



Newsletter of the Malheur Wildlife Associates, Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge  
... Keeping the Needs of Wildlife First ...

Volume 3, Number 1

February 2006

### Malheur Wildlife Associates

*an affiliate of the National Wildlife Refuge Association*

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### What's Been Happening!

*Patty Bowers, Newsletter Editor*

We're still in the grip of winter here in the Harney Basin. A recent 5-inch snowfall followed by another 2 inches the next day and temperature lows in the teens encourage us to keep the home fires burning. Despite the groundhog's prediction on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, daytime temperatures are reducing snowfall accumulations, and subtle signs of spring's march into the basin are present.

Local birders have sighted the first redwing blackbirds and Cassin's finches and are listening each day for the season's first calls of the tundra swans and the snow geese. Chipmunks have joined birds at our feeders off and on since early January, more than a month earlier than normal.

Plans are underway for project work parties in 2006. Currently volunteers will be needed for riparian plantings along the Blitzen River in April and May and for trail maintenance along the Crane Pond Overlook trail at an as yet undetermined date. Watch your email for announcements of dates and times for these upcoming work parties. And, don't forget to check the "work party" box on your 2006 membership form so we can keep you in our notification database.

### Workers Needed

If you want to receive word about work parties, check the appropriate box on your membership form and include your email address.

BE AWARE that our work projects often rely on available refuge equipment or staff, or are dependent on road conditions or access to marshland. Although we will give you as much notice as possible, we often cannot plan far in advance.

The 25<sup>th</sup> annual John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival and Art Show is scheduled for April 7-9, 2006. Check out the exciting details by going online to [www.migratorybirdfestival.com](http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com) or call the Harney County Chamber of Commerce (541-573-2636). This early spring gathering in the Harney Basin is one you don't want to miss!

Your 2006 MWA dues are now payable. Paid members receive the twice-yearly newsletter, a 15% members-only discount at the Malheur Refuge Visitors' Center store, notices about work parties, and immense gratification in knowing you are supporting the Malheur Wildlife Associates mission and goals on behalf of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. We'll look forward to hearing from you soon.

The Malheur Wildlife Associates is an independent, non-profit, 501(c)(3), corporation dedicated to assisting Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in its efforts to provide, protect and restore wildlife habitat for the diversity of wildlife for which the Refuge is well known; improve the educational experience of visitors to the Refuge and enhance their appreciation and knowledge of natural systems; and advocate for greater responsibility on the part of the public and elected officials toward the natural world, and the Harney Basin in particular.

## Meet The Staff – Tami Coe, Office Assistant

*Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair*

The cheerful, helpful voice you hear when you call Malheur National Wildlife Refuge belongs to Tami Coe. As the main link between the refuge and the public, her jobs are many and varied.

One of Tami's major responsibilities is managing the refuge Visitors' Center, which hosted 5500 visitors last year. Tami "hires," trains, and supervises volunteers who meet the public and keep the Visitors' Center humming. She orders the books, clothing and other items for sale in the store and maintains an up-to-date inventory.

Tami works with neighboring ranchers who use the refuge for haying and grazing, keeping track of their permits and billings.

Her office is the nerve center for the inter-refuge radio system. Dispatcher Tami keeps the movements of personnel in the field more efficient.

Tami works with other local federal and state entities and the Burns Chamber of Commerce to coordinate vehicles used for the many tours that take place during the John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival.

Pleasant working conditions, interacting with other staff members and the ever-changing challenge of working with the public adds up to great job satisfaction for Tami.

Chances are that without her presence in the office, things might just grind to a halt, but every now and then she slips her desk shackles and gets out into the field. She treasures these opportunities to work with various staff members—participating in wildlife counts, helping visiting school groups, gathering information about refuge history, and assisting with various educational programs.

Tami grew up in Iowa and came to Oregon after rediscovering and marrying Mitch, a childhood sweetheart. Between them, they have four daughters and one grandson. Mitch and Tami live on a small acreage with three dogs and one cat.

Tami's hobbies, besides the grandson who gets top billing, are reading and flower gardening.



Photo by Carey Goss

Tami Coe manages the Malheur Refuge Visitors' Center, which hosted 5500 visitors in 2005.



