

MUSKRAT EXPRESS

WILLIAMS LAKE FIELD NATURALISTS
APRIL 2024 NEWSLETTER



ALKALI LAKE
APRIL 14TH

SCOUT ISLAND
BIRDING
APRIL 21ST



DID THEY FORGET MUSKRATS ARE
GOOD SWIMMERS?



WHAT A GREAT
FIELD TRIP LIST



AND A NATURE
HOUSE
EVENING
PRESENTATION
APRIL 25TH
7PM



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 (250)398-7724 or e-mail muskratexpress@shaw.ca

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 Margaret Waring, secretary Nola Daintith, treasurer Sue Hemphill and directors Peter Opie, Ray Hornby, Jean Oke, Cathie Hamm, Sean Donahue, Lara Roorda, Katharine VanSpall, Michaela Waterhouse, Kim Zalay, Natalie Swift, and Ken Day



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 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



The April Field Trips for Members of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists

All participants on club field trips must be members of BC Nature (all WLFN are members). Churn Creek trips are joint trips with members of Friends of Churn attending. Day membership forms will be available for non-members.

Alkali Lake first field trip of the year *Sunday April 14 (Leader Peter Opie 392-1440)* Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 9:00am to arrange carpooling. We will view bird species along the road to Alkali Lake and spend most of the day viewing the large variety of birds which can be seen early in the season on the open water and in the marshes of Alkali Lake. Be sure to bring a lunch and your binoculars or spotting scope. Birding will be done from the road so expect minimal walking.

Birding at Scout Island Sunday April 21, Leaders Betty Donahue (250-267-3353) and Lubna Khan. Come join fellow birders for a casual morning stroll around Scout Island. We will identify a multitude of birds and waterfowl in this wonderful setting. Bring binoculars and meet at the parking lot by the Nature House at 9 AM.

The remainder of the 2024 field trip list is included at the end of the newsletter. Thanks to all of the volunteer leaders for this year's trips. Looks like a great list of very interesting trips. We hope to see you on some of these outings.

Past, Present and Future Forests in the Interior Douglas-Fir

A presentation by Kristy Iverson
At SINC on April 2 at 7:00 pm

Kris Iverson is the regional ecologist for Cariboo Natural Resource Region. The increased severity and frequency of fires, attributed to climate change and accumulating fuel, pose significant threats to our dry-belt Douglas-fir forests and the communities they encompass. Without interventions, drought and frequent wildfire suggest a trajectory toward a substantially non-forested landscape. This presentation delves into fire history and historical structure of dry Douglas-fir forests and looks at current



forest structures. She will summarize climate change projections and the implications for future wildfires. She will present examples of recent harvesting and restoration work and looking at how they might interact with wildfire.

Please register as space is limited: email shemphill@xplornet.com

We hope you can join us for this presentation

Spring Plant and Yard Sale

Saturday May 4th from 9:30 AM until 1:00 PM.

From Margaret Waring

The purpose of the sale is to raise funds for a \$1500 student bursary that we give to a graduating student from Lake City Secondary School. We need plants, donations and shoppers!

Please share some seedlings you have grown. When you do yard work, remember the plants that you divide or dig out can be purchased by others. House plants are welcome too. Previous requests have been for trees, rhubarb, cacti, berries, flowers, shrubs, herbs and vegetables. I am hoping we gather enough plants and garden items for this section to be the main focus of our sale. We also need donations of other gently used and sellable items such as books, CDs, DVDs, and vinyl records, sporting goods, camping items, tools, household and craft items. Put out a box at home and see if you can fill it with some quality items for us to sell.

We hopefully will have good weather. There are 3 outdoor sale areas, with the books inside.

This year I am requesting no large heavy items that are difficult to move. There are other outlets for donated clothing, linens, bedding and related items.

Please drop off sale items at the Nature House on Friday May 3rd from 4-7 pm and on Saturday May 4th between 8:30 and 9AM.

Please consider helping for an hour or two. We need help to set up on Friday afternoon and 8:30 Saturday morning. We need vehicles and people to clean up at 1PM on Saturday. Please contact me by phone or email if you are able to help or if you have any questions. My contact information is: newaring@hotmail.com, home phone 250-398-7724 or cell 604-813-1043.

Your help is needed to make this event a success.

Thanks in advance.

