

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS

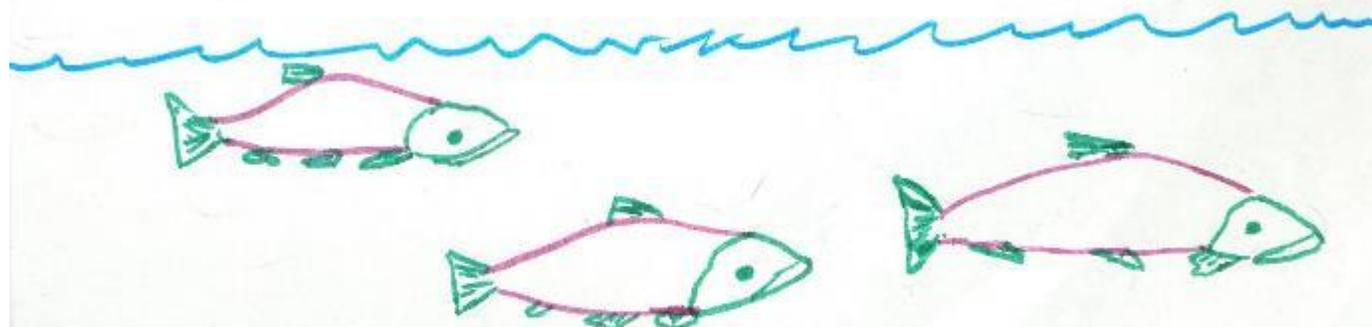
SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

MANY HUMANS ARE INTERESTED
IN THE SALMON UNDER THE
BRIDGE AND IN THE CREEK



WHY SUCH FUSS
ABOUT FISH?

I THINK
MUSKRATS
ARE MORE
INTERESTING



ONE MORE FIELD TRIP

OCT 23

VISIT THE JUNCTION SHEEP



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

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: presidential Team Margaret Waring (Chairperson), Don Lawrence (Scout Island affairs) and Ordell Steen (Communications/liaison), secretary Nola Daintith, treasurer Katharine VanSpall and directors Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Francis McCoubrey, Jean Oke, Cathie Hamm, Don Lawrence, Sean Donahue Vanessa Robinson and Fred McMechan



Editors: Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Please expect your next edition of the newsletter early in November. If you have comments, suggestions or articles for the next Muskrat Express please contact Margaret Waring (398-7724), Jim Sims (778 764-2752) or e-mail us at muskratexpress@shaw.ca



From Jim at Eagle Lake:

The Fall colours reflecting in the calm turquoise waters have been a daily occurrence for several weeks. It is a difficult task to resist getting out there and away from this screen and the editing task.

This summer I have taken visitors and neighbours to the Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory, always a thrilling outing. It is nearing the end of their season now and again this year the banding season has been extended into October when they concentrate on banding Northern Saw-whet Owls. This year the number of Owls banded is not nearly as high as it was last year. When I helped last year for an evening we banded 16 owls and this year we only banded 2 on the night I helped Sachi. The most they have banded on one night this year is just five. Sachi said the number of Owls banded seems to follow a 4 year cycle, perhaps related to the Lemming population. On the high number years they band mainly hatch-year owls. Last year was a peak year.



**Photo by Robyn Dell
A TLBO volunteer**

Visitors are welcome to stop in for a visit so if you are venturing out this way for a late season holiday be sure to drop in. The first trip to the mist nets is around 8:30pm. It will get earlier as sunset gets earlier. The opening is weather dependent.

Our Eagle Lake Terns departed early this summer. The last birds were seen on August 1st. Again this year I only confirmed success from one of the three nests but expect a 2nd nest was successful. The nest on Aldo Island was abandoned in Early July and the adults departed shortly after that. The pair nesting on Goose Island successfully fledged 2 young. On July 25th I watched the family of 3 flying. I did not see any more Terns for several days and I expect the family had left for their long flight south to Antarctica waters. On Jul. 28th I visited Clay Island, the island half way down the lake. There



Adult Tern feeding minnow to juvenile

were no terns at the island. On the previous visit, on July 20th I observed the 2 adults displaying defensive behaviour and expected the young were hiding close by. It is likely that this pair fledged 2 young. Hopefully next summer our 6 adults will return and bring one of the kids with them

The last Field Trip of the Season

Junction Sheep Range

Sunday October 23rd (Leader: Fred McMechan 392 7680)

Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am. Bring a lunch and your binoculars for this annual day long drive and hike into the park. This will be 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.

Thanks to all of the field trip leaders for volunteering your time and expertise. If we have not published a report from your field trip we would appreciate having one.



