a Nature Explorers group led by me, Kristi Iverson. We have two groups of kids (about 40 kids total), each meeting once a week for a 3-hour walk to see what plants, bugs, aquatic invertebrates and other natural treasures we can find. Many of the parents come along too and sometimes it's hard to tell who is having more fun – adults or kids.



The kids really enjoy some of the hide-and-seek type games such as Eagle Eye and The Wildlife Are Watching. After the first time out, most kids show up in drab clothing so they can successfully blend in with things around them when they are hiding. Other fun games include blind rock (each child gets a rock to hold but not look at and then has to try and find their rock again when the rocks are mixed up and passed out again) and Fire Keeper where the kids try to sneak up on the blindfolded 'fire keeper' to steal the noisy bell without being pointed at when the fire keeper hears them moving.

The kids love to make great faces whenever we encounter something dead and decaying, but they all gather close as soon as I pick it up to take a closer look. Last fall we looked in the crop of a grouse to see what it had been eating and this spring we had a great look at carrion beetles feeding on a decaying deer leg.

The excitement of the kids is infectious. I wish their energy was equally infectious: they cover about 4 times as much ground as me most times and will often break out into spontaneous running games when we stop for lunch. We'll be wrapping up soon as our "school" year winds down but plan to start up again in the fall.



## Scout Island Nature Centre News

From Sue Hemphill

What a busy month we have had. The strike action did interfere with classes coming to the Nature Centre, but many made it anyways. Eight classes that raised salmon this year were able to come to release their fry as well as dissect fish, catch aquatic invertebrates and enjoy the nature centre.

For the last 2 weeks of the school year, we are providing a day long outdoor education program for 20 primary children and 20 intermediate children each day. We are able to do this because we have 6 teacher candidates from UBC helping us. They are in the region for three weeks as part of a Community Field Experience course they are taking as part of their teacher training. We offered to keep them busy helping us provide this special outdoor education program. It is a kind of "jump in the deep water" workshop in outdoor education for them. Frances McCoubrey and I have been presenting theory and activities related to outdoor education—especially the practices we both use from "Coyote Mentoring." The summer staff has been providing the natural history expertise to the UBC candidates so they have the background to plan a full day of activities for each group. It has been great fun. These 6 people are full of energy and will be wonderful teachers. And the 40 children are having a great time!

In the words of these teachers to be:

"My name is Caroline Albiston and I'm currently completing my BEd in the French Cohort at UBC. Previous to the start of this program I received my BSc from SFU in Biology and have always grown up with a great appreciation for nature and simply being outside. The outdoors has brought me such pleasure and appreciation throughout my life and I have been very interested in finding ways that this appreciation might be shared with my future students. In particular it's been very useful to see how Scout Island staff have been able to include multiple areas of study into their activities and not simply science. I look forward to incorporating these ideas and activities!"

“My name is Joey Chang and I am currently finishing my teaching certification and BEd at UBC. My pedagogical practices currently focus on Social and Emotional Learning with a heavy emphasis on outdoor inquiry. On my spare time I enjoy hiking, reading and writing. It has been an absolute pleasure to be at Scout Island Nature Reserve these past few days learning about the flora and fauna around the Cariboo-Chilcotin areas.”

“My name is Meagan Vandekerckhove and I have a UBC Teacher Candidate from Langley, British Columbia. Since grade 3 I knew that I wanted to become a teacher and have been pursuing this dream ever since. I enjoys being outdoors and am very excited for the opportunity to learn how to bring students to nature. While at Scout Island, I am being pushed out of my comfort zone by all the bugs and creepy crawly things, but I am leaning so much and I am enthusiastic about the experience.”



“My name is Geoff and I have been teaching in one capacity or another for years, so becoming a certified teacher was probably inevitable. I taught English as an additional language for five years, living in Canada, Mexico, and South Korea. I have also worked in childcare and youth programs. Working at Scout Island is the perfect fit for me as it combines my love of educating with my need to be out in nature.”

