

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

SEPTEMBER 2017 NEWSLETTER

Visit the Junction
Sheep Range
Field Trip
Oct 22



Where did
you go
this
summer?



Did the osprey
have
young?

Why did every
one leave? We
played in the lake
all summer.

Did most of
the
birds
stay
or
go?



Do you
know a
Totem Duck?





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, vice president Vacant, secretary Ordell Steen, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Nola Daintith, Cathy Koot, Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Brian Chapman, Don Lawrence and Chris Coates



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter late in October or early November. 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



Last Field Trip of the Season Junction Sheep Range

Sunday October 22nd (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.

Program to be Announced

There will be an evening program presented by Todd French in October but the date and topic cannot be confirmed at this time so please watch for an email and if you do not get email watch the tribune for the announcement or have a friend give you a call.



Notes from the Executive

By Fred McMechan

The following information comes from the executive meeting on September 13, the first meeting after the summer recess:

- 1) Reprinting of "Stepping into Nature". The first printing of the 2012 Williams Lake Field Naturalists Guide to the Williams Lake River Valley was sold out earlier this year. We made a decision to order 200 copies of this guide which are now available at the Open Book or the Nature House. They will also be used as a reference by school classes.
- 2) BC Nature Camp at Tatlayoko Lake. We have decided to plan a Camp for September 9 to 15 in 2018. The venue for the camp will be the Homathko River Inn located in the Tatlayoko Lake Valley. The camping will be on the grounds of the Inn rather than at the campground of the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) when the Camp was held in 2015. The catering by Connie Bracewell and her staff, and the presentations will also occur at the Inn. Christie Mayall has agreed to be the registrar. Our committee will be completing the planning for the Camp in October and an article on the Camp will be provided in the winter edition of the BC Nature magazine. We expect to have an outline of the field trips, presentations, registration procedures and other general information on both the BC Nature website (www.bcnature.ca) and our club website (www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca) sometime in late November.

- 3) Replacement of the railings on the Island Trail. This fall we plan to replace many of the rotting railings along the Island Trail which are on the far island. We have decided to replace the railings with 2x6 cedar boards because the non-treated railings have rotted too quickly. The cedar boards will be a long lasting alternative. The boards will be delivered and a volunteer crew will fasten them to the posts in October.
- 4) Two significant motions were passed during the summer:
 - a) A motion to offer Paula Laita one year employment to act as the Education Coordinator at the Scout Island Nature Centre from September 1, 2017 to September 1, 2018. She will work along with Sue Hemphill to provide school and community education programs, design and lead education programs decided in cooperation with Sue, share the supervision of summer staff, and work with First Nations groups to encourage an exchange of programs and content.
 - b) A motion to approve the following renovations to the Nature House:
 - i) At the basement entrance to the Nature Kindergarten room an enclosed entranceway with an adequate heating system and insulation be constructed to improve accessibility and comfort. This will allow the children space to hang their outside clothing and allow for the clothing to dry. We hope to have this upgrade finished later this year.
 - ii) At the front entrance a larger roofed porch, stairs and ramp be constructed to provide for better weather protection and accessibility, especially by people in wheel chairs. We will start to fund raise to have this upgrade completed by 2019
- 5) We decided to form a committee to search for a new president to replace Fred at the AGM in 2018. The committee will consist of Ordell Steen, Don Lawrence, Kath VanSpall and Fred. The first meeting will occur on September 27. If anybody has suggestions on the search or recommendations of possible candidates please contact one of the committee members.

Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill



It was very strange to be at Scout Island during August with no one walking the trails. The dry brown grass and drooped bushes and trees added to the strangeness. There were the three osprey chicks that somehow were learning to fly through the smoke. How their parents had found food for them without being able to see the water is amazing. Whether the chicks' lungs developed well enough to allow them to make the journey south this fall is another question. Summer staff returned with their various evacuation stories, and we put together 3 weeks of nature fun. We had the program run 10-2 for all ages so that there was less coming and going. Parents were allowed to walk their children in and pick them up again. We were full every day as children really appreciated having something to do besides sitting inside at home. Our wonderful new (three years ago) cooling system proved its worth as it completely filtered the smoke out. So children were outside exploring when they air quality allowed and inside doing all kinds of things when the smoke was too bad. Summer staff did a great job of creatively coming up with interesting inside activities.



Paula is taking over as the Nature Centre's Education Coordinator. She will be coordinating and teaching the Stream to Sea program as well as other school and community programs. I will be doing executive director tasks and a few programs as needed during this transition year. Frances continues as the district's Outdoor Education Resource teacher. Mary will continue with school programs and other community programs like the fall and spring break programs. Jacinta will take the lead with the air quality education.

You can even build a beaver lodge inside if you have to!

Nature Kindergarten is in full swing. We welcome Kirsten Hamm as the teacher and Tanya Johnson returns as the ECE. The children are outside exploring every day all over the nature centre, but their favorite place so far is Aspen Grove (next to the block house) where there is a lot of building going on.

