



Malheur Musings

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

Volume 1, Number 1

January 2004

**MALHEUR
Wildlife Associates**
an affiliate of the
National Wildlife Refuge Association

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BEHOLD, OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER!

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Malheur Musings, newsletter of the Malheur Wildlife Associates (MWA), makes its debut at last. Patty Bowers, our newest board member, is volunteering as the newsletter editor. Feedback from members and topic suggestions for future issues are always welcome.

Many thanks to Jen Bock who created the masthead artwork for *Malheur Musings* and Kelly Hazen who developed easily usable graphics files.

By February 5th our new web site, www.malheurfriends.org, will be up and running. Anne Merydith used her creative skills to make this web site functional and easy to use. Check the site often for information about current projects and opportunities for volunteer work parties.

We recently said goodbye to index cards and computerized our membership list. Now is a good time to use the form in this newsletter to update your membership and contact information for 2004.

Our very reasonable annual membership fees are due the first of each year. We will carry your membership forward to 2004 if you paid in November or December 2003, but if it's been a while, please consider

renewing soon. Then we won't bug you for a whole year! Granting institutions and politicians often want to know how many 'real' (paid) members we have. Membership numbers translate into financial support and recognition for the refuge in the political realm.

Your membership entitles you to receive our newsletter, which initially will happen at least twice a year. You will also receive word about special times to visit the refuge and opportunities to participate in volunteer work parties. Project participants often get to see parts of the refuge not usually open to the general public.

Won't you consider joining or rejoining MWA soon? We'll look forward to hearing from you and/or seeing you at a work party in 2004.



WORKERS NEEDED

If you want to receive word about work parties, check the appropriate box on your membership form and include your e-mail address. A handy list of interested folks will improve our efficiency in notifying only those interested in participating.

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.

HELLO FRIENDS OF MALHEUR!

Donna Stovall, Refuge Manager

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is an incredible place for many reasons, but particularly for its tremendous diversity and importance to the Pacific Flyway. When the manager's position became vacant, I considered it a wonderful opportunity to be at one of the National Wildlife Refuge System's crown jewels. I'm very happy to work with the extremely talented staff here at Malheur, and I'm delighted to have this "Friends" group as part of the family.

To give you a brief history of my background, my introduction to the Service started when I was a Youth Conservation Corps employee at Santa Ana NWR in south Texas. Now I have over 20 years with the Fish and Wildlife Service and have been blessed to work at some outstanding refuges in Hawaii, Alaska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and of course, in my home state of Texas. My duties at Malheur NWR



will bring together experiences gained from each of my previous duty stations.

There is a lot to learn about this 187,000-acre refuge with some aspects requiring years, if not a career, to understand fully. A unique richness exists here both in history and natural resources which we plan to celebrate at our Centennial birthday in 2008. Some exciting projects recently completed or underway include restoration of 3.5 miles of the Donner und Blitzen River, installation of fish screens with passage for redband trout, restoration of the historic Sod

House Ranch, interpretive pullout at Malheur Lake, carp barrier on Mud Lake, weed control projects with partners, and the list continues.

However, along with the spectacular wealth of wildlife, we face several challenges to maintain and enhance the habitat needed for these wildlife concentrations. Waterbird production in Malheur Lake has been severely reduced due to carp; invasive weeds are spreading quicker than we have been able to control; and there is a never-ending need for infrastructure maintenance.

We will take one day at a time and search for creative and innovative ways to meet our challenges. With assistance from the Malheur Wildlife Associates and the community, there is no telling what can be accomplished. Thank you for your support and for letting me be part of *Malheur Musing's* first edition! 🌿

LADY POWER PLUS ONE

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

On October 10, 2003, six of MWA's finest volunteers — five ladies plus one gentleman on the chain saw — assisted Carla Burnside, refuge archaeologist, with construction of a rustic wooden fence at the newly-restored, historic Sod House Ranch site. Pole fence construction was new work for all of us, but everyone learned quickly and had a great time. As the picture shows, everyone was pleased with the results.

The fencing project was one of the final preparations for the grand opening of Sod House Ranch, marking the completion of an enormous restoration project by the refuge. Restoration efforts included bringing back to vertical a magnificent 116-foot barn that was in danger of falling over. This barn is one of several unique barns built in the days of Peter French.