Annual General Meeting for 2023

By Margaret Waring



We gathered at the Nature House Friday March 22, 2024 and had a large crowd of members and an outstanding potluck dinner. Thank you to all who attended. Thank you to all who help with and support our activities and this includes those who show support by purchasing a membership.



Anna and Fred

We had our two life members (Fred McMechan and Anna Roberts) present. We announced a third life member, Ordell Steen. We provide this honor to Ordell, who has made outstanding contributions to our club and natural environment and has been a member of the Board of Directors for approximately

40 years. He was not available to attend the AGM and he has retired from being a director, but continues to actively contribute in many ways.

We recognized our retiring Directors, Ordell, Sean Donahue, Don Lawrence and Fred McMechan, and thanked them for the outstanding work they have done.

We welcomed four new Directors: Michaela Waterhouse, Natalie Swift, Kim Zalay and Ken Day. Nola Daintith is continuing as the Secretary and Sue Hemphill has taken on the role of Treasurer. We thank Kath VanSpall, who has been our dedicated treasurer for many years and will continue on as a director.

I will continue as President for next year. I am looking for someone to take over this job in the future. We have no one yet in the position of vice president.

Lastly, we provide recognition and thanks to the Directors from last year who are continuing: Ray Hornby, Cathie Hamm, Peter Opie, Jean Oke, Lara Roorda and Kath VanSpall.

Two members were picked as Volunteers of the year. They were Sean Donahue, who has been a leader for the boardwalk building and Ordell Steen who has been re-establishing native plants and working on First Nation relations and many other areas.

Cathie Hamm is taking over the membership duty from Joyce Lawrence. Thank you, Joyce for doing this essential task for our club.

2023 Report from Co-Presidents of the Williams Lake Field Naturalists Club

It is a privilege to be part of this dedicated, knowledgeable, hard-working and skilled group of members and volunteers. Major achievements of this year included hiring a new Executive Director for Scout Island Nature Centre, a banquet on April 21st featuring speaker Frank Ritcey and the creation of the new Otter Point Boardwalk. We had phenomenal support from our members and community, planning and designing the new boardwalk, removing the old board walk, and building the new one. We had financing from grants and numerous donations from community members and local businesses and companies.

On Scout Island two roof covered areas for outdoor classrooms and other activities were constructed. Many volunteer hours have been dedicated to the battle of controlling the spread of invasive weeds. Ongoing work has been occurring to re-establish native plants.

We had some evening presentations at the Nature House starting with learning about the plants and spring flowers at Scout Island on January 18th and ending with a November 28th session learning about research involving cougars, wild horses and other mammals in the Chilcotin. In between we had other interesting presentations on topics including Big Horn Sheep and Mountain Bluebirds.

Our final gathering for the year was the December 17th Christmas Bird Count followed by a Pot Luck Supper.

Field Trips led by club members occurred during the year for us to enjoy the outdoors, meet members, learn about and experience areas in and around our community. Visits and trips included Churn Creek Protected Area, Alkali Lake, Blue Bird nest boxes, Farwell Canyon, Fox Mountain, Scout Island, Chilanko Marsh, Becher's Prairie and Walker Valley.

We had a yard and plant sale on May 13th to fund raise for a bursary we give to a graduating secondary school student. We created 6 copies of our Newsletter, The Muskrat Express and we send email messages for further communication with members who have internet access.

During the year we had 8 meetings of the Directors plus the March 31st Annual General Meeting. We are working on a document defining our lease requirements and maintenance responsibilities for Scout Island. We met with the City several times, updating each other regarding the management of Scout Island. Discussions, emails and meetings occurred

about Marie Sharpe Kindergarten use of the Nature House downstairs classroom and time available for other Marie Sharpe classes to have weekly visits. We met and shared information with our Nature Trust representative and local First Nations.

We have already gathered some ideas for programs for next year and are starting to consider field trip options. We welcome and need you, your ideas, suggestions and participation.

Respectfully submitted Co-presidents of the Williams Lake Field Naturalist Society
Margaret Waring, Don Lawrence, Ordell Steen.

A Note of Appreciation

From Don and Joyce Lawrence

It was back in 2012 that Joyce and I joined the Williams Lake Field Naturalists. If I remember correctly, it was Sue Hemphill who heard that I was retiring and convinced me to join (she is very persuasive!). My first volunteer project at Scout Island was the replacement of a portion of the Willow Trail (Fred McMechan was also very persuasive). After 12 years and many projects, it is time for us (with heavy hearts) to say goodbye. Our children have settled in the Okanagan and we feel drawn to be closer to our grandchildren.

