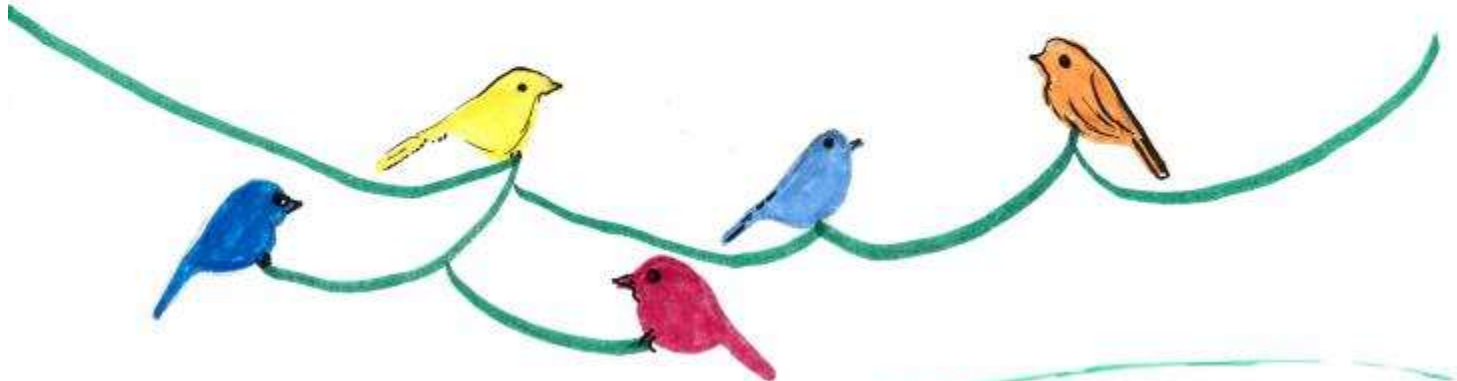


MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
SEPTEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER



ENJOYING THE LAST DAYS OF SUMMER



OCT 3RD
BARBAQUE
+ PRESENTATION
IN LIKELY

OCT 17 FIELD TRIP
HAZELTINE CREEK REHAB
WITH
KATIE McMAHENT + COLLEEN HUGHES

SEPT 26 + 27 HORSEFLY SALMON FESTIVAL



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 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, 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 near the end of 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@shaw.ca



BC Nature Fund Raiser (Northern Gateway)

From Fred McMechan

Please make note of BC Nature fund raising campaign to support our legal fight against Northern Gateway. Donations can be sent through the fund raising website, "FundRazr"

Details about the campaign and giving donations can be found at either :

- 1) the fundrazr website, fundrazr.com/campaigns/912Lg2 or
- 2) the BC Nature website, www.bcnature.ca/join-us-in-the-fight-for-nature-and-help-us-protect-the-bc-coast/

Hazeltine Creek Rehabilitation Tour

On **October 17, 2015**, Katie McMahan and Colleen Hughes are pleased to be providing a tour of the Hazeltine Creek Rehabilitation project near the Mount Polley Mine. The tour will include a look at the Polley Lake Outlet Structure, the new Hazeltine Creek Channel, the new Lower Edney Creek channel at Quesnel Lake. We will meet at Scout Island at 9:00 am where Katie and Colleen will do a presentation on the response to the breach and the rehabilitation of Hazeltine Creek. We will depart by 9:45 to the ditch road arriving at 11:00. Tour and discussions will last as long as people want to stay.

For those that do not want to come into Scout Island first, we will plan to meet at the Hazeltine Creek Crossing on the Ditch road at 11 am.

Salmon Festival

September 26th and 27th (10am to 4pm at Horsefly BC)

A wonderful way to celebrate BC Rivers Day and the return of the Sockeye Salmon to the spawning grounds. Come out and enjoy the arts and crafts, live music and watch the dissection of a salmon.

UNBC report on the Mt. Polley tailings pond breach

Saturday Oct. 3rd at the Quesnel River Research Centre (6581 Likely BC)

Presentation begins at 10:00am followed by refreshments and barbeque at noon

UNBC and colleagues will share their findings on the Mt. Polley tailings pond breach and other research activities.