Sod House Ranch was the northernmost outpost for the huge Peter French cattle empire. Several of the original buildings are intact at the site.

A large stand of enormous cottonwood trees at the ranch site provides a nesting colony for cormorants and great blue herons.

The Sod House Ranch site will be open to the public and available for tours showcasing an earlier way of life from August 15 through October 31. 🐾



Carla Burnside, refuge archaeologist, and MWA volunteers admire the results of their efforts at Sod House Ranch. Photo contributed by Mary Narey.



NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK CELEBRATION

Carla Burnside, Refuge Archaeologist

National Wildlife Refuge Week is a time for all Americans to learn about the magnificent collection of lands set aside for wildlife. Malheur National Wildlife Refuge held two events to mark this celebration from October 12 - 18, 2003.

Tiny and Sue Pedersen of the Desert Historic Theatre, the Malheur Wildlife Associates, and the refuge joined together to bring *Winged Migration* to Burns for the week's celebration. *Winged Migration* is a documentary film exploring the drama and mystery of bird migration from a bird's eye view.



Harney Herdsmen 4-H group hosted a reception prior to the showing of *Winged Migration* during National Wildlife Refuge Week.

The Harney Herdsmen 4-H group hosted a reception at the theatre prior to the initial movie showing. Finger foods, displays, and Malheur Refuge staff were available for conversation and questions.

The second event was the reopening of Peter French's historic Sod House Ranch. Sod House Ranch was designed and constructed under the direction of Peter French, a well known eastern Oregon rancher, who managed one of the first ranches in Harney County. At the height of its operation the ranch was one of the largest ranches operating on private property in the western United States. The ranch is listed on the National Register of Historic

Places because it represents an intact 1880's era ranch and is associated with Peter French.

Sod House Ranch was the northern headquarters of the 160,000 acre ranch managed by Peter French for San Francisco business man Hugh Glenn. Eight of the 1880's era buildings remain at the ranch, including the 116 foot long, 50 foot wide and 20 foot tall

Long Barn. The barn is constructed of juniper posts, split juniper slabs, and ponderosa pine beams and boards. It was designed by Peter French and constructed by his ranch hands. Other buildings at the ranch include a two-room office, a stone cellar built of locally quarried stone, a two-story bunkhouse, a chicken coop/grain storage building/carriage shed, a hide shed, harness shed and the original homestead house.

The ranch has been closed to the public since 1990. Portions of the ranch were inundated in the mid 1980's when Malheur Lake flooded beyond the historic high meander line. Saturated soil conditions and deterioration of the structures created unsafe conditions for public access. Renovation began about four years ago.

Numerous outside partners assisted the refuge in the stabilization and restoration of the Long Barn and grant funding helped complete various phases of the restoration project.

To celebrate the reopening of the ranch, the Harney County Historical Society and the Harney County



Sod House Ranch Long Barn

Cattlemen helped the refuge host the event at Sod House Ranch. The Centennial Trail and new interpretive panels were dedicated by Regional Director Dave Allen. Members of the Harney County Historical Society were available to answer questions about the role of ranching in the Harney Basin. The Harney County Cattlemen held their annual Scholarship Fund Barbeque at the ranch while community members displayed historic memorabilia and demonstrated traditional western skills.

Beginning in 2004, the ranch will be open each year from August 15th through October 31st. Staffed by volunteers, the public will have the opportunity to explore the eight buildings at the ranch, learn about the history of ranching in the Blitzen Valley and see how the refuge uses haying and grazing in the management of wildlife habitat.



A stone cellar built of locally quarried stone still stands at Sod House Ranch.



GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT 2004

Join the Malheur Wildlife Associates as participants in the *Great Backyard Bird Count* from February 13 - 16, 2004. Learn how to participate by visiting <http://www.birdsource.org>.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Data collected during the Great Backyard Bird Count, combined with Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch data, provides an immense picture of winter bird distribution and activity.

Last year, many bird enthusiasts not only participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count, they helped others participate. They collected reports from friends, family, and others who didn't have access to the Internet, then entered the information through their own computers. In 2003, 47,740 checklists were submitted, representing 573 species and over 4 million birds.