As a member of the WL Field Naturalists Board, my main focus has been maintenance and updates to the infrastructure of the Scout Island Nature Centre. Joyce and I have appreciated the value this place has in our community for nature education, a highly diverse conservation area, and where citizens of Williams Lake can escape the hustle and bustle of life and experience the calm of nature. We note a steady increase in the number of visitors over the years. We have also enjoyed other Field Naturalist activities like field trips, field camps, potluck meetings, evening presentations and banquets. We appreciate the knowledgeable dedicated members and the many hours they commit to organizing these activities.

At the AGM (a couple of weeks ago), we were presented with gifts and a very nice card. We were humbled and honoured by your thoughtfulness. The coffee table book is excellent. Jurgen's beautiful wood shoehorn is greatly appreciated as we find bending over to put on shoes more of a challenge!

So... Thanks to so many for making our time with the Williams Lake Field Naturalists interesting, rewarding, and just plain fun. To Fred, Sue, Ordell, Ray, Margaret, Rick, Rodger, Sean, Peter, Kath, the rest of the board, and all the volunteers who helped with hard work and a positive approach; it has been a pleasure to work with all of you. We will be back often for visits and are very confident that SI is in good hands.

River Valley Gravel Pit Ponds

By Phil Ranson

Easter Monday saw Sandy Proulx, Ordell Steen and myself heading into the Williams Lake River Valley to fix a broken post and several rails in the cattle exclusion fence surrounding a unique little wetland just below (what used to be) the lower parking lot on the valley trail. Driving into the valley now needs permission from the city to enter and a key to unlock the gate at the trail head below the cemetery, both of which we had.



Damaged Fence

I'm not sure that this area has been named but seems to answer to the 'gravel pit ponds' and is a series of spring fed ponds each maintained by beaver dams which then drains into the river. The larger, upper pond usually has some open water all winter and a good spot to see waterfowl year-round. The lower pond is fed via a small stream from the beaver dam above and supports a vibrant cattail marsh which has all the usual marsh birds including Marsh Wrens, Sora and Virginia Rail.

To be more accurate, it 'now' supports a vibrant marsh because until 2008, prior to the construction of the fence, the ponds were used as a watering hole by cattle on the grazing lease which includes most of the lower valley. By the end of summer, the water edge was trampled and degraded and the cattails grazed down to stubble. The ponds and adjacent areas had also become a playground for ATV's and dirt bikes.

While we took a break in fence fixing, I was to learn from Ordell some of the background of how the Williams Lake Field Naturalists saw the need for the protection of this area and the complexities of formalising the necessary permits and raising the needed funding to build the fence. Additionally, an article written by Ordell and Katherine VanSpall at the time of construction appeared in the Tribune on November 13, 2008 and provides more context and history for the site:

'In the 1960's the area was an old-growth white birch forest with subterranean seepage and surface water pools which allowed the growth of lush vegetation. According to Anna Roberts, the area was used by school classes in the 1960's. Then in the 1970's the forest was logged and the area converted to a gravel pit. When the gravel pit was abandoned, vegetation began to re-establish and beavers dammed the outflow of the ponds resulting in the site we see today.'

This wasn't the first engagement by the Field Naturalists in the stewardship of the river valley. In the early 70's a grant was received for clean-up and trail building in the upper valley followed in 1975 by the preparation of a set of recommendations for preserving the natural values of the valley. Much of this was later adopted by the Ministry of Environment in the 'Williams Lake Creek Valley Land Use Plan'. The Field Naturalists were also instrumental in the formation of the Ministry of Forests, 'Recreational Reserve' in the valley.

The protection and enhancement of the ponds was initially discussed by Anna Roberts and Ordell while they were working on their book, *Stepping into Nature: A Guide to the Williams Lake River Valley*. Ordell consulted with Chris Armes, the Range Officer at the Forest Service and they worked on a submission for a Range Improvement Authorisation which was approved by the District Manager in July 2008. This had been agreed upon by the range permit holder, Bill Stafford, who had some input on the placement of the fence.

Funding was obtained by cash donations from Ducks Unlimited and Daybreak and Noon Rotary Clubs while The Nature Trust and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans provided materials. The Field Naturalists supplied additional funding and labour to assist in the construction which was completed by K & L Contracting at a cost of \$8,720 in November of 2008.



