



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

Volume 1, Number 2

September 2004

MALHEUR
Wildlife Associates
an affiliate of the
National Wildlife Refuge Association

36391 Sod House Lane
Princeton, OR 97721
www.malheurfriends.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair: Alice Elshoff
calice@oregontrail.net
541-495-2322

Vice Chair: Gary Ivey
ivey@oregonvos.net
541-487-7177

Secretary/Treasurer:
Guy Sheeter
sheeterg@hotmail.com
541-573-2628

Joe Hendry
shendry@centurytel.net
541-573-6773

Patty Bowers
dustdevil@centurytel.net
541-573-5754

Refuge Liaison:
Carey Goss
Carey_Goss@r1.fws.gov
541-493-2612

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING!

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

It has been a busy and beautiful spring and summer at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors from Oregon and all over the country marveled at the spring migration event that is always so spectacular here. They chased unusual avian visitors, like the Hutton's vireo and the black and white warbler, or simply enjoyed the incredible diversity of birds for which Malheur is so well known.

The refuge staff is involved with many important projects including grain plantings which will serve as a forage base for sandhill cranes and continuing efforts to control invasive species like perennial pepperweed.

MWA was busy, too. Looking back at our "To Do" list from last spring, we accomplished some projects and postponed others. See the related article on page 3.

Check out our new and improved membership form on page 5. Have we got a deal for you! Are you tired of those pesky annual reminders that it's time for membership dues again? You can now become a life member and never hear us ask you for dues again! Honest! Check it out on the membership form. A new category "Life Member" allows you to join MWA for life with a \$500 contribution. Life membership dollars are kept in a

separate fund and are earmarked for projects that directly benefit the needs of wildlife.

Or, if a special perk is your thing, how about becoming a "patron" with a \$200 donation. As a patron, you'll not only feel good about helping wildlife, you are entitled to a personalized refuge tour led by one of our members.

Of course, our regular members make it all possible, and we hope you will renew each January. And there's still time to renew for 2004! Don't forget — your membership card (sent following renewal) entitles you to a 15% discount at the Visitor Center store at refuge headquarters.

Those of you who indicated receiving your newsletter via email will see it in that form starting with the next newsletter.



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 improves 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.

AN ARCHAEOLOGIST'S LOT AT MALHEUR REFUGE

Carla Burnside, Refuge Archaeologist

I suspect that I have one of the best jobs at Malheur Refuge. I get to dig in the dirt, walk endless miles across the wonderful landscape of the refuge, fuss with old buildings, do a little bird watching, work on interpretive projects that encourage people to learn about the refuge, interact with visitors of all ages, work with great volunteers who help the refuge, and all of this falls under the guise of archaeology. As you can probably imagine, my job has evolved considerably since I arrived at the refuge in 1990 to work on prehistoric flood sites on Malheur, Mud and Harney Lakes.

There is a direct correlation between the abundance and diversity of wildlife and plants in an area to the prehistoric and historic use of an area. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Harney Basin and on the refuge. Even before Malheur Refuge was established in 1908, it was an area teaming with wildlife, and people have used these resources for over 11,000 years. In all of that time people, being people, have left abundant evidence of their presence on refuge lands and it is my responsibility to document and protect that evidence under the National Historic Preservation Act and to interpret it for the scientific community and the public.

Whenever the refuge plans a project that will disturb the ground, I work closely with project



planners and the maintenance staff to make sure that cultural resources are not impacted. Because it would bring people into a previously closed area that may contain historic or prehistoric sites, the MWA's proposed Swan Pond trail and overlook location underwent a cultural resource survey. Fortunately the project will not impact any sites and is in the final planning stages.

I also serve as the primary cultural resource contact in the region for the Southeast Idaho Refuge Complex and for Hagerman National Fish Hatchery.

One of my career highlights was an invitation to participate as an archaeologist on the Department of Interior's National Interagency Burned Area Emergency Response Team. This team assesses the effect of large wildfires in the U.S., which may have the potential to impact human life, property, cultural resources or endangered species.

Last year the team spent three weeks in southern California working on four of the devastating wildfires in that region. My role was to determine how erosion, looting, or increased deterioration as a result of the fire would further impact cultural resources.

Much of my time at Malheur has been devoted to the restoration of Sod House Ranch, one of Peter French's historic ranches. The long barn at the ranch site was on the verge of falling over and desperately needed a helping hand. With many partners and an influx of grant dollars we restored the barn and opened the ranch to the public. Several MWA volunteers helped build the parking area fence last fall. The ranch opened this year on August 15th and will be open each day until October 31st. Volunteers staff the ranch site and are available to give tours.