Photo by Carla Burnside

Alice Elshoff "models" microscopes available for environmental education use at Malheur Refuge.

## Microscopes Available For Educational Programs

*Carla Burnside, Refuge Archaeologist*

Refuge staff would like to express gratitude to the Malheur Wildlife Associates (MWA) for their donation of three microscopes to the Environmental Education program. The microscopes are available for use in our new classroom or when volunteers and staff work with students off-refuge. Jack Smith, our Environmental Education volunteer, carved the classroom out of

unused storage space. It will easily accommodate 12-15 students.

One of the microscopes is digital and connects to a computer so images can be stored or projected for easy viewing. Thanks MWA for your very generous donation!



## Winter Wildlife Highlights at Malheur Refuge

Gary Ivey, MWA Vice Chair

Wildlife are abundant in spring, summer and fall at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Although things slow down a bit, winter visitors to Malheur Refuge are often treated to interesting wildlife observations. Some bird species are present on the refuge only during the winter and some mammals are much more visible.

Most songbirds move south for the winter, but certain sparrows remain. Careful observers may find American tree sparrows along the snow-lined roads, and if lucky, long-spurs or snow buntings are occasionally found among the flocks of horned larks. Many species of ducks, geese and swans use the refuge in winter, but their numbers are much less than at other times of the year due to cold temperatures and few open water areas. Canada geese and mallard ducks are the most common. Check the display pond at headquarters, the Blitzen River, Knox Pond and the Narrows. Barrow's and common goldeneyes, and common and hooded mergansers winter in good numbers at Malheur.



Photo by Wayne Bowers

A young Cooper's hawk watches for unwary prey.

Some mammal species are much more visible in winter. Large numbers of mule deer move onto the refuge in October and very large bucks are visible during their rut from late October through November. Coyotes and porcupines are commonly seen on the refuge during winter. Look for porcupines among the willows north of P-Ranch. Large groups of pronghorn antelope are often found along the foothills bordering the refuge. Lucky visitors may find a badger, bobcat or a weasel. Weasels are white during winter. Elk also occasionally visit the refuge in winter.

Human winter visitors to Malheur Refuge should be prepared for severe winter driving conditions and bring appropriate clothing and supplies. Weather can be cold, sometimes below zero, but most days are sunny and the roads are usually in good shape during this period.



Photo by Patty Bowers

A porcupine feeds in the orchard at the P-Ranch.

November's highlights include large flocks of tundra swans found at Knox Pond and a few other nearby locations. Hundreds can gather in one area and their voices carry long distances. Watch for trumpeter swans, some of which spend the entire year on the refuge in the south Blitzen Valley. Waterfowl begin returning from southern wintering grounds in February and peak numbers of swans and snow geese occur in March. Sage grouse begin strutting on nearby leks in March.

Some raptors, such as rough-legged hawks and golden and bald eagles, are present in high numbers in the winter. Rough-legged hawks breed in the Arctic and subarctic regions and become the most abundant hawk on the refuge in winter. Good numbers are also found on the Silvies Floodplain near Burns. Malheur Refuge has recorded the greatest number of this hawk in North America during a few Christmas bird counts.



Photo by Patty Bowers

Large mule deer bucks are often present in late fall in the south Blitzen Valley.



## John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival & Art Show, April 7–9, 2006

Spend an amazing weekend witnessing the spring migration spectacle in the Harney Basin of Southeast Oregon. View thousands of migratory birds as they rest and feed in the wide open spaces of Oregon's high desert country. From waterfowl to shorebirds, cranes to raptors, wading birds to songbirds, you'll see it all! The festival offers non-stop birding activities as well as historical and cultural information sure to entertain you and your family. Whether you're a beginner or a life-long wildlife enthusiast, the festival has something for everyone. Don't miss this extraordinary weekend!

Registration begins February 6<sup>th</sup>. You must register by calling the Harney County Chamber of Commerce (541-573-2636) **or** going online to [www.migratorybirdfestival.com](http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com). MasterCard and Visa are accepted. If you register by telephone, you can also pay by check. Tour space is limited and tours fill fast, so contact the Harney County Chamber of Commerce right away if you plan to attend.

Great Egret commemorative posters and T-shirts featuring the art of René Eisenbart (see above and on the Web site) are available for purchase.