Ordell and Sandy lean on the repaired fence

Once the fencing project was completed, rehabilitation commenced with the planting of willows and a variety of native grasses. This however has been only partially successful with the willows offering an easy snack for the beavers and the grasses being out competed by introduced alfalfa on the upper, dryer sections which also provides a tempting treat to the cattle in late summer. On one occasion the 3-strand barbed wire fence was cut by persons unknown to release calves which had found their way through the fence. This was the second occasion Ordell was called upon to effect repairs. Prior to this several rails had been pried off to feed a party camp fire.

The river valley is now open throughout its entire length to non-motorised traffic following remediation work after the devastating flooding in the spring of 2020. To date there are no plans to open the valley to vehicular traffic although there will no doubt be lobbying from competing interests to do so.

Spring Cleaning!

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN lmccsiz@gmail.com
March 29, 2024



It is indeed a Good Friday, a good Friday to head out onto the land and ready nest boxes for an early return. Remember last year? Most of us had to wait until mid-April to access our routes. As of today, I have cleaned and maintained houses at LORAN-C, Spring Road, Fox Mountain, and Becher’s Prairie. That’s about 120 houses. And each nestbox tells a story.

For example, Pat Teti’s route at the old LORAN-C site has 31 boxes, and 27 of them produced 35 successful nests. Nineteen boxes were used only once, 13 by Tree Swallows and 6 by Mountain Bluebirds. Eight boxes were used twice: 3 contained two Bluebird nests, and 5 contained a Tree Swallow nest on top of a Bluebird nest. How do I know all of this?

A Mountain Bluebird nest is all about woven grass. The wall will be coarse grass and the cup, which is carefully shaped to the brooding mother's body, will be fine grass. Sometimes other materials are added, such as cow hair or the odd feather, but generally speaking, the Mountain Bluebirds rely on grass. A Mountain Bluebird nest has probably been 100% successful if it is flattened to some degree and empty of eggs and young. Mountain Bluebird nests are usually very clean as well. In my experience, the parents regularly remove fecal packets from their nest as the brood matures.



Mountain Bluebird Nest that fledged 6 young on Becher’s Prairie in 2023.



Tree Swallows, on the other hand, build the walls out of coarse grass and the cup out of feathers. With feathers for insulation, the brooding mother does not appear to spend much time shaping the cup to her body. That being said, a Tree Swallow has no qualms about utilizing an abandoned Bluebird nest, custom-made cup and all, so I would say that the abundance of feathers is the best indicator. I have also noticed that Swallow nests are very messy after the young have fledged. This is the hallmark of success: no eggs, no dead, and lots of poop!

Tree Swallow Nest fledged 7 young in 2023

The story told by the nests at LORAN-C is a positive one. Almost every egg hatched and only a couple of young died. Given that Mountain Bluebirds lay about 5 eggs per nest and Tree Swallows 7, I estimate that Pat’s route fledged 85 Bluebirds and 126 Swallows. All the other routes that I tended were similarly successful, although Spring Road and Fox Mountain significantly favoured Tree Swallows over Mountain Bluebirds.

When I maintained the LORAN-C route on March 11th, the temperature was 4 degrees Celsius and there wasn’t a bird in sight (ok, there was one crow!). On March 29th, when Michaela and I maintained our route on Becher’s Prairie, the temperature ranged between 1 and 6 degrees, and at least ten pairs of Mountain Bluebirds had already established territories. This is much earlier than last year. On April 21st 2023, when we maintained our Becher’s route, the Mountain Bluebirds were just arriving, and the males were jostling for territories and mates.

This year, it is a good bet that some Bluebirds will have built nests by mid-April. Therefore, if you are maintaining your boxes at this time, watch for freshly woven grass, which indicates a Mountain Bluebird is present, and for loose, clean, fluffy feathers, which suggests that a Tree Swallow is at work. These nests should be left alone, even if you don’t see any birds nearby.



Male Mountain Bluebird admiring his reflection in a Becher’s Pond (Photo by Loyd Csizmadia)

Given that so many Bluebirds have already returned to Becher's Prairie, it is fortunate that Michaela and I checked our route in March. Nearly every one of our 61 houses needed repairs. Most noteworthy, however, was that so many had lost their roofs. I quit counting after 20. I also noticed that every attached roof needed tightening. My advice to route managers is to carry a lot of screws, in particular 1 3/4 - 2-inch deck screws for roof and wall repairs, and 2 1/2 - 3-inch for securing boxes to their fence-posts. Almost all of my houses were wobbly on their posts, especially the ones attached by nails.