A New Website for the Williams Lake Field Naturalists

By Ordell Steen

The Williams Lake Field Naturalists society has launched a new website for the club to replace the previous out-of-date website. Like the old site, the new one can be accessed at www.williamslakefieldnaturalists.ca. The new site is still in its infancy and we are continuing efforts to make it more effective, interactive, and able to meet the needs of WL Field Naturalist members and the interested public. Any comments or suggestions regarding the new site can be sent to wlfldnat@gmail.com or to oasteen@shaw.ca or another Field Naturalist director. We encourage all members to check out the new site.

The new website provides links to society documents, recent newsletter issues, membership and other forms, natural history guides, club project descriptions and results, volunteer opportunities, field trip lists and descriptions, and upcoming events. In addition, we have attempted to make the site more interactive by including a blog for club discussion and by encouraging members and others to “Ask a Naturalist” about wildlife, plant, or other natural history questions. Questions will be answered as timely as possible by club members or forwarded to more knowledgeable persons. Questions and responses will be posted on the website blog, for further discussion if people wish. Another section features founding and contributing members of the W.L. Field Naturalists, which will be expanded on an on-going basis. Links to the Scout Island Nature Centre website and Facebook page are also provided.

Request for website management assistance: If you have an interest in assisting with our website management, we would like to hear from you! Let us know at one of the above email addresses or talk with a WL Field Naturalist director.

Get to know our Lichens

By Katrina Coveny Tatlayoko Bird Observatory volunteer

With the wind and rain thwarting our efforts of opening the mist nets we headed in the opposite direction of the net loop and into the stand of Douglas fir and Lodgepole Pines. At first glance, it appeared as though what this area had to offer was pretty obvious, lots of grass, sparse coniferous trees, and other conspicuous shrub-like plants. However, that was not the case when we really started to look at the environment around us.

Pixie Cup Lichen (Genus *Cladonia*) found on an old stump. Look for the upright cup-like “stems” coming from scale-like lichen at the base



Instead of looking up, as we would for birds, today we looked down at the ground, for lichen. Lichens are a symbiotic association between fungi and algae, the fungi provide protection and shelter for the algae, while the algae provide energy for the fungi. Most fungi derive their energy and nutrients from decomposing organic material, however as Lichenologist Trevor Goward says, “Lichens are fungi that have discovered agriculture”, and therefore derive all of their energy from their symbiotic partner, the algae.



Wolf Lichen (*Letharia vulpina*) covering a standing dead tree.



Now that we know what lichen is, where can we actually find it? Lichen is often found on fallen logs, tree branches, rocks, soil, moss, and a variety of other substrates. Some species are only found on rocks while others are only found on wood, however,

Wolf Lichen (*Letharia vulpina*) found on a fallen log. Wolf Lichen is poisonous to humans.

there are such a wide variety of species in this region that it wasn't hard to find lots of lichen. After walking for 20 minutes we had only gone about 1 km as there was so much lichen to see! We saw a dead-standing tree almost fully covered in bright green Wolf Lichen. We saw Shield Lichen sprinkled across the wooden fences and Pixie Cup Lichen in colonies right under our feet. One of my favorite things about lichen is how prolific it can be! Once you start looking for it it is hard to ignore, you start seeing it everywhere.

Here are some lichen species to keep your eye out for in the Chilcotin region; **Wolf lichen** is abundant and its bright yellow/lime green colour makes it hard to miss. It is usually found on wood either on fallen logs or tree branches and is a Fruticose or “Shrubby” lichen with branches coming out of a central point. **Shield Lichen** is a white/light gray colour and is found on both wood and rock. It is flat and has divots, making it appear as though it has been hammered. Lastly, one of my favourite types of lichen is a group called **Pixie Cup Lichens**, this group is very diverse and it is hard to narrow these individuals down to species. However, all of these species have stems emerging from lichen scales at their base and many of the stems end in cups that possess the fungal spores used for reproduction. When rain falls into the cup it causes these spores to be spread and helps to aid in reproduction.

Shield Lichen (*Parmelia sulcata*) found on an old wooden fence, with various other lichen species in the background.



While rainy days aren't ideal for bird banding, they are a great time to look for lichen as the moisture often enhances the colour of the lichen making them more obvious and beautiful. Next time you head out in the rain keep your eyes out for these magnificent symbiotic organisms!