“My name is Nina grew and I up spending time in the forests of the Kootenays and the busy streets of Vancouver. I have enjoyed teaching children art and archaeology camps during the summer and volunteering at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Vancouver in the winter. I am very excited about becoming a certified teacher. Scout Island has been a great learning opportunity for me and I have really enjoyed this wonderful chance to share nature with children.”

“My name is Jared Power, I am currently a French Language elementary teacher candidate through UBC. I grew up living most of my life in Coquitlam, B.C. I have had experience in the wilderness as a Wild fire fighter in the Kootenays for 3 years and am a very active and sporty person by nature. This experience brings a great opportunity for me to interact with children through outdoor education. The location of Scout Island in Williams Lake is absolutely beautiful and I relish this opportunity to learn and grow as a new teacher in such an amazing environment.”

Our bees have been so busy, especially the queen, that they threatened to swarm. Diane Dunaway, our wonderful beekeeper, came in and with the help of Caitlin took some full frames out and put in some empty frames.



### The end of an era of Discovery (Margret Retires)

How many children can one woman nurture in a 21 year career? How many little hands can she hold on adventurous walks in search of baby geese? How many 3-5 year olds have planted their first flower seeds under her patient guidance? Or painted their first masterpiece, made their first Mother’s Day card or Christmas ornament? And how many of those children, now grown into nature-loving adults, couldn’t wait to bring their own children to Discovery Pre-school so **Margret Onneken** could work her magic? As Margret retires at the end of the 2013-14 season, she takes with her a mountain of memories, affection and gratitude. Staff, directors and well-wishers gathered for tea on June 18 to honor Margret and her friend Nancie Eastman, who also retires after many years of cleaning the pre-school space. Former students Patrick Newsome and Caitlin Langford, now serving as summer staff for their second year, thanked her for getting them off to a great start. Former pre-school assistants Marcia Aitkin and Barb Langford were on hand to add their warm wishes. We presented Margret with a framed (by Jurgen) photo of a favourite spot on the

island, and small album of pre-school moments. To the inevitable question “What’s next”, Margret glowed to report that her granddaughter Bronwyn is with her for two weeks, and she looks forward to leisurely mornings. We may be able to lure her back to Scout Island for occasional programs, but she warned that she will not be leaving the house when it’s -35 out. But we know Margret...she will never lack for things to do.

This typical comment from our facebook group captures many of the sentiments we hear: “Margaret was a perfect preschool teacher in every way. Her gentle but firm way has guided thousands of children...I'm proud to say we are in that number. Rachel continues to speak highly of her preschool time there and though we are sad to see Margaret retire we know it's well deserved. Thank you for your part in helping raise Rachel!”



We’re pleased that Karen Haseldine will be running a pre-school next year, 4 mornings a week. It’s already fully booked, but we’re still taking names for the waiting list. Plans are underway for the school district to operate a nature-based kindergarten here beginning in 2015. This is a big step in our ongoing project of increasing nature education in our local schools.

Tell all the children you know to come and enjoy nature with us this summer.

**Nature Fun**  
**Scout Island Nature Centre**  
**Discovering Nature Up Close**  
**A New Program Each Day**  
**Weekdays July 2- August 21**

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

**Ages 8-13**  
**Tuesday 1-3 (\$10)**  
**Or 9:30-3pm (\$20)**

This day will include a variety of art activities lead by our resident artists including a nature drawing course that will build new skills each week

For more information or to register:  
Call: (250) 398- 8532 or  
scoutisland@shaw.ca

**Rufous Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus rufus*)

Research by Jim Sims

Source Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds, Birds of British Columbia Vol. 3, and [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/rufous\\_hummingbird/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/rufous_hummingbird/id)

On June 9<sup>th</sup> I went to the firewood shed to split some kindling when a Rufous Hummingbird flew off this nest that was above the splitting block. The inner lining of the nest is typical: soft plant down spun together with spider web and then disguised with an outer coating of lichen. The nest contained 2 eggs that hatched out into very tiny hummers by June 17<sup>th</sup>. Today they are sporting tiny beaks that are getting longer each day like Pinocchio's nose. There is no sign of a male as he has left his mate to be responsible for all of the care of the young. The male leaves the female once breeding is complete and it is thought that he moves to higher elevations in search of new wild flower blossoms.