In addition to screws and a screw-driver, I carry two pencils, a knife, pliers, rubber gloves, a simple mask, hand cleaner, and a black waterproof felt pen to renew faded box numbers. Typically, I bring one new box just in case! And because I collect nest data, I carry data collection sheets.



Michaela enjoys a spot of tea at the end of the day

If any boxes on your route need replacing, there is a fresh supply at the Nature House thanks to Andrew Hutchinson and his LCSS woodworking classes. These are stored in two unlocked metal storage sheds, one on each side of the block house at the Scout Island Nature Center. If you take any houses for your route, I would like to know.

In closing, I want to thank all of our members for supporting the Bluebird Program, in particular the members who volunteer one or more days to ready their routes for the returning birds. When the program began around 1978, the Williams Lake Field Naturalists installed nearly 500 nest boxes, hoping to convince agriculturalists to stop spraying insecticides. Today, there are at least a 1000 nest boxes in our area alone, and every year they fledge thousands of hungry birds. I believe we are doing good work.

By the way, there are some available routes this year: two along Highway 20 with offshoots onto the grasslands and two along Dog Creek Road. I have three or four names on my waiting list, so I will offer them to you first. If anyone else would like a route, please contact me at lmccsiz@gmail.com. I wish you all a safe and happy season. Please tread gently on the land.

Loyd Csizmadia, Bluebird Program Coordinator for WLFN
lmccsiz@gmail.com

Plants of Scout Island Nature Centre

Catkin-bearing Plants Grasses

by Ordell Steen

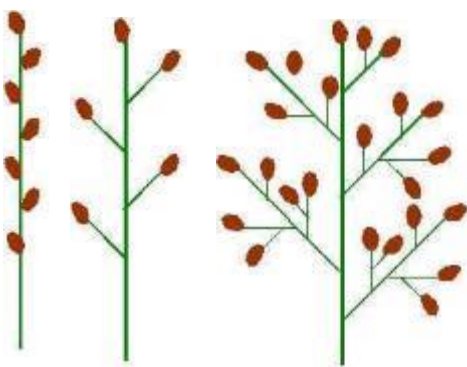
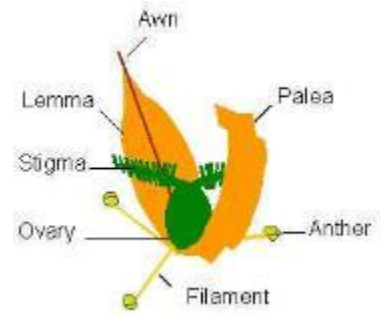


Grasses are a fascinating and very important group of flowering plants which people often overlook, probably because their flowers are inconspicuous. Grass flowers have no petals or sepals and they are typically small and obscure. They are not very colorful. But look closely and you will see flower structures, as well as vegetative structures, not found in other flowering plants. Investigating and identifying grasses can be lots of fun when their unique structures become familiar and species recognition becomes relatively easy.

Grasses are one of the largest groups of flowering plants on the planet. To date, I have recorded 21 species of grass on Scout Island although more careful searching will certainly uncover more. Of these species, 16 are native to BC and five are introduced. The largest concentration of introduced grasses on the Nature Centre is on the old campground area west of the block house which was seeded to smooth brome, quackgrass (or couch grass), crested wheatgrass, and perhaps other species. Few native grasses have established in this area. The grass family (Poaceae) does not include the sedges, rushes, and other grass-like plants which are also present on Scout Island.

In contrast to grasses, most other flowering plants have evolved to attract pollinators, often very specific pollinators. Grasses are almost entirely wind pollinated and, as a result, they do not need to attract pollinators in order to form seeds. What is important is the release of lots of pollen and structures (stigmas) to effectively catch the pollen.