MWA members, families, and friends are encouraged to help with this meaningful data collection activity. All you need is basic knowledge of bird identification and access to the Internet at home, a friend's house, local library, school, or anywhere access to the web is available.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR SPRING PROJECTS

Work parties in March, April, and May (pre-mosquitoes) will include the following projects:

1. Swan Pond Overlook

Volunteers are needed to help clear the area, plant trees and shrubs, and construct a trail and overlook.

2. Blitzen River Planting

Volunteers are needed to help plant cottonwood and willow slips grown in the clone bed.

3. Fence and Corral Removal

Volunteers are needed to help with removal of fencing hazardous to wildlife within the refuge boundaries and to remove a corral.

Please indicate on your membership form if you are interested in receiving information via email about these work days. Also, don't forget to check the Malheur Wildlife Associates web site for project information at www.malheurfriends.org. And remember, volunteers often get to see parts of the refuge not generally open to the public. Have we convinced you yet? Consider joining us in this important work! You'll be glad you did!

How To Make Your Counts COUNT:



- ✓ Count the birds in your backyard, local park, or other natural area on one or all four count days. Count in as many different locations as you wish, just make sure to keep separate records and fill out a checklist for each area.
- ✓ Watch the birds for at least 15 - 30 minutes on each day that you participate to get a good sense of what birds are in your area.
- ✓ So data is useful to scientists who analyze bird population data, it is important that everyone counts in exactly the same way. On the day(s) you count, watch your bird feeders, or take a short walk (less than 1 mile) in your neighborhood or park. For each kind (species) of bird that you see, keep track of the HIGHEST NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS that you observe at any one time. Use a "tally sheet" to keep track of your counts. If you record only the highest number of individual birds of any one species in view at the same time, you're sure to never count the same bird more than once.
- ✓ At the end of the day, go to "Submit your bird checklist" on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site, <http://www.birdsource.org>. Fill out the questions about your location, local habitat, and count duration. Then enter your high counts for each species sighted on that day and location. You can submit one bird checklist for each day or for each new area that you count in.
- ✓ After submitting your data, explore the website and check the results section to see other reports from your community and watch as data comes in from other areas. Find out other ways you can help birds. Enjoy!



In light of this, we let the whips grow for two years. They are now 6 to 10 feet tall. This spring we will use a stinger, a device that uses a water jet to make a deep small diameter hole, to plant the whips. This should get the whips deep enough to reach the water table. Volunteers are needed to help at the planting sites and to construct wire cages around each planting. Watch for more information about this project, including experiments with elderberry plantings. 🦋



The completed Narrows off-road parking area is ready for birders and other wildlife watchers.

OFF ROAD PARKING AT THE NARROWS

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Creating a safe, off-road parking area for wildlife viewing at The Narrows was an idea whose time had come. All it needed was a jump-start and MWA provided the spark. Realizing it was a project MWA could not accomplish alone, we contacted relevant agencies and found them receptive and eager to help. Bob Wright from the Oregon Department of Transportation, Steve Grasty from the Harney County Transportation Committee, and Chad Karges from Malheur Refuge came up with a plan for sharing costs, labor and equipment.

The result is a 30 foot wide by 250 foot long parking area just south of the Narrows bridge between Malheur and Mud Lake. Two years of severe drought left the two lakes in retreat so that ironically, at least this spring, there may not be a wading bird in sight! History

tells us, however, that the lakes will return and we will be ready.

Placement of interpretive panels is also on track. This phase involves a partnership between the Burns Paiute Tribe, which will explain the importance of the lakes in their history; the refuge, which will interpret the importance of wetlands to wildlife; and the Harney County Chamber of Commerce through the John Scharff Waterfowl Festival, which is donating money for the panels. Dedication of the site is scheduled in early April during the bird festival. 🦋



Malheur Wildlife Associates
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Here's What's Inside . .

Our First Newsletter.....	1
Hello Friends	2
Lady Power + One	2
Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Wk ...	3
Backyard Bird Count	4
Volunteer Work Parties	4
Blitzen Restoration	5
Native Plant Clone Bed	5
Membership Form	5
Narrows Off-Road Pkg	6