Last fall we celebrated the restoration with a huge grand opening at the ranch. This one-day event was such a success that the refuge decided to make it an annual event. With the help of refuge staff and many community members, Malheur Refuge will again host the annual Ranching Heritage Day at Sod House Ranch on October 16th during National Wildlife Refuge Week. Mark your calendars and plan to join us for a celebration of the history of the area and a chance to make just one more visit to the refuge this year. 🐾

AUTO TOUR GUIDE DEBUT

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Next time you visit Malheur Refuge, you will find a new auto tour guide available to lead you on your journey through the refuge. MWA volunteer, Alice Elshoff, in collaboration with refuge staff, has written an interesting and informative script. You'll learn about refuge history, geology, wildlife, and more. First time visitors to Malheur

Refuge will find it helpful and even long time visitors may find something of interest.

The tour corresponds to 18 numbered stops (in place by early 2005) along the Center Patrol Road, which runs for 40 miles through the heart of the refuge. Each of the signs features the graphic at the right. Watch for the pelicans in the low rider car. They'll show you the way to go! 🦋



WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Looking back at our "To Do" list from last spring, we accomplished some projects and postponed others. Below is a summary of our accomplishments since you last heard from us.

1. Native Plantings

With help from volunteers Dale and Lois Derouin, Terry Gloeckler Bill Marlett, and Cal and Alice Elshoff, 65 native cottonwood whips and 25 blue elderberry bushes were planted along the Blitzen River and Bridge Creek. This was our first experience using the water-jet stinger, a device that uses a water jet to make deep, small diameter holes. With the aid of the stinger, the whips were planted five feet into the ground, within reach of the water table during late summer conditions. We have high hopes for their survival. Stay tuned for a report next spring after the buds have opened.

2. Swan Pond Overlook

Our first plan at this site included the usual type of foot trail to the upper overlook site with a wheelchair accessible trail to a lower viewpoint. However, we found another



Cal Elshoff, MWA volunteer, uses the water jet stinger to drill holes for planting cottonwood whips along Bridge Creek.

location for the wheelchair accessible trail that offers more possibilities and less potential disturbance to the wildlife, and a better viewpoint for everyone. So, that portion of the project is on hold while we work with the refuge staff to further develop the idea. In the meantime, we will continue to develop a primitive trail and photo blind at the original Swan Pond site.

3. Fence Removal

Two more meadows are fence-free since the last newsletter. Volunteers have now removed ten miles of unnecessary fencing from refuge lands.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR PROJECTS

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Upcoming work parties will include the following projects:

1. Swan Pond Overlook

We plan to start the Swan Pond foot trail soon. Fall, with its crisp clear days and lack of bugs, is the perfect time to take part in a work party on the refuge. Please join us for a trail building and area clean-up work party the weekend of October 8 - 11, 2004.

2. Blitzen River Planting

We'll let the current batch of cottonwood whips grow for another year in the clone bed. But long willow poles that have been growing for two years and some shrubs species will be ready to plant in March. Rick Roy, refuge biologist, would like as many willows as possible planted along the Blitzen



Christmas Bird Count volunteers meet to compile data following the P Ranch count in December 2003.

upstream from headquarters. We will use the stinger and will need lots of volunteers. Plan for a work party date sometime during the first two weeks of March.

3. Christmas Bird Count

Dates for the Harney Basin Christmas Bird Counts will be set soon. Three consecutive counts occur here - P Ranch, Sod House, and Burns. Volunteers are needed for all three counts. Watch for details and considering joining us for this annual event.



NEED MORE INFO?

If you indicated on your 2004 membership form that you are interested in receiving information about work parties via email, you will receive more details as the time for a particular project draws near.

If you have not yet renewed your 2004 membership, but are interested in helping with any of the above projects, or if you have questions about any of the projects, please contact Alice Elshoff directly at 541-495-2322 or by email at calice@oregontrail.net.

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!

VISIONS OF WHITE IN HARNEY COUNTY

Gary Ivey, MWA Vice Chair

In spring, over 200,000 snow and Ross's geese stop at Malheur Refuge and the Silvies River flood plain near Burns to feed, rest, and store energy for their continuing migration from California's Central Valley to the far north. Peaks of over 300,000 geese have been recorded in this area. Most of the Ross's geese, the smaller of the two species, are on their way to nesting grounds in the central Canadian arctic. The snow geese also migrate to northern Canada, but some also return to northern Alaska and Russia.