There are two Grade 7 Outdoor Education classes this year and they both come to Scout Island 2-3 times a month. Both classes joined us at Gavin Lake for the Salmon Trip last week along with 16 Senior students. There will be more about that in the next Muskrat.

Our first family event will be a visit from the Vancouver Aquarium's Aqua Van on Oct 15 from 1-4. Their van will be set up in the parking lot and will be full of ocean creatures you can get up close to. They have partnered with the Great Canadian Shoreline Clean Up so we will also be organizing a garbage pickup and night shade pulling work bee. There will be more details available soon.

Thanks to Fred, Ray and Don for building us a new path out front that hopefully is wide enough to keep people on it. Soon there will be a new enclosed entrance to the Nature Kindergarten so that the children have a warm place to leave packs and wet outer clothing. As usual, because of our wonderful volunteers, the Nature Centre continues to thrive.

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Researched by Jim Sims

During a recent visit to Eagle Lake I was walking the shore of the lake near the Eagle Bear Lodge when I found this female Harlequin Duck resting near the shore of the lake. This is only the second Harlequin Duck I have found at Eagle Lake. Most of us will not be used to seeing this interesting and colourful duck. During my many late May canoe trips with students I looked forward to finding them playing in the "Shoot" at the end of Isaac Lake on the Bowron Lakes Circuit. They would dive into the fast moving water and reappear and climb up onto the rocks in the middle of the fast flowing water. Some of our members will remember the field trip into the Tchaikazan River in Ts'il'os Provincial Park. On that trip we found a female Harlequin Duck and her chicks on the small alpine stream flowing down from Spectrum Pass. It was as though the family were playing in kayaks paddling up and down the fast flowing stream from one eddy to the next. Others might remember back to June of 2008 when a male sat on one of the loafing logs by the Duck blind at the Nature Centre.



The Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds lists the Harlequin Duck as a rare species (1 to 6 individuals per season in the right habitat) that nests in the region. This is a duck that loves to live/play on wild fast moving water. In the winter they can be found along the coast on rocky shores being pounded by surf. Many Harlequins will show evidence of fractured bones. I've seen them frequently during ocean Kayak trips. In the breeding season they can be found along fast flowing alpine streams and rivers. The nest is usually located on the ground near fast moving water. The young can feed themselves almost immediately and will be raised by the female on the nearby stream as we saw in the Tchaikazan Valley. These ducks feed by swimming under water or diving. They also dabble. They eat molluscs, crustaceans, insects and fish. Harlequins have smooth, densely packed feathers that trap a lot of air within them. This is vital for insulating such small bodies against the chilly waters they play in. This also makes them exceptionally buoyant, making them bounce like corks after dives.

This small sea duck takes its name from Harlequin, a colourfully dressed lighthearted servant character in 16th and 17th century theatre. The species name comes from the Latin word "histrion", "actor". It is also known as lords and ladies. Other names include painted duck, totem pole duck, rock duck, glacier duck, mountain duck, white-eyed diver, squeaker and blue streak. Very appropriate for the very colourful and happy at play duck. Does it indeed look like it belongs on a Totem Pole?



Our View of the Night Sky – October 2017.

Planet Review

Mercury is difficult to see at this time. It re-emerges low in the western evening sky later in the month. **Venus** shines brightly in the early dawn sky low in the east-north-east. Look for it very close to Mars on Oct. 5th. **Mars** is visible in the dawn sky in the east. Look for it very close to Venus on Oct. 5th. The crescent moon is very close to Mars on Oct. 17th. **Jupiter** is very low in the southwestern sky at dusk and will drop from sight by mid-month. **Saturn** is low in the southwestern sky through mid-evening then sets in the later evening. Its rings are tilted so they provide a great view through a telescope!

Moon

New Moon - Oct. 19th, Nov. 18th.
Full moon - Oct. 5th, Nov. 4th.

Meteor Showers

Orionid meteor shower peaks on Oct. 21st.
Leonid meteor shower peaks on Nov. 17th.

Zodiacal light is visible in the east before morning twilight for about two weeks during the last half of Oct. Needs to be viewed from a dark sky location.

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. "October 2017: Northern Edition (PDF)". At the end of the month it changes to show the next month's chart.

The Skymaps chart also has a useful list of what is visible with the eye, binoculars and telescopes.

Member's Moment (No submissions?)

"Member's Moment" is an opportunity for you to share a special scene, plant, animal, bird or outdoor activity that you have enjoyed and photographed here in the Cariboo Chilcotin. A chance for you to encourage other members to get outdoors and find their own special moments close to home and perhaps share them with all of us. For each newsletter the editors will select one or two photos for inclusion in the newsletter based on the quality of the photo as well as the interesting paragraph you must provide. We will save all submitted unused moments in hopes they may find a place in a future edition. Please email your full resolution photo and paragraph to the muskratexpress@shaw.ca.