Fishy Business

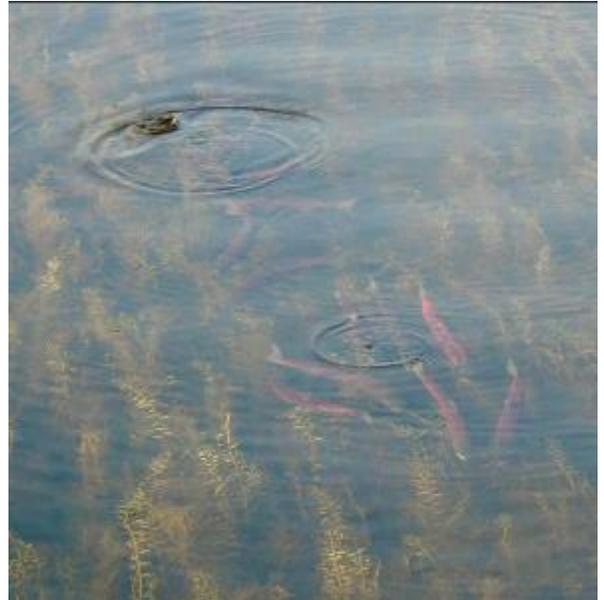
By Lara Roorda

It's been so fantastic to connect with all kinds of people enjoying the watery views from the RC Cotton footbridge this fall. Why are so many people pausing there you may ask?? Amongst other reasons, the Sockeye salmon have returned to Williams Lake. Sockeye have been observed all through September from the Highway 20 bridge, the RC Cotton bridge upstream of Williams Creek and as far as the Mission bridge on the San Hose River. These are first recorded sockeye sightings in Williams Lake in many years! Department of Fisheries and Oceans biologist Guy Scharf reports these are likely Quesnel watershed fish that ran out of steam before reaching their destination. There are a few things that may have contributed to their presence in Williams Lake. Higher water temperatures in the Fraser River this year may have created conditions that caused the salmon to use up their energy reserves faster than usual... resulting in

more salmon keying in on our very own Williams Creek tributary stream. This fall of 2022 was expected to be one of the dominant years in the 4-year sockeye cycle. Low water levels and high-water temperatures within Williams Creek may often pose barriers to salmon attempting to access our local River Valley for spawning. It's possible that water conditions combined with high salmon numbers during a peak sockeye run have created a unique opportunity for the fish this year.

Observing sockeye in all their spawning glory from a location such as the new RC Cotton bridge is a rare treat. Groups of up to 60 sockeye have been observed repeatedly in a small, relatively vegetation free area under the bridge. In addition, members of the public have been noticing large numbers of coarse fish in an adjacent low vegetation area under the same bridge. These coarse fish are believed to be predominantly Northern Pikeminnow and peamouth chub. One question many have been asking is, "why are the salmon and coarse fish holding in these specific areas???" Some have speculated that the coarse fish are eating whatever eggs are suspended in the water. However, it is unlikely the substrate, water flow and temperatures under the bridge inspire salmon to spawning there. The coarse fish observed under the bridge spawn annually in the spring, so they are certainly not spawning in this area right now. One other theory is that there may be some ground water upwelling under the bridge creating cooler temperatures and increased oxygen levels that the fish are enjoying.

To create wonder about these special sightings is one of the greatest treasures Scout Island has to offer. Whatever the exact explanations may be, one thing is certain... It is a pleasure to be able to observe nature in all its finery (so conveniently close to home) as marine driven nutrients are returned to the local streams.



Notes from the Director's Meetings.

By Margaret Waring



I have just come home from work and am on my deck enjoying the fall air and sunshine. I have a glass of lemonade and a yellow jacket came to join me. I now have a fly swatter. I missed the yellow jacket but the action and noise seemed to scare him away which was really all I wanted.

I want to update you on Field Naturalist activities.

Field trips returned. I know many of you enjoyed them. We have one more scheduled, the trip to the Junction Sheep Range on October 23rd. Thank you to the leaders and organizers of the field trips.

We had some interesting programs, all zoom but a benefit is, if you missed one, check out the list in the last newsletter and you can watch the show. Thanks to the presenters and organizers of these programs and for this list.

Our new Web Site was launched. I hope you have taken a look. Thanks to Ordell Steen who has spearheaded this project.

Some Directors and Nature Centre staff met with Carl McNaughton from the Nature Trust when he visited the area in August.

Have you noticed the diligent weed warriors? You may not be aware of them and the good work they are doing. Two mornings every week they are at Scout Island digging to remove unwanted weeds. They deserve thanks for their hot dirty back breaking work.

We had a director’s meeting on September 21st and another planned for November 2nd. We are considering in-person programs and a banquet in the Spring. Would you be interested and willing to attend these? Let me or another director know.

I have enjoyed walks in the forest on the Fox Mountain bike trails and visiting the lake on the trails of Scout Island. It has been interesting to see the salmon in Williams Lake Creek.

Building and repairing the trails is starting. Watch for the screw piles that should be in soon.

The yellow jacket is back to visit so I take this as a sign to end and send this to Jim, the diligent editor of the newsletter for over 25 years.

There are many wonderful people working hard for your organization. Let us know if you would like to help.



