

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

JANUARY 2018 NEWSLETTER



JANUARY HAS
2 FULL MOONS

PARTICIPATE IN THE
MUSKRAT OLYMPICS

GREAT BACK YARD BIRD COUNT FEB 17



DID YOU PAY YOUR
2018 MEMBERSHIP?

FAMILY FEST FEB 25TH



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

Membership fees: Family (\$35), single (\$30) 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. **Another friendly reminder that dues for 2018 are now overdue so if you have not submitted your membership and fees and forms please do so as soon as possible, You might still be able to find your forms with last months newsletter or see directions above**

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 by early March. 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 In last month's newsletter we requested help with



natural history articles and this resulted in no offers. All of you with expertise can expect a call from Jenny soon. You can still contact Jenny through our email address. Our Member's moment continues to receive minimal contributions and we find that frustrating as the ones we have been getting have been great photographs and stories. There are many more of these out there. If it is difficult for you to write something I'm certain Jenny will be glad to help you so send in your photos anyway and Jenny will contact you for the story.

50th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Report by Phil Ranson

The Williams Lake Field Naturalists finished off their 50th annual Christmas Bird Count with a record number of birds counted. A total of 6501 birds of 56 species were recorded on the day long count on Dec 17th which started out with moderate temperatures and light winds but became snowy by the early afternoon. The reason for such a large total can be attributed to an estimated 2437 Bohemian Waxwings which accounted for nearly 40% of the overall count. This is the largest number of waxwings ever recorded in the 50 year history of the count. A single flock of between 1800 and 2000 of these birds were seen by 2 separate counters along 9th Ave during the morning.

Other birds seen in near record numbers were Pine Grosbeaks with 340 and Common Redpolls with 668. These birds appeared to be the exceptions to generally average numbers of our usual winter species. Some numbers were well down with our lowest ever count of Gray Jays with only 3 observed, all at a Wildwood feeder. Our average for this species is 12. Hairy Woodpecker were also at their lowest with only 12 recorded against a count average of 32.

There were concerns from bird watchers prior to the count that Hairy Woodpeckers were not coming to feeders this year in their usual numbers. Speculation as to why ranged from an ample winter food supply within the beetle infested Douglas fir, to the possibility they may be concentrating in the fire killed trees which



Common Redpoll photo by Lubna KhanA

have attracted insects including wood wasps to lay their eggs.

Despite Williams Lake being about 85% ice free on count day resulting in 9 species of ducks, grebes, and coots being recorded, the species count of 56 was less than expected and below the record of 62 in 2008 when the water was also mostly open. Of interest on the lake were 2 lingering Red-necked Grebe making only their second appearance on the count. Another rarity was the seldom seen Harris's Sparrow which normally winter in the South Central US and was found at both the Scout Island feeder and a feeder on Wood Road.

The Field Naturalists would like to thank all who participated in the field and those that called in the counts from their bird feeders. The count numbers are attached at the end of the newsletter

Great Back Yard Bird Count – Family Event – Scout Island Nature Centre

Free Family Event at Scout Island on **Saturday, February 17 from 1pm to 3pm**

Learn to identify those fascinating feathered visitors with local birding expert Cathy Koot and Environmental Educator Paula Laita. Short ID introduction with frozen and stuffed specimens, to compare with bird books. Count birds at the Nature House feeders and play a game to learn about the different types of beaks that birds have!

If you cannot come to this event, you can still be a citizen scientist by counting birds at your feeders on February 17th-20th and submitting and submitting your findings at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> Help create a real snap-time shot of where the birds are.

This is a free family event but space is limited. Please register

phoning 398-8532.



How many of these bills can you identify and do you see any adaptations that make it easier for the species to get food? .