## High Desert Discovery Scenic Byway

Connie Brumback, Harney County Chamber of Commerce

(Adapted from *High Desert Discovery - Oregon Scenic Byway* brochure – contact 541-573-2636 or [www.harneycounty.com](http://www.harneycounty.com) for more information)

### Introduction

The High Desert of Harney County is a far cry from the Oregon west of the Cascades. Covered with juniper and sagebrush and dotted with dramatic mountain ranges, this area is true frontier country. The High Desert Discovery Scenic Byway guides you through the heart of this sparsely populated region, offering broad panoramas of wide-open spaces seldom encountered today. This byway serves as a gateway to awe-inspiring Steens Mountain, Diamond Craters, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, Peter French Round Barn and the Alvord Desert. Its austere beauty offers incredible solitude. Alone in the high desert, you feel a bit like a cowboy or pioneer from another era. As a modern day pioneer exploring this frontier, plan accordingly as basic services are few and far between.

### Burns to Malheur Refuge

The High Desert Discovery Scenic Byway begins at Burns, which rests at the junction of Highways 20, 78 and 395. From Burns, proceed south on Highway 205. Wright's Point provides stunning views of the Blue Mountains to the north and Steens Mountain to the south. At the Narrows interpretive site, Mud Lake and Harney Lake offer pleasant vistas to the west. To the east, Malheur Lake and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge offer a veritable oasis amidst arid rangelands. Malheur Refuge stretches 39 miles wide and 40 miles long, and is home to 320 bird species.

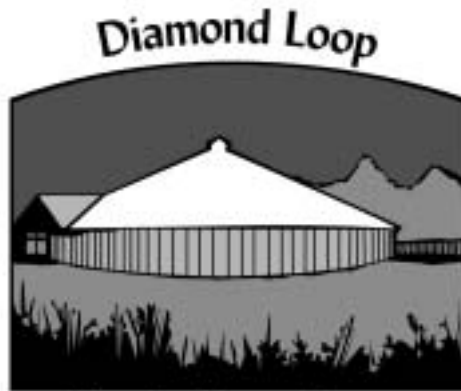
### On To Frenchglen

Skirting the marshes of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, you'll soon pass the turnoff for the Diamond Loop Tour Route, which leads to the Peter French Round Barn. Continue to follow the route that parallels ancient basalt flows until you reach the southern end of the Blitzen Valley and the community of Frenchglen. Frenchglen provides services for Steens Mountain visitors and is the point of departure for the Steens Loop Tour Route. You may also access the Donner und Blitzen River from here, which offers excellent angling for redband trout, a species of rainbow trout indigenous to the high desert region. Outdoor activities within the area include hiking, horseback riding, camping, birding, fishing and winter recreation. One of the focal points of Frenchglen is the historic Frenchglen Hotel, built in the mid-1920s and remodeled in 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It's an excellent example of American Foursquare architecture and is still open today, providing lodging and family-style meals.

## Catlow Rim to Fields

Heading south from Frenchglen, you'll soon pass the turnoff for the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. This primitive road leads to the 275,000 acres of high-desert habitat set aside in 1936 to provide spring, summer and fall range for the region's pronghorn antelope herds. Continuing south, Route 205 parallels Catlow Rim and Catlow Valley, home to some of the region's wild horse herds and big horn sheep, which are frequently seen from the road. The 131-mile High Desert Discovery Byway ends in the ranching community of Fields. At the turn of the century, borax was collected at nearby Borax Lake, providing a significant source of revenue. Fields is an excellent staging area for outdoor adventures in the nearby Trout Creek and Pueblo Mountains. The privately owned Alvord Hot Springs is currently open for public use. Fields offers some essential traveler's services such as food, gas and lodging. From here, you can loop north on the East Steens Tour Route, which ends back in Burns.

## Diamond Tour Loop Route



Winding through a variety of high desert habitats, the 69-mile Diamond Loop Tour Route offers views of the high desert from mountains to the sage-covered hills. The route offers opportunities to view wildlife, historic ranches of

the Diamond Valley and the Round Barn, along with the geologic formations of Diamond Craters.