A Very Special Note from Jenny

As you may have heard, I am leaving my job as Coordinator at Scout Island on the 24th of this month. I'm turning 70 soon and feel it's time. But I want the club to know that my 8 years here have been a fabulous opportunity to know a most intriguing and dedicate bunch of folks. The shared passion for nature, education, and environmental responsibility that binds us together is truly inspiring. I've learned so much about nature, but even more about how talented and well-intentioned people can work together to serve the community.

Of course I'm not going far away. I'll still do publicity on a volunteer basis, as I really enjoy telling the world about all the cool stuff that goes on here. And I'll remain a member for the rest of my days. So...see you around, and thanks for 8 great years.

And a big thank-you to Jenny from all of us for all of the amazing work you have done for Scout Island. Enjoy your retirement!



Golden Eagle Hike Report

Reported by Jon Gaztelumendi

On Sunday July 12th, members of Williams Lake Field Naturalists led by Jon Gaztelumendi went on a fieldtrip to see the Golden Eagles in Hanceville Canyon, one of the territories surveyed for the Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring by the Fraser and Chilcotin Rivers Project*.

The group left a rainy Williams Lake early in the morning and carpooled to Hanceville, where they found good weather with a not very high temperature, perfect for bird watching. After a 45min hike up, they naturalists reached the top of the peak located on the west end of the Hanceville Canyon and took a break to enjoy the beautiful views. Once the group reached the first observation point (around 800 metres from the cliff), they observed the four nests rebuilt year by year on the cliff by the local Golden Eagle pair and learn more about their ecology and the breeding data collected on the past two years. As no activity was found on the nests, they decided to keep hiking to the second observation point (around 600 metres from the cliff) and enjoy their lunch there while waiting for the eagles to show up.



Although there was no luck with eagles this time, they saw a beautiful Merlin calling and flying on the top, a flock of Sharp-tailed Grouse on their hike up, and also a moose and a black bear, which were spotted from the road.

**The Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring by the Fraser and Chilcotin Rivers Project started in February 2014 with the main purpose of compiling information about the Golden Eagle in the Cariboo by doing ground surveys based on the observation of the strategic areas for this bird species, such as cliffs and open and mountainous areas, in order to determine current occupancy of the territories by the Fraser and Chilcotin rivers. This project is sponsored by Williams Lake Field Naturalists and BC Nature and totally run by volunteers.*

Teapot Mountain Field Trip Report

By Katie McMahan

Despite a last minute destination change, on Friday July 10th a group of four WLFN members headed into the Teapot Cabin for an overnight hiking trip. Without a high clearance vehicle, we hiked up the logging road and then the trail to the cabin, enjoying the cooler weather as we gained elevation. Wildlife sightings included a moose and an “alpine frog”, and the wildflowers were out in force. After dropping our gear at the cabin, we hiked the steep climb into the alpine, along the fast-running creek and past patches of snow, to the summit of Mount Elsey for a great (albeit smoky) view of the surrounding lakes and mountains. The well-equipped cabin was a welcome respite from the bugs, and a relaxing evening of socializing and yummy curry dinner was enjoyed by all. Fortunately the forecast thunderstorms held off until the night when we were tucked away in the cabin, and the rain made for a lush and fragrant morning.

After hiking out, we stopped in at the Horsefly Falls to take in the view, have a picnic lunch, and swim in the river. An afternoon and evening partaking in the Arts on the Fly festivities in Horsefly was a perfect way to cap off the adventure!



Jane Perry, Frances McCoubrey and Paula Laita at the Summit of Mount Elsey

Big Creek Ecological Reserve

Unfortunately we have had to cancel this field trip due to the leader being very busy with no available weekend time. That seems to happen once you retire and you have to work on the weekends as well as the other 5 days of the week!

Junction Sheep Range

Sunday October 25th (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.