Family Fest

Scout Island Nature Centre will be participating at the 13th Annual Family Fest on **Sunday January 28** from 10am to 2pm at the Gibraltar Room (535 Proctor Street, Williams Lake) organized by the Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy. There will be puppet shows, storytelling, and lots of 'hands-on' fun and interactive learning! Come and visit our fun table -- Winter animal signs and tracking! No registration required.

AGM - Williams Lake Field Naturalists

This notice provides information about this event:

- 1) It will take place at the Scout Island Nature House on Friday, March 23.
- 2) Itinerary: pot luck supper starting at 6 pm; the AGM meeting at about 7:30 pm; slides shown by club members after the AGM.
- 3) A significant part of the AGM will be presenting the new club bylaws and submitting a motion to approve the bylaws. We request that there will be a good turnout of members so that a quorum can be announced.



Notes from the Executive

By Fred McMechan

- 1) The AGM of our club will take place on Friday, March 23. Details are provided in a separate notice in this newsletter.
- 2) New Club Bylaws: Firstly the Bylaw Committee, Nola, Ordell and I, prepared and approved a draft of the new Bylaws. The Committee presented their proposal to the Executive(Board) on January 17. After discussion and with a few amendments the bylaws were approved so that they can be presented to the AGM. In February Nola will send out a copy of the new bylaws along with informational notes to each member, either by email or by Canada Post.
- 3) The BC Nature Camp Committee, Christie Mayall, Don Lawrence and I, continued to organize for this event at Tatlayoko Lake. The phone-in registration will occur on February 21 by phoning the BC Nature office. Details are found on the BC Nature website, www.bcnature.ca (on the main page link to “field camps 2018” and then link to our field camp) or on our website, www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca (link to “ programs and field trips” and then under “BC Nature Field Camp”, link to “attached pdf”)
- 4) Scout island Nature Centre Banquet:
This banquet will be held on Friday, April 20, at the St. Andrew’s United Church, Rob Higgins has kindly offered to be our guest speaker. Details about the banquet will be provided in the next newsletter.
- 5) The AGM for BC Nature, hosted by Nature Vancouver, will be at UBC in Vancouver on May 10-13. Details are found on the BC Nature website (on the main page, link to “AGM 2018- Nature Vancouver” or go to the BC Nature, winter edition magazine for the registration form. I encourage you to consider attending this event. Nature Vancouver is celebrating its 100th anniversary. They have planned a wonderful selection of field trips and speakers. The website provides detailed information about the events and the people who are leading each one. The UBC Conference Centre has reserved rooms at a reasonable rate so that registrants can stay on the campus where most of the activities are easily accessed without the use of a vehicle.
- 6) This year we communicated with The Nature Trust of BC (TNT) to request that TNT signs be placed on their property and that signs be provided. Recently we received information from them agreeing with our request. In the spring a large prominent sign will be erected close to the Nature House and two smaller signs will be erected on each of the two TNT properties on the north side adjacent to Borland Road.

Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Scout Island Nature Centre January 2018



It was quiet at the Nature House over the holidays. The Chinook alewives kept growing and their yolks shrinking. They now wiggle all over the bottom of the tank. The larger turtle, “Willie” came out of hibernation and is now wolfing mealworms and dew worms down. Thank-you to everyone who stepped into help with shoveling and gate opening and closing (Ray Hornby, Peter Opi, Kris Andrews, Rex, and others I probably don’t know about). We are happy that Denise’s foot is on the mend and Fred is up and running again.

The winter weather has been fine for outdoor play, and the Nature K and Grade 7’s have been taking advantage it. The grade 7s built quintzes on the beach which were perfect size for the Nature K. The grade 7’s have also been busy bird watching. They are taking part in the Feeder Watch program and have become very good at identifying our winter birds.

Despite the winter weather, we are thinking of spring. It is time to start interviewing summer staff—teacher naturalists. If you know of a university student interested in biology and/or teaching please have them send me a cover letter and resume. They can email me if they would like more information about this great summer job (May-August).