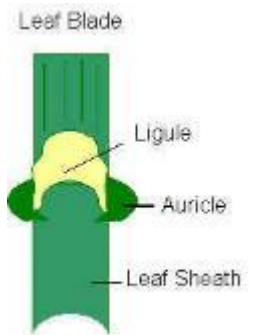
Grass flowers are mostly bisexual, generally containing three stamens with anthers (pollen producing male part) and one pistil with ovary (seed producing female part). The stamens and pistil are typically subtended by two bracts, 1) a typically thin, membranous palea and 2) a larger, firmer lemma. Characteristics of the lemma, such as number of nerves, whether it is rounded or folded and whether there is an awn at the tip or not, are important features for recognizing grass species. The lemma, palea, stamens, and pistil together make up one “flower” which is called a floret in the grasses. In the spring, the lemma and palea spread apart slightly as the stamens and their anthers expand to release the pollen into the wind.



The florets of grasses occur in groups of one or more called spikelets. These can be readily distinguished because each spikelet is subtended by two (usually) bracts called glumes. The comparative size of the two glumes and if there is one or more than one floret in a spikelet are important features to distinguish grass species. In turn, the spikelets are arranged in one of three patterns making up an inflorescence. In a spike arrangement, the spikelets are attached directly to the main stem of the inflorescence. There are no branches. A good example of this are the wheatgrasses which are common on Scout Island. In racemes, the spikelets are at the ends of unbranched side stems.

Racemes are relatively uncommon. In panicles, which are very common, the spikelets occur on secondary branches of multi-branched stems. The bluegrasses are good examples of species with panicles.

The leaves of grasses also have distinctive leaf characteristics which help to recognize species. The leaf consists of a blade which extends outward from the stem, a sheath which wraps around the stem, a ligule which extends upwards from the sheath beyond its junction with the blade, and



occasionally an auricle which is like hooks at the junction of the blade and sheath. Blade size and other features are important. For example, the blue grasses (*Poa*) have a tip which is shaped like the bow of a boat. The sheath may be closed or open and hairy or not. The ligule size, shape, and edge characteristics are important grass recognition aids. Auricles are most common in the wheatgrasses such as Slender Wheatgrass (*Elymus trachycaulus*), found on Scout Island. There are two large, tall grasses that are easy to distinguish on Scout Island.



Reed canarygrass with exerted anthers and stigmas

Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*) forms dense stands on the south west end of the main island, especially near the west end of the Bulrush Trail. This grass is often more than 2 m tall. The leaf blades are wide and flat, the ligules are round with jagged margins, and auricles are sometimes present. The inflorescence is an erect, compact panicle (branches spread at maturity). The spikelets contain two sterile (reduced) and one fertile floret. The grass spreads by long rhizomes just beneath the soil surface. Although Reed Canarygrass is listed as native in the U.S., introduced forms are also present and have interbred with the native form. The hybrid is generally taller and forms more dense stands than the native plants.

Giant Wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*) is very different. Although it may be slightly more than 2 m tall, it is most often shorter and does not form dense stands. In contrast to Reed



Canarygrass, it forms dense clumps or tufts which are scattered, mostly in moist depressions, on the main island, including just west of the ridge west of the blockhouse and at the east end of the picnic ground. The blades are tough and often rough. Auricles are usually well developed. The inflorescence is a stiff, erect spike (no branches), usually with three spikelets attached at the same point (node) on the stem. The spikelets have 4 to 6 florets each subtended by very narrow, awl-shaped glumes. The lemmas are usually awn-tipped, with awns about 5 mm long.

Giant Wildrye is native to BC and is known to the Secwepemc as pesnúl'ten or napesnúl'ten. It was used for many purposes by the Secwepemc, such as for weaving mats, for bedding, and covering the ground to keep things clean. Because it was sometimes used to cover bodies for burial, it is sometimes known as "grave grass". The Sugar Cane reserve is apparently named for this grass. Lots of Giant Wildrye occurs on old village sites and burial grounds.

Giant Wildrye spikes

Enjoy looking at the grasses of the Nature Centre!!

Member's Moment
photo by Lubna Khan and note by Betty Donahue



Unwanted Visitors

While cleaning our bluebird boxes, we never know what we might encounter. Last year we came eye to eye with a squirrel that had taken over a box. This was the year of the mouse! Lubna was quite happy to take on the task of photographer and data collector. Sean and I were thankful to have his long-handled scrapers to clean the boxes and keep our distance from the pesky mice.