A few moments ago I watched the tiny adult defend the nest as a young red squirrel got a bit too close. The Rufous Hummingbird is a ferocious defender of its food source as well as its nest. They are often observed driving off much larger hummingbirds (and squirrels). This was one of the first photographs I took of a Hummingbird way back in the days of film photography. They are readily attracted to feeders and this can result in very large numbers of Hummingbirds raising families in close proximity to the feeder. They have a remarkable memory for the location of a good food source. This can extend from year to year. There are often reports of them buzzing around the location of last

year's feeder waiting for it to be filled for the new season. The Rufous Hummingbird makes one of the longest migratory journeys of any bird in the world, as measured by body size. At just over 7.6 cm long, its roughly 6300 km movement (one-way) from Alaska to Mexico is equivalent to 80,000,000 body lengths. In comparison, the 33cm long Arctic Tern's one-way flight of about 18,000 km is only 54,000,000 body lengths. During their long migrations, Rufous Hummingbirds make a clockwise circuit of western North America each year. They move up the Pacific Coast in late winter and spring, reaching Washington and British Columbia by May. We see them in our region as early as mid-March but it is not until the end of March that we see very many, once the Willow catkins and other early flowers can support them. The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds designates them as a Common species (20 or more individuals per locality per day) through the breeding season. As early as July they may start south again, traveling down the chain of the Rocky Mountains.



Eggs on June 9<sup>th</sup>



Feathered young on June 17<sup>th</sup>



Pinocchio Beaks today

## Our View of the Night Sky – June - August 2014.

By: Steve Capling

### Planet Review

Saturn is visible low in the southwest evening sky. It will pass very close to Mars on Aug. 24. Mercury, Venus and Jupiter (later in August) are visible at sunrise. On Aug. 18 Venus and Jupiter pass very close to each other (conjunction).

### Meteor showers

The next forecast meteor shower is the **Perseids on August 12-14, 2014 before dawn**. The Perseid meteor shower is perhaps the most beloved meteor shower of the year for the Northern Hemisphere. The shower builds gradually to a peak, often produces 50 to 100 meteors per hour in a dark sky at the peak, and, for us in the Northern Hemisphere, this shower comes when the weather is warm. The Perseids tend to strengthen in number as late night deepens into midnight, and typically produce the most meteors in the wee hours before dawn. They radiate from a point in the constellation Perseus, but, as with all meteor shower radiant points, you don't need to know Perseus to watch the shower; instead, the meteors appear in all parts of the sky. They are typically fast and bright meteors. Best mornings to look: August 12, 13 and 14. Unfortunately the almost full moon will interfere with observing dimmer meteors.

### Ceres and Vesta - Asteroid Crossing!

Vesta and Ceres are normally far from each other in the sky. But every 17 years swift Vesta, with an orbital period of 3.63 years, catches up to slower Ceres in its 4.60-year orbit. In 2014 they're traveling through Virgo in tandem, never more than a few degrees apart in the sky.

Look here for a full-page printable finder chart for Ceres and Vesta in 2014

at: [http://d366w3m5tf0813.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Web\\_Ceres\\_Vesta\\_2014.pdf](http://d366w3m5tf0813.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Web_Ceres_Vesta_2014.pdf)



Although Vesta is just 60% Ceres's diameter, it appears much brighter because it's 40 million miles closer to Earth and the Sun, and because its surface reflects more of the light that falls on it. The two asteroids' closest approach in the sky occurs on July 5th, when they're just 10 arcminutes apart. But by that point they have faded considerably and are inconveniently low by the time the sky is fully dark.