Computer Help Needed

If you are a person that knows enough about computers and can help keep our computers up to date, download programs like power point, etc, please contact me. I can often figure out how to do some of these things but it takes a long time. I would really appreciate some help with this.

We are starting a fundraising campaign to raise the funds needed to upgrade the front of the nature house, put energy saving windows in, and squirrel proof the attic.

Our newest Scout Island video is complete thanks to Rick Magnell. It will be used as part of this campaign. Take a

look at it; I think you will enjoy it. It emphasizes the new emphasis on “growing” nature mentors.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn_k3XDqVhg&feature=youtu.be

Our View of the Night Sky – January/February 2018.

Planet Review

Mercury is not visible in January but becomes visible in March in the evening sky. Look for it near Venus in March.

Venus becomes visible but with difficulty late in January. Through February and into March it becomes more visible in the evening sky. Venus will reign as the evening ‘star’ for much of 2018.

Mars is visible in the dawn sky low in the east. As we move into February Mars will rise after midnight. Mars moves closer to Saturn in late March.

Jupiter becomes more prominent in the morning twilight throughout the month. Look for Jupiter near the moon on Feb. 7th.

Saturn enters the dawn sky in late January low in the south east. Saturn appears close to Mercury low in the east on Jan. 13th. In February look for Saturn, Mars and Jupiter in a line. Saturn will be situated in Sagittarius for the rest of 2018.

Moon

New Moon - Feb. 15th, Mar. 17th.

Full moon - Jan. 31st, largest full moon in 2018; Mar. 2.

Lunar eclipse near dawn on January 31st.

Meteor Showers

There are no meteor showers for the next few months.

Spring Equinox

March 20th.

Zodiacal Light

Is visible in the western evening sky for approx. two weeks in early Feb. from dark sites.

Evening Sky Map – courtesy of Skymaps.com.

For a printable sky chart try this web site - Skymaps.com/downloads.html - scroll down the center of the page to the download button. “January 2018: 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.

Birds of Prey starting fires?

By Margaret Waring

I read an article in the Vancouver Sun Newspaper by Richard Warnica (Wednesday January 10th 2018) Birds of Prey...and flames. I was unaware and interested and thought you might be too. A research paper published recently in the Journal of Ethnobiology reported on fires in Australia caused by birds carrying burning sticks and is questioning if this is purposeful activity. Black kites, whistling kites and brown falcons come to the fronts of the fires because from the burning grasslands small birds, rodents, lizards, insects emerge, all fleeing from the fire. Apparently the concept of fire foraging birds is well established. The newspaper article reports Raptors on at least four continents have been observed on the edges of big fires for decades. The paper considers the idea that birds might be intentionally spreading the fires to flush prey for them to eat.

Bob Gosford a lawyer turned ethnobiologist studying relationships between Aboriginal peoples and birds from Australia and Marc Bonta an academic from USA and other co-authors found the idea of fire spreading was well known, especially by aboriginal groups of rural northern Australia. Fire fighters too have observed birds pick up smouldering sticks and carry them ahead of the fire and start new fires. Has this happened here? Have you heard of this before?

Short Eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

Researched by Jim Sims (Checklist of Cariboo Chilcotin Birds and The Birds of British Columbia vol. 2)

Close to New Years of this year up to six Short Eared owls were observed along Mission Road at the east end of Williams Lake. I have made a few trips along the road during my drives back and forth to town recently and I was fortunate to get this close up of a cooperative owl.

As shown on the frequency graph



the owl is rare (1 to 6 sightings per season in the right habitat) during the winter months. Our recent sightings of up to six owls per day are unusual. A similar occurrence was in the winter of 2011-2012 when there were several reports of Short-eared from Chimney Valley, Springhouse and Mission Road. Most observations occur during the migration period (Spring mid-March to mid-April; Fall mid-October to end of November) when they are uncommon, 1 to 6 individuals per locality per day. They are a nesting species in the Cariboo Chilcotin Region. There numbers are also declining and this is occurring on a provincial level.