## Steens Loop Tour Route

This 59-mile loop departs from Frenchglen and climbs to the top of Steens Mountain, which rests in the clouds at nearly 10,000 feet. Along the way, you'll have ample opportunities to view wildlife and take in the grandeur of a national treasure.



Steens Mountain is an example of a fault-block mountain, formed when massive internal pressure forced the east

edge upward along a fault line. From the east rim overlook, Steens Mountain drops over a vertical mile to the Alvord Desert floor. There are five major glaciated canyons on the Steens. The Kiger Gorge overlook offers a breathtaking opportunity to stand at the headwall of a classic textbook example of a massive "U" shaped valley.

## East Steens Tour Route

This 127-mile tour skirts along the eastern escarpment of Steens Mountain and the vast expanses of the Alvord Desert, providing a scenic study in dramatic contrasts.



## In The Shadow of Steens Mountain

Near milepost 65, the tour route detours south off Highway 78 onto East Steens Road. Most of this road is a gravel surface, but quite passable for regular passenger vehicles. The landscape is arid, but not without life-sustaining water. After passing the sagebrush-covered Sheepshead Mountains to the east, you come to a series of small lakes — Five Cent, Ten Cent, Fifteen Cent and Juniper Lakes (The lakes can be dry depending on the year.) — that attract a variety of animal life. Majestic Steens Mountain also comes into view. It is the largest fault-block mountain in the northern Great Basin, rising a vertical mile from the Alvord Basin to an elevation of nearly 10,000 feet. Steens Mountain is a topographical wonder, and presides over the remainder of the route. With binoculars, bighorn sheep can be spotted on the ridges and pronghorn antelope can be seen adjacent to the road. Next, you'll reach Mann Lake, which is renowned by fly fisherman for its hefty Mann Lake cutthroat trout.

## Desert Hot Springs and a Treat in Fields

While Steens Mountain looms to the west, the shimmering salt flats of the Alvord Desert unfold to the east. The Alvord Desert playa, which can be wet or dry depending on the time of year, is one of the largest playas in Oregon—6 miles wide and 11 miles long. The Alvord playa is also a popular venue for motorcycle and ATV riding, land sailing, glider flying and camping. Sore travelers will find sweet solace at Alvord Hot Springs; a privately owned, no-fee hot spring that bubbles up at 174 degrees, but cools considerably by the time it reaches man-made sitting pools. The tour route ends in the small community of Fields. Rumor has it that the café in Fields serves some of the best hamburgers and milkshakes in southeastern Oregon.

## Wetland Ecology & Management Workshop

Lyla Messick, Malheur Field Station Co-Director

(The following article was printed in the Fall 2005 Newsletter of the Malheur Field Station.)

The Malheur Field Station and Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) held a professional development workshop in August 2005, entitled "Wetland Ecology and Wildlife: Considerations for Wetland Restoration and Management." The workshop, in its third year, was expanded from three days to five to incorporate additional field trips and classroom sessions. Topics covered included the Ecology of Waterfowl, Shorebirds/ Marshbirds, and Amphibian/ Reptiles. Invertebrate identification and classification were also addressed as well as topics on wetland restoration programs, mitigation issues and invasive weeds. Daily field trips included area tours and a night session of waterfowl banding on the refuge.

The lead course instructor was wildlife professor extraordinaire, Guy Baldassarre, College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry, State University of New York in Syracuse. Richard Roy, Supervisory Biologist, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was the course leader. Malheur Field Station

directors also took part in this important and exciting cooperative program.

Workshop participants included folks from local, state and federal government agencies, nonprofit organizations, as well as interested, nonaffiliated individuals. The success of this course, based on its growing popularity (waiting list) through word of mouth and positive reviews, has prompted all parties involved to plan two sessions for next year!

If interested in the 2006 sessions, contact Rick Roy (541-493-2612), or email [Richard\\_Roy@fws.gov](mailto:Richard_Roy@fws.gov) for more information. 🐰



Photo by Lyla Messick



Photo by Lyla Messick



Photo by Lyla Messick



Photo by Lyla Messick

From top left, clockwise: Course leader, Richard Roy, MNWR; Blitzen River at P-Ranch, MNWR — an example of innovative restoration efforts and on-site techniques; a well-armed workshop participant; identifying invertebrates with instructor Bruce Dugger, Oregon State University.