See more at:

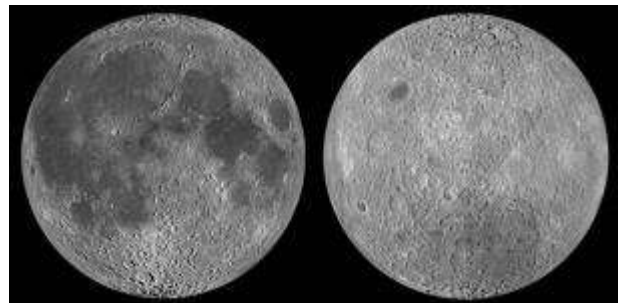
<http://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/observing-news/ceres-and-vesta-in-2014/#sthash.NewJWO8w.dpuf>

### The Moon

As you look for meteors around the full moon in August, which by the way will be the 'largest' full moon of the year, you can contemplate some new research findings on why the moon's two sides are so different.....

#### Why is the Moon Two-Faced?

We see only half of the Moon (left), the hemisphere that displays many dark, circular maria (lava plains). By contrast, the farside (right), visible thanks to spacecraft, contains very few mare deposits. NASA / Arizona State Univ.



This week's third lunar result takes a stab at resolving a 55-year-old mystery. Since the Moon's rotation is locked in such a way that we see only one hemisphere, we didn't know what the unseen half looked like. Then, in 1959, the Soviet spacecraft Luna 3 radioed the [historic first-ever views of the lunar farside](#) that showed it to be *very* different: the familiar dark maria so common on the nearside are almost completely absent.

Various researchers have tried to explain this dichotomy in the decades since, but with no real consensus emerging. Now Penn State researchers Arpita Roy, Jason Wright, and Steinn Sigurdsson think they have the answer.

Writing in the [June 9'14 issue of \*Astrophysical Journal Letters\*](#), they explain that when the Moon first formed it was much closer, just 5% to 10% of its present distance, and that its rotation quickly became tidally locked. Both bodies were still hot from the collision, with Earth's surface a red-hot 4,500°F (2500°C). This meant the lunar nearside was continually seared by the looming, glowing Earth that dominated its sky, too hot for any minerals to condense into solid.

But the farside, out of sight from Earth, cooled much quicker. The first solids to form were rich in aluminum and calcium, minerals that have relatively low densities. These early minerals became the building blocks for the lunar crust, which accumulated faster and grew substantially thicker on the generally cooler farside.

Later on, titanic collisions battered all of the young Moon's surface. The nearside's relatively thin crust, fractured deeply by the largest impacts, provided an easy conduit for dense, metal-enriched magmas to rise from the deep interior to the surface. These formed the pattern of dark maria — the familiar "Man in the Moon" — seen today. But similar eruptions were almost nonexistent on the farside, due to its thicker crust.

And *that*, claim Roy and her colleagues, is [how the Moon got its two-faced appearance](#).

- See more at: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/three-new-findings-moon/#sthash.7KcJ349Y.dpuf>

### Comet PanSTARRS Update

While not a spectacular sight in binoculars, Comet PanSTARRS is starting to be visible. Binocular comets are few and far between, and this one is worth the risk of a few mosquito bites on a summer night. Besides, the next few weeks will be the last chance for mid-northern observers to catch C/2012 K1 at a convenient time and relatively high altitude.

Come mid-July, the comet dips into the twilight glow and disappears from view. It returns to view, this time in the morning sky before dawn, in mid-September, but it won't climb much higher than 20° for mid-northern sky watchers while swinging south from Hydra into Puppis.

In theory, Comet PanSTARRS should continue to brighten over this months-long interval.