Notes from the Executive

Fred McMechan

- 1) BC Nature Field Camp at Tatlayoko Lake: The camp was successful, operating from September 6 to 12. The planning and preparations for the camp took place before and during the camp. We had very good support from Peter and Roma Shaughnessy (Peter is the land manager for the Nature Conservancy of Canada) in setting up the camp at the Tatlayoko Lake campsite, and from Connie Bracewell who catered for the camp at her Homathko River Inn. Our volunteers also provided wonderful assistance toward the success of the camp. Christie Mayall will be writing an article on the camp in the next edition of our newsletter
- 2) Renovation of the caretaker's house: This project of renovating the west and east walls was completed in August. We plan to renovate the east and north walls in 2016. Thank you to the volunteers who helped with the renovations. A special thanks to Rodger Hamilton who oversaw the renovation.
- 3) Bennie Cabin at Nimpo Lake: We decided to continue to assist The Land Conservancy, which owns this property, in managing the property. We will do ongoing monitoring and continue to do minor repairs as needed. Thank you to Jim Sims for his work on the property.
- 4) Kiosk replacement. We are progressing with the replacing the kiosk at the Nature House parking lot. Communication with Pioneer Homes has taken place and we are hoping to have a new kiosk built in the late fall.

- 5) Drones policy at the Nature Centre: We decided to forbid the use of drones at the Scout Island Nature Centre. As well we will prepare a drone policy for the public.
- 6) In August we had a meeting with Darrell Garceau, CAO for the City to discuss several issues around the Nature Centre. Afterwards at our last executive meeting we decided: to not support any for-profit commercial activity at the Nature Centre; to provide Darrell with a list of items for next year's City budget and for future City budgets, such as replacing the main door at the Nature House, bear proof garbage cans, a new roof for the Nature House, new soffits for the Nature House; a committee from the executive will explore developing the RC Cotton site as a nature appreciation site including the riparian property owned by BCR (which the City is considering buying) and the property owned by SunCor.
- 7) The issue of burning railway ties at the Williams Lake Power Plant was discussed. We will pursue getting information from the local Air Quality committee and follow up at the next meeting

Good-bye Ospreys...Here Come the Swans

Jenny Noble, Coordinator Scout Island Nature Centre

The first day of autumn at Scout Island Nature Centre is the day we say good-bye to our summer staff. This year we've been lucky enough to have Patrick Newsome back for his third year, and he's been a great resource for Sienna Hoffos and Geneva Gordon. All three are returning to University to pursue studies in the sciences. It's always a little poignant, but also fulfilling, to witness how they grow in knowledge and confidence through the season.

From early May until the end of school, they taught nature lore at schools and at the Nature House. As soon as school ended, they began developing Nature Fun adventures for kids aged 3-13. At five separate programs a week, this is a really demanding work load. Each session incorporates a short lesson relating to the week's theme, games, crafts and lots of outdoor time. During Bird Week, kids learned to identify the birds that visit us for the summer and studied their nesting behaviour, what type of feathers they have, what they eat and how they use their special "tools" (different types of beaks) for gathering their favourite food. During Mammal Week they handled animal skulls, dissected specimens, studied bats and their amazing echolocation skills, learned how the local mammals will be getting ready for winter soon, and even "became" Beavers for a day and mimicked their awesome adaptations!



The Bug Makers

natural materials), model beaver lodges of collected clay and mud, amphibian/reptile mini books, "fossils" and tracks moulded in clay, and a photography day.

A Voyageur Canoe excursion has become a much-anticipated annual tradition, and this year 18 Nature Fun kids (plus adult staff and volunteers) tried out their paddling skills on the lake, and they got to see kingfishers. For some it was their very first experience in a boat!

Our special Art in Nature six-hour Nature Fun Tuesdays for kids 8-13 were really popular this year. Our "frequent flyers" were assigned to the weekly observation and feeding of specific animals in the Nature House exhibits and became pros at their tasks. Art projects included: papier mache insects (group project), giant volcano eruption (outdoors!), origami lotus flowers, realistic bird drawings, model caddis fly homes (made from found



We see Autumn's approach in other ways. The 3 osprey chicks that were hatched and reared atop the nesting pole are flying and hunting on their own. The parents appear to consider them ready for independent life, and have departed on

their long migration to Central/South America. The bees in our observation hive had a stellar season, and their honey will soon be ready for the second extraction of the year. A bumper crop of choke cherries is helping the chickadees store up energy for the winter. The buck is following the doe and her fawns around with a glint in his eye.