### National Wildlife Refuges: Wildlife's Best Friend

National wildlife refuges are places in the United States where wild creatures can get what they need to live — food, water, shelter and space. On national wildlife refuges, the needs of wildlife come first.

## P-Ranch Long Barn Restoration

Carla Burnside, Refuge Archaeologist

Great things will begin happening at the P-Ranch Long Barn this winter. Malheur Refuge and the Harney County Historical Society have received two grants to prepare a condition assessment and engineering plan for the stabilization and restoration of the Long Barn. The Historical Society received a \$10,000 grant from the Oregon Cultural Trust. The refuge used that grant as a match for a \$15,000 Challenge Cost Share Grant through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



The P-Ranch Long Barn is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The barn was constructed in the mid-1880's under the direction of ranch manager Peter French and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was the last of the massive barns constructed on the 140,000 acre ranch. The structure is an impressive 150 feet long, 48 feet wide and 30 feet high at the roof peak. Pine lumber for construction of the barn came from a ranch-owned sawmill in the Fort Harney vicinity. Ranch hands harvested juniper and aspen on Steens Mountain for posts, sills and manger boards. Ponderosa pine roof shingles may have come from the mill.

The barn was used primarily to feed horses. Extra horses, unused saddle horses, and young broncs used to pull haying implements were tied inside stalls. Loose stock wandered through open doors on the sides to feed and obtained water from ditches and surface water west of the barn. Equipment was also sometimes stored in the barn.

The Long Barn is a favorite destination for many visitors to the refuge and is located on the Steens Loop Tour Route of the newly designated High Desert Discovery Scenic Byway. Photographs of the barn have appeared in regional tourism publications, on the Internet, on calendars and in books. The High Desert Museum in Bend is building a replica of the barn at their facility.

If you've visited the barn recently, you may have noticed that the northeast corner appears to be sinking, the roof line has some definite zigs and zags and the doors are in poor condition. The sinking appears to be the result of saturated soil conditions. Early in 2005, the Refuge addressed this problem by cleaning ditches in the vicinity of the ranch and by raising a portion of the river dike. In May 2005, it was apparent these efforts were successful when flood waters in the Blitzen Valley did not reach the barn.

Pilgrims Progress Preservation Services (PPPS) will conduct the initial assessment of the barn. PPPS completed the same work for two other Pete French buildings—the Round Barn and the Sod House Long Barn. PPPS also directed the stabilization and restoration of those two structures. The P-Ranch assessment will begin in late February with a report available by late spring. The report will provide details for future grant applications and will help guide various phases of the project.

If you're interested in helping with the stabilization or restoration of the P-Ranch Long Barn call Malheur Refuge at 541-493-2612.



## Membership Form

2006

Annual dues:

- \$10 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$50 Donor
- \$200 Patron
- \$500 Life Member

I prefer to receive my newsletter by:

- Snail Mail
- Email

Type of membership:

- New
- Renewal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle I.

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with check to: Malheur Wildlife Associates  
36391 Sod House Lane  
Princeton, OR 97721

- I am interested in hearing about work parties via email. Please add my email address to the project notification list.

Malheur Wildlife Associates is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

## Weed Management Activities on the Refuge

Jess Wenick, Refuge Habitat Ecologist

A large weed mapping effort was initiated during the summer of 2005 in an effort to update critical location information within the refuge GIS system. Most major travel routes, all known and realized medusa head (annual grass and noxious weed) infestations, as well as infested acreage within fields in the Double O Unit were completed in 2005. The Malheur Wildlife Associates played a critical role in managing the funding necessary to hire a seasonal technician to collect this information. The data collected thus far has already paid dividends in the realization of higher levels of weed management efficiency.

In 2005, a broad-scale effort to treat noxious weeds in the Double O Valley was also launched. It was funded in part by a Fish and Wildlife Service Challenge Cost Share grant for cooperative efforts on private lands adjacent



Photo by Alice Elshoff

Jess Wenick demonstrates use of a GPS for the 2005 weed mapping project.

to the refuge. This community-based effort was a tremendous success that fostered positive working relationships with all impacted landowners

and relevant county, state, and federal agencies. Approximately 1600 acres were treated within the valley on both sides of the refuge's boundary fence.



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