This is a relatively slender mid-sized owl with a dark triangle around each eye and a streaked breast. The ears may not be detectable as in the above picture. They are perhaps the most active owl during daylight. Look for them in the late afternoon flying over fields or marshy areas as they forage for small mammals. Its flight and habitat are similar to one of its main competitors, the Northern Harrier. The wings are light below, long and broad. It has a shorter tail, larger blunt head and lacks the white rump patch of the Harrier. Note the dark comma like mark on the elbow of the underwing.



The Short-eared Owl nests on the ground in open country with short vegetation, grassland, rangeland, near dry marshes, and farm land. Mortality is high when they make use of hayfields. Clutch sizes range from one to up to 13 eggs. Loss of nesting habitat may be a cause for the declining numbers. Competition from Northern Harrier may also be contributing as surveys have shown that in areas where both species frequented in the past there is a good chance that the owl is gone from the location.

The Fraser River delta is their main wintering area. They can be found roosting in groups in tall grass and along the lee side of dykes. Roosts of up to 110 individuals have been found on Sea and Iona Islands. Recently the wintering number of owls has been very low.

The Short-eared Owl is noted for its worldwide distribution. This is supported by its ability to fly great distances over the ocean. It has been reported landing on ships hundreds of miles from land. A subspecies of the Short-eared Owl is Hawaii's only native owl and it is found on all of the islands.

Member's Moment from Betty Donahue







Dreaming

While hiking at Farwell Canyon on Thanksgiving weekend, the lighting was perfect for photography. This was one of my favorite photos when I captured my husband, Sean, and Lubna Khan enjoying the view from the ridge. I loved the dreamlike quality of the scene.

“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. A special thanks to Betty for the winning entry.

Williams Lake Christmas Bird Count Results

1	American Wigeon	1	33	Black-capped Chickadee.	285
2	Mallard.	81	34	Mountain Chickadee.	184
3	Green-winged Teal.	7	35	Red-breasted Nuthatch.	93
4	Ring-necked Duck	1	36	Brown Creeper.	1
5	Greater Scaup	7	37	Pacific Wren	2
6	Bufflehead	5	38	American Dipper.	12
7	Common Goldeneye	24	39	Townsend's Solitaire.	26
8	Barrow's Goldeneye	1	40	American Robin	1
-	Hooded Merganser	cw	41	Varied Thrush	5
9	Common Merganser	13	42	European Starling.	213
10	Ruffed Grouse	1	43	Bohemian Waxwing.	2472
11	Pied Billed Grebe	1	44	Spotted Towhee	2
12	Red-necked Grebe	2	45	American Tree Sparrow	10
13	Great Blue Heron	1	46	Song Sparrow.	25
14	Bald Eagle.	16	-	White-crowned Sparrow	cw
15	Red-tailed Hawk	2	47	White-throated Sparrow	2
16	American Coot	4	48	Harris's Sparrow	2
17	Rock Pigeon	474	49	Dark-eyed Junco.	75
18	Eurasian Collared Dove	6	50	Red-winged Blackbird.	14
19	Northern Pygmy Owl	3	51	Pine Grosbeak.	340
20	Short-eared Owl	1	52	House Finch.	142
21	Downy Woodpecker.	21	53	Common Redpoll	668
22	Hairy Woodpecker.	12	54	Pine Siskin	24
23	Northern Flicker	60	55	American Goldfinch.	86
24	Black-backed Woodpecker	1	56	House Sparrow.	299
25	Pileated Woodpecker.	11	TOTAL		6501
26	Merlin	2	 Count high total		
27	Northern Shrike	3	 Second highest total on count		
28	Gray Jay.	3	 Well below average		
28	Steller's Jay	6	 Seen during count week		
30	Black-billed Magpie.	18			
31	American Crow.	421			
32	Common Raven.	309			