Refuge biologists learn about the geese by using a spotting scope to look for collared birds. Repeated sightings of collared birds throughout the migration corridor provide insight into migration patterns and longevity. A variety of partnerships among state, federal, and foreign agencies and private consultants are responsible for the initial banding of white geese on their northern breeding grounds. The Canadian Wildlife Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Russian biologists from Wrangel Island, Siberia have all had a part in this important biological work. At the present time, the Canadian Wildlife Service continues to collar geese.

All of the collars have a letter/number combination, which is noted and then entered into a computer for analysis later. Ross's collars are primarily blue, but a couple yellow collars have been seen. These unusual birds are from the eastern Canadian arctic. Snow goose collars are primarily black (those which breed in northern Canada on Banks Island) and red (Wrangel Island, off the coast of Russia). Rare finds are blue four-digit collars from western

Alaska and yellow and green collars from interior Siberia. In 1997, refuge biologists saw almost 300 collared individuals. Forty-four of those birds were also seen in 1996.



This Ross's goose, blue collar TN5, banded in the Central Canadian Arctic, was observed in Harney County on April 7, 2004. Photo contributed by Kelly Hazen.

Besides collar information, radio telemetry equipment is sometimes used to search for radio frequencies on snow geese. These birds have collars with small radios attached, which can be heard up to eight miles away. Biologists scan for these radios from the ground and by plane by listening for each

radio's unique frequency beeping on a special receiver. This provides important information, since the geese are often too far away to read their collars. The life of the radio is limited to one year, but the collar can be read for many years to come.

Biologists can get an estimate of how long the geese stay in an area by multiple sightings of individuals, either by radio or collar information. In 1997, nine of the radioed birds were heard on more than one occasion, for an average stay of 29.5 days and 41 collared birds were seen on multiple occasions for an average stay of 14 days for snow geese and 23 days for Ross's geese.

Malheur Refuge and the Silvies flood plain are very important as spring staging areas for snow and Ross's geese. Watching the incredible spectacle of a moving cloud of thousands of white geese

is rewarding, but by participating in monitoring of the geese along with other biologists in the western states and in other countries, refuge biologists continue to learn more about our avian visitors. We hope the long-term data will continue to reveal their migration patterns, length of stay in each area and survival rates



GOOSE COLLAR MAGIC - A VOLUNTEER'S STORY

Kelly Hazen, Volunteer

Friends ask, "What got you interested in reading goose collars?" I say, "It's all Rick Vetter's fault." During a birding trip Rick mentioned that if we saw a snow goose with a red neck band that meant the bird had been banded on Wrangel Island, Russia. Wow! I thought that was pretty interesting and I was hooked!

Now 7 years later, I've seen 5 snow geese with red collars, 8 snow geese with green collars from the Eastern Canadian Arctic, 17 Ross's geese with yellow collars from the Eastern Canadian Arctic, 274 Ross's geese with blue collars from the Central Canadian Arctic, and 23

snow geese with black collars from the Western Canadian Arctic. Over the years I've read and reported a total of 327 collars to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center of the US Geological Survey. I first reported my sightings on a spreadsheet via mail but now I enter the information directly onto a web site.

A few highlights include seeing a Ross's goose that stayed in our

area at least 42 days; one goose seen two years in a row on the same day; seven geese seen in consecutive years, and a goose that hatched in 1993 was seen 3 years in a row (2001, 2002, and 2003).

(Continued on page 5)



Kelly Hazen, volunteer goose collar reader, and friend Andy, enjoy a spring day in Harney County. Photo contributed by Kelly Hazen.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS AT MALHEUR - 2008

Carey Goss, Refuge Liaison

As the years roll closer to the 100th birthday of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, refuge employees, friends and partners are starting now to plan a celebration worthy of a century of history, conservation and partnerships.

On August 18, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt established Malheur National Wildlife Refuge for the protection of migratory birds and other wildlife. Today, visitors personally experience portions of the 187,000 acres of prime habitat, which reflect almost 100 years of protection for fish and wildlife.

To celebrate Malheur National Wildlife Refuge's 100th birthday, plans for several activities and events are in progress to reveal the hard work of dedicated refuge staff, friends and partners. Most of the activities and events will take place in 2008, including the display of a Malheur National Wildlife Refuge community quilt and a refuge employee reunion. Malheur Wildlife Associates will be a key player in the celebration, as the 'friends' group of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge will assist with several projects in preparation for the event.

Further information about activities and events will be released throughout the next couple of years. We



Malheur Refuge staff and MWA members, Cal and Alice Elshoff, celebrated Malheur's 96th birthday in August 2004, as they plan for the 100th birthday celebration which will take place in 2008.

will keep you posted. If you have any suggestions to add to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge's 100th year birthday celebration, please contact Carey Goss at 541-493-2612 or email Carey_Goss@r1.fws.gov.



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