Williams Lake Field Naturalists Field Trips 2024

Last Chance Natural and Cultural History hike. Sunday, May 12 (Leader: Peter Opie 392-1440)

After an approximately 1/2 hour drive on Dog Creek Road we will arrive at the Last Chance area off the Mayfield Lake Road. We'll have a leisurely walk through grassland between conifer forests and aspen copses filled with spring wildflowers and birdsongs. We will visit an "Indian potato" patch, an old First Nation village site and a culturally significant fasting rock with a magnificent view of the Fraser and magnificent basalt columns. We will be accompanied and hosted by an Esk'eteme guardian guide to provide cultural interpretation. Meet at Scout Island at 8:00 a.m. to carpool. Expect to return to Williams Lake by 5:00.

Flowering Plants of Scout Island Nature Centre. Wednesday evening May 15 (leader: Ordell Steen, 250-398-5017)

Meet at Scout Island Nature House parking lot at 6:00 p.m. for an evening walk on Nature Centre trails to discover, identify, and learn some of the many plant species that occur on the island. Bring a hand lens or magnifying glass if you have one and any plant guides you wish to use.

Annual Chilanko Marsh Field Trip May 18th to 20th (Leader Jim Sims: (778)746-2752 or smedleysims@gmail.com)

On Saturday we will conduct an annual bird species count at Chilanko Marsh. Please allow for a 2-hour drive and follow the wildlife viewing signs on the next right after the Puntzi Lake turnoff (approx. 200 km from Williams Lake). Please arrive at the tanker base by 9:00 am. After the walk around the marsh you are welcome to join the party for a pot-luck supper and spend the night at Jim's home (Tern Inn) at Eagle Lake. Sunday morning you will be treated to Jim's famous Tern Inn Pancakes. There is limited room in the home and cabin so you might be more comfortable in a camper or tent. On Sunday there will be another walk and day of birding at one of many interesting nearby locations. Before you head back to town on Monday we will offer a shorter morning walk at another site.

Fire history and the role of wildfire in Douglas-fir and grassland ecosystems in Churn Creek Protected Area: Professor Jillan Harvey and students from Thompson Rivers University; Sunday May 26. (Contact: Ordell Steen 250-398-5017).

Join us for this exceptional opportunity to walk with Dr. Jill Harvey and her students through the Douglas-fir forests and adjacent grasslands of Churn Creek Protected Area to learn about fire ecology and dynamics of these dry ecosystems. Dr. Harvey has documented fire history over several years of studies in the Protected Area and will show us the evidence of this history and describe its ecological and management importance. Along with her graduate students she is extending her studies to include post-fire recovery following the 2021 wildfire, dynamics of tree encroachment, and vegetation and tree responses to ecosystem restoration treatments. Meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:30 a.m. or at the BC Parks kiosk (1 km on Empire Valley Road) near the Churn Creek bridge at 9:30 a.m. Bring good boots, a lunch, and plenty of water. This is a joint trip with the Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area.

Birding in the Upper Williams Lake River Valley Saturday June 8th (Leader Phil Ranson: 398-7110)

Meet on Saturday, June 8 at 08:00 a.m. at the trail parking lot across Mackenzie Avenue from the cemetery. We will take a short walk of about 2 hours duration around the settlement ponds and along the river trail, looking and listening for the many birds that breed in the varied habitats that the valley offers, paying particular attention to the warbler and flycatcher species. Please bring binoculars and leave pets at home.

Becher's Prairie wetlands and grasslands; June 15 (and 16?) (Ordell Steen, 250-398-5017)

This trip will include a walk of about 7 km to a number of wetlands and adjacent grasslands northwest of East Lake on Becher's Prairie. We will view plants, birds, and other life of this provincially important waterfowl area. This will hopefully be an initial trip to learn more about the wetlands of this area and relate our observations to those of others in previous years. Please contact me well ahead of the trip if you would like to camp at McIntyre Lake rec site on Saturday night and spend a second day (16th) or come only on a second day viewing the wetlands. On Saturday (15th) morning, meet at Scout Island Nature Centre at 7:30 a.m.

Asbestos Pits Wednesday evening, June 19 (Leader: Peter Opie 392-1440)

This will be a moderate hike up towards Russet Bluff. Bypassing the Bluff, we will arrive at the top of the "Asbestos"

Pits. There is no evidence of asbestos; however, the underlying bedrock is serpentine, sometimes associated with asbestos and ultra-mafic soils. It is a lovely spot on top in a juniper forest with a fabulous view of the San Jose valley. Bring good boots, camera and perhaps hiking poles. Meet at the eastern end of South Lakeside Drive at 6:30 p.m.