While kids shop for school supplies and teachers gestate lesson plans, permanent Nature Centre staff are gearing up for busy academic season. There is no pre-school this year, but the new SD 27 program Tales and Trails for 0-5 year olds will be using the Nature Centre regularly. This loosely-structured program offers lots of nature-based experiences, including stories, songs and dawdling along the trails. Call 398-3839 for information.

We're especially excited that Frances McCoubrey is joining the staff as Outdoor Education Resource Teacher for the school district. Frances will work at Scout Island, in the schools and at other outdoor sites to provide nature-based/multi-age learning experiences for teachers and students. She will be working closely with other Nature Centre educators. This half-time position is being created in partnership School District No. 27, and we are providing the funding for it. It's exciting to see the school district embrace nature education.

The Grade Seven Outdoor Education Academy will again use the Nature Centre regularly. We also offer a wide range of programs for K-12 school classes, and work with teachers to supplement their regular curricula. Teachers are encouraged to book early by phoning 398-8532.

So while the Autumnal Equinox is still a few weeks away, the kids, the teachers and the creatures of Scout Island are already in transition mode. We can all look forward to the swans!

NatureKids members contribute to the Bluebird House Project

By Paula Laita

On July 20th, members of the Young Naturalist Club led by Paula Laita spent a great evening monitoring and recording the activity of some Bluebird houses along Dog Creek Road. While checking out the boxes, they learnt about the project and the ecology of this bird species. They had great findings like eggs as well as just-hatched and almost-fledged chicks. They also had time to observe some waterfowl in the ponds and two Turkey Vultures flying just above their heads!

Young Naturalists' Club of BC became NatureKids BC in the spring of 2015. The name was proposed and selected by members and the change-over will be complete by September.

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

By Jim Sims

At this time of the year I find the birding a bit frustrating, the bright colours of the breeding season are dulled, if I could hear the songs they are either non-existent or muted, and by time I pick up my binoculars the bird has already moved to the next tree to the south and by time I focus they have migrated out of sight. One of the more common Little Brown Birds around now are the White-crowned Sparrows. While at Eagle Lake for the first week of September the White-crowned Sparrow was one of the more common birds and this is also the case here at Rose Lake. Watch out for the juvenile birds that will have a brown and white-crown like this one I photographed at Eagle Lake.



Juvenile White-crowned Sparrow

The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds designates them as Common (20 or more individuals per day per locality)

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

during both migration periods (The Birds of British Columbia gives them a Very Common designation). In the spring migration they can be the most abundant bird in the region from late April to mid-May. During the fall they move through in smaller flocks over a longer period of time, being common through most of September. A few birds will remain behind for the summer and they have an uncommon rating (1 to 6 individuals per day per locality). They are known to nest in the region. At Eagle Lake I'm certain there were at least 2 nests this summer. The extensive low brush (willows, wolf brush young spruce) that have grown up in recent years where the water levels have dropped provides an ideal habitat for the White-crowns. Occasionally a few will stay around through the winter as well when they have a casual rating (more than 6 reports but not every year).

The White-crowned Sparrow is a large Sparrow with a long tail and small yellow or pinkish bill. At first it might just look like another one of those LBJs but a closer look will reveal the bold black and white strips through the top of the head. The similar White-throated Sparrow has of course a bold white throat patch and yellow lores along with the black and white strips on the crown. The Breast and throat of the White-crown are unmarked grayish in colour while the breast of the White throated is mottled gray. Look for White-crowns in low shrubs with good cover near open grasslands. They will also frequent tall grass regions but like to have the shelter of shrubs nearby. They can also be attracted to feeders. When on the ground they will often move about very rapidly, allaboutbirds.org claims they can run on a tread mill at a rate of 1/3 of a mile per hour without tiring. When feeding on the ground they might "double-scratching," involving a quick hop backwards to turn over leaves followed by a forward hop and pounce. When these birds arrive on their breeding grounds males and females quickly pair, then wait until snow has melted enough to begin nest building. At the end of summer the pairs break up and winter separately, but when both members of the pair return the next summer, about two-thirds of the pairs re-form. Young birds move very little for the first few days after they leave the nest, and don't typically learn to fly until a week or so later. Siblings can stay with each other for more than two months after fledging.