Scout Island Nature Centre

By Sue Hemphill

Scout Island Nature Centre Report

We said good-bye to our great summer staff, Sydney, Amelie and Adrien. Here are some kind words from one of the parents shared on the Facebook page.

“Thank you to the staff, Sydney, Adrienne and Amelie, who were patient and amazing with the kids and doing an excellent job at balancing fun with learning. My kids loved every second of the program and it was a highlight of the summer. Thank you for all your hard work, for Sue to help with the programming and we look forward to next year!”



There was good attendance for Nature Fun and Art in Nature Numbers almost back to pre-covid levels with 172 in Nature fun and 71 in Art in Nature. Botaino came 4 times over the summer.

Learn about Fossils then make your own fossil

“Return-It” for Scout Island Nature Centre!

Did you know that you can donate your refundable beverage containers to Scout Island? It’s easy. Just bag up your empties and put a tag on the bag clearly identifying it as going to Scout Island Nature Centre and drop it off at the “Return-It” depot (aka the bottle depot) on Mackenzie. No sorting required. An account was set up for Scout Island in 2012 and since then almost \$3500 has been “donated”. This includes empties that are collected in the bottle bin at the Nature House, and donations of empties. Not bad!

Thank you to the Williams Lake Garden Club

The Garden Club had a successful tour of very interesting and beautiful gardens in July. Instead of charging for the tour they received donations and they have generously donated the proceeds of their tour to Scout Island. On July 28th Deb Radolla (front row) and Nola Daintith (back row) of the Garden Club presented a cheque of \$1200. In the front row accepting the cheque is Amelie Hornburg, one of our Scout Island Summer Students and behind her is Sue Hemphill the Executive Director of Scout Island. The photo includes participants enjoying the Nature Fun Kids Program. Thank you to the Garden Club for their support and donation.



Report on the Removal of Invasive Plants at Scout Island, 2022

By Fred McMechan, co-ordinator

During the summer and early fall our volunteer crews, consisting of club members and members of the general public, were busy removing invasive plants. We started on June 21 and had our last session on September 29. During each week we removed invasives on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 8 am to 10 am. Volunteers also worked on their own at other times.

From June 21 to August 11 we worked on removing thistle, stick weed and burdock. The areas covered included the causeway, the north trail, the bulrush trail between the nature house and the Ducks Unlimited viewing platform, otter point, the butterfly trail, grassland sections, willow trail, island trail, border along the north side of the picnic ground, boat launch.

From August 11 to September 29 we worked on removing bittersweet nightshade at otter point, and along the willow trail and island trail. Nightshade grew extremely well during this year and it was a major undertaking to remove this plant. Next year we will have to start earlier to stop the growth of this plant. Since this plant is toxic we worked on removing the flowers and the berries

Thank you very much to the volunteers for their diligent work.

Next year we plan to continue this service. Hopefully more people will step forward to help.

Air Quality Peer Mentor Workshop

By Martin Kruus

Climate Change and Alternative Transportation were some of the topics covered at the April 29th Pro-D session at Scout Island. Fourteen Grade 5 or 6 *Air Ambassadors* representing six Williams Lake area elementary schools were led by two veteran Climate Activists, Ella Kruus and Julia Zirnhelt. Cooperative tasks, a multimedia show, a scavenger hunt, and group brainstorming were squeezed around a make-your-own sandwich lunch. The budding student leaders were given a crash course on how to take action at their schools or in their neighbourhoods to improve the quality of what we breathe daily in the WL airshed. The day was filled with enthusiasm and meeting new friends with shared values. Some of the participants also came to the June 5th *critical mass* bicycle rally downtown.

Tour of the Cariboo Fire Center

Also by Martin

On Thursday June 30th, the first day of summer school holidays, 14 Nature Kids from the Williams Lake group met at the regional airport. They were treated to a tour of the fire center operations situated there, led by Owen and his Initial Attack crew. After an introductory FireSmart video (with many questions from the children about whether Ember, the fox, was real...) we had a chance to go inside the “birddog” command plane, and climb aboard the water bomber out on the runway apron. Afterwards we actually met Ember! and the crew explained the equipment they use to fight fires. There were a lot of pumps, hoses, valves, and nozzles to keep track of... Finally the kids tried a firefighter’s relay race to see how well they could stay safe, quickly carry heavy



Ember meets the Nature Kids



The Relay

loads, cooperate as a team, and squirt water accurately. The next step for the nature Kids and their insatiable curiosity about fire may be a fall session to learn how to safely ignite campfires by various means.

Member's Moment from Lubna Khan and Betty Donahue



Enjoying the Sunshine

As this glorious weather is extending into October, it appears that people are not the only ones soaking up the rays. This great blue heron was spotted at Scout Island warming its folded wings.

“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 Lubna and Betty for their picture and story.