Dugan Lake evening paddle. July 9 (Leader: Rick Dawson, 250-392-3370).

Dugan Lake provides a relatively easy paddle with good viewing of forest and marsh birds and other creatures as well as waterfowl. Good for canoeists, kayakers, and paddle boarders. Meet at Dugan Lake recreation site at 6:30 p.m.

Grasslands and Old Trees near Farwell Canyon; July 14 (Ordell Steen 250-398-5017).

This will be a walk of about 5 km from the BC Parks kiosk above Farwell Canyon eastward into the grasslands and forests of large, ancient Douglas-fir trees surrounded by recent tree ingrowth. We will examine ancient trees, bird use, and compare plant species of different habitats. Meet at Scout Island Nature House at 7:30 a.m. Bring plenty of water to drink.

Beaver Valley Paddle. July 20 – 21 (Peter Opie, 250 392-1440 or peter&skye@telus.net)

We will paddle 15 km of Beaver Creek from Chambers Lake to Beaver Valley Provincial Park and back. This lovely valley trip will pass through three lakes in the chain, through old-growth forest and a mile along a slow and lush meandering creek. We should expect to see wildlife feathered and otherwise. At this time, reduced current should provide for easy return upstream. However, shallow spots may require getting out to tow a canoe. This would be a leisurely, three-hour trip one way; an extra hour will allow for a lunch stop on Joan Lake. Richard Case will be our guide. Richard has offered to host us at his cabin in the park if any wish to camp there overnight. We are planning a potluck dinner with fresh salad greens from Richard's garden. Bring a contribution for dinner, beverages and tent and bedding if staying. Richard is keen to share his space and the park with us. We will put in Saturday at David and Susan Zirnhelt's, 5679 Jacobson Road, off of the Likely Road. We will meet there at 10:00 am or meet at Scout Island gate at 9:00 to carpool. Participants may return the same day if they do not wish to stay overnight

An evening walk in the Williams Lake Community Forest; August 25 (Ordell Steen, 250-398-5017).

This will be a short (approx.3 km) walk in the W.L Community Forest in the "Hydrology Trail" area from the parking lot just off Hodgson Road, to the group of small lakes in this area.

Mushrooms of Interior Douglas-fir forests. Saturday, September 14. (Leader: Tim Philpott (Contact Ordell Steen, 398-5017)).

Tim is a research soil scientist with the Ministry of Forests and a very keen expert on mushrooms and other soil fungi. The day will start with a brief lecture introducing attendees to mushroom collection, followed by a foray where we will collect specimens on a relatively easy walk through forests and meadows in an area near Williams Lake. All collected specimens will be displayed, identified and later sequenced to obtain a DNA barcode for ID confirmation. Tim's final choice of the collecting area will depend on his experience of the most likely places to find a variety of mushrooms following recent weather. Bring a basket or bucket to put mushrooms in, a camera/phone, a pencil and notebook, a mushroom guide if you have one, good boots, a lunch, and water. Meet at Scout Island Nature House at 8:30 a.m.

Churn Creek Protected Area, Hairy Fish and BC Lakes, Sunday, September 29 (Leader: Peter Opie 392-1440).

With the Friends of Churn Creek, we will hike from Iron Gate Road. A moderate hike will take us through forest, grassland and by wetlands to BC lake, a reservoir created by the damming of Koster Creek. A loop will allow us to view a variety of habitats and some areas burned by prescribed fire and wildfire. Bring good boots, a hat, water and lunch. For carpooling we will convene at the wye parking lot west of the A&W at 7:00 am. Otherwise meet at the kiosk on Empire Valley Road at 9:00 am. Expect to return to Williams Lake by 5:00

Junction Sheep Range Saturday October 19th (Leaders Loyd Csizmadia & Michaela Waterhouse 250-398-5754).

This day-long drive and hike into the park is rather challenging. Dress warmly and wear sturdy hikers. Walking poles might be handy as well. **Meet at Scout Island at 8:00am.** To minimize our impact on the grasslands, we encourage carpooling. If you own a vehicle with good clearance and traction, we will appreciate your services. Don't forget to bring lunch, a thermos of warm liquid or freshwater, as well as your binoculars and camera. The California Bighorns may be in rut, so look forward to seeing some sheep and, perhaps, some head-butting!