Adult White-crowned Sparrow

Many of us will remember the years when Barbara DeWolfe followed the White-crowns north from California to the Arctic. Barbara often stopped in Williams Lake while she studied the different dialects of the birds. She taught many of us to recognize the song of the White-crowned Sparrow that is described by John Neville on his CD with the mnemonic "poor Will peed his pants". Here is an interesting link to some of Barbara's research <https://books.google.ca/books?id=2iFmsVSyV4gC&pg=PA89&lpg=PA89&dq=Barbara+deWolfe+white-crowned+sparrows&source=bl&ots=5r5Qc-9Bnn&sig=fKCDbaNGj4d36-mEMHTO4bMkctk&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CDIQ6AEwA2oVChMIINKx7Yz8xwIVx1CIC1aSwDU#v=onepage&q=Barbara%20deWolfe%20white-crowned%20sparrows&f=false> In a nut shell, White-crowns have different dialects associated with the territories they frequent. The young birds learn their songs from the birds in their territory and not from their fathers. Some birds are non-migrating some are short migrating and others are long migrators. The non-migrating California birds will have similar dialects. The short-migrating birds will be exposed to several dialects and will become multi-lingual and can use this to adjust their song to match their neighbours when they begin to breed. This will give them an advantage as they may not return to their natal territory and if they know the dialect of their new nesting territory they will fit in well. Long-migrating birds are less likely to change their dialect due to lack of time on the nesting territory.

Our View of the Night Sky – September 2015.

September equinox - Fall starts on Sept. 23.

Planet Review

Mercury is visible low in the eastern dawn sky well below Venus, Mars & Jupiter.

Mars is visible as a reddish 'star' in the dawn sky in the east in the constellations Cancer & Leo. It will be close to Regulus on Sept. 25. Jupiter becomes visible in the dawn sky in southern Leo. Venus continues to dominate the eastern fall morning sky. It reaches its maximum brightness of magnitude -4.8 on Sept. 21. Saturn is visible low in the southwest in the evening sky in Scorpius.

Moon Status - LUNAR Eclipse happens on the evening of Sunday, Sept. 27th!

The lunar eclipse will be happening for us at sunset as the moon rises in the east (totality lasts from approx. 7 p.m. to 8:20 p.m.). See if you can notice the constellations and Milky Way becoming more visible during the totality portion of the eclipse. For a more detailed explanation of a lunar eclipse check out this article:

http://calgary.rasc.ca/downloads/Observing_and_Understanding_Lunar_Eclipses_Sept_2015.pdf

This is the last lunar eclipse visible to us until January 2018.

Full moon - Sept. 27th.

New moon - Sept. 13th & Oct. 12th.

Meteor Showers

There are no meteor showers in September.

Asteroids

Asteroid Vesta reaches opposition on Sept. 29th - brightest for 2015 at magnitude 6.2.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart go to this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - and scroll down the center of the page to the download button. "September 2015: Northern Edition (PDF)". At the end of the month it changes to show the next month's chart.



Members Moment

Photo by Slavka Paral

Slavka wrote: *I feel privileged to be able to learn more about the nature around Willy's Pond where I have lived most of my Canadian life. The trip on Sunday to Churn Creek was just a little example of the incredible beauty and education I soaked in. Looking forward for more. Thank you again.*

We are always looking for your special “**Moments**” that you captured with your camera. So send us your photo of a scene, plant, animal bird or even friends having fun outdoors. Be sure to add in a description telling us why your photo is so special to you and something that will encourage all of us to get outdoors and enjoy. Please email your full resolution **moment** to the muskratexpress@shaw.ca