Face west at nightfall in the coming weeks and locate the familiar "backward question mark" asterism better known as the Sickle of Leo. The chart will help you star hop from there to the comet. - See more at: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/observing-news/see-comet-panstarrs-summers-binocular-comet/#sthash.EefnRUxn.dpuf>

Comet PanSTARRS (C/2012 K1) spends mid-June in Leo Minor near the 4.5-magnitude star 21 Leo Minoris before gliding over the Sickle of Leo, highlighted by the 1st-magnitude star Regulus. Comet positions are shown for 10:30 p.m. EDT every five days from June 13th through August 2nd. Click to enlarge and print out for use at the telescope. Source: Chris Marriott's SkyMap - See more at:

<http://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/observing-news/see-comet-panstarrs-summers-binocular-comet/#sthash.EefnRUxn.dpuf>



Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - [Skymaps.com/downloads.html](http://Skymaps.com/downloads.html) - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. "June 2014: Northern Edition (PDF):" At the end of the month it changes to show the next month's chart.

## Field Trips for the rest of the year

### Koster Lake – Churn Creek Protected Area

*Saturday June 28<sup>th</sup>* (Leader *Ordell Steen 398-5017 - please phone if you plan to come and Glen Davidson*). A moderate, full day hike (about 14 km total) in conjunction with Friends of Churn Creek to beautiful Koster (China) Lake and return. Gentle trails through grasslands, Douglas-fir forests and riparian areas from Hairy Fish Lake. Time permitting; we may walk beyond Koster Lake along Little Churn Creek towards Churn Flats. This can be either a hike or bike trip. We will likely meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:00 a.m. but please phone for confirmation.



**Missioner Creek (Dairy Fields) walk**

*Wednesday July 9<sup>th</sup> (Leader Ordell Steen 398-5017)*

We will focus on history of human occupation of this area within the City of Williams Lake, from earliest evidence of people to Secwepemc village site and burial ground, HBC brigade trail and site of “first Williams Lake”. Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 6:00 p.m.

**Eureka Meadows**

*Saturday July 26<sup>th</sup>. Katharine VanSpall (250-392-4447). Please pre-register with Katharine so we can be sure enough high clearance 4x4 vehicles will be available.* Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:00am

Join Kath for a hike into the alpine meadows northwest of Eureka Peak, located in the Cariboo Mountains near the headwaters of the Horsefly River. There will be an elevation gain of approximately 700 meters over 5 km (i.e. ~10 km total hike), so be prepared! This trip is planned to coincide with the alpine flower season, so bring your plant book to help with identification and your camera. Be sure to pack a hearty lunch and snacks, as well as plenty of water. Rain gear is also wise as you are in the rain belt of the Cariboo Mountains. Good footwear is imperative and gaiters could be an asset as the vegetation will be very deep and most likely wet. The last part of the drive to the trailhead is over rough logging roads with numerous water bars, so high clearance 4x4's are required.

**Churn Flats – Churn Creek Protected Area**

*Saturday September 6<sup>th</sup> (Leader: Ordell Steen (398-5017 – **please phone** if you plan to come)*

A moderate, full day hike (about 12 km total) in conjunction with Friends of Churn onto spectacular grasslands of Churn Flats. Excellent bunchgrass grasslands are present and the hike will include views into canyons of Churn Creek and Little Churn Creek. High clearance vehicles will be required due to likely rutting of the forest ranch road which accesses the area. Meet at the “Y” (A&W parking lot) at 6:45 a.m.

**Dante's Inferno**

*Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup> (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)*

Moderate hike to new (2013) Goal 2 Park, 20 km west of Riske Creek. The hike features fabulous vistas from basalt cliffs and a trail to small lake below with a possible extension to the grassland slopes along the Chilcotin River. Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch, lots of water and good footwear.

**Junction Sheep Range**

*Sunday October 19<sup>th</sup> (Leader Fred McMechan 392-7680)*

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch, water bottle and your binoculars for this annual day long drive and hike into the park. This will be at the peak of the California Big-horned Sheep rut so look forward to seeing the sheep and perhaps you will be lucky and see or hear some head-butting.