



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2010

[http:// www.refugefriends.com](http://www.refugefriends.com)

Number 32



N. pygmy owl, photo by Paul Bannick

The Owl and the Woodpecker

On March 26, 2010, the Friends, along with Conservation Northwest, will cosponsor a free presentation by Paul Bannick, author of “The Owl and the Woodpecker” at 7:00 PM. Location will be in the Auditorium of the Colville Community College, 985 S. Elm, Colville.

Since his childhood in Bellevue, Washington, Mr. Bannick has harbored a love for the environment and a passion for its conservation. He established a successful career in the software industry, working for 15 years at companies such as Aldus, Adobe Systems and Microsoft, but also nurtured a hobby as a photographer and is largely self-taught.

Today, as director of development for the nonprofit Conservation Northwest (conservationnw.org), the Seattle-based photographer has merged two of his main interests: Using photography as a tool to raise awareness about the plight of threatened habitat.

Trail Talk

Although the calendar says it's the 14th of February, as I look out my window it is hard not to think of spring. And just like the rest of you, when I think of spring I think of trail building on the LPO. I am sure that some of you might be worried that you have missed your opportunity to spend weekends becoming intimately familiar with a pick and shovel, but worry not; opportunities still abound.

McMEET

This is beginning to sound somewhat like a broken record, but the McMEET really is close to being completed. We just have two remaining components to finish: the observation blind and the big boulder-gathering site. The boulders are scheduled to be placed this May and the observation blind will be finished in 2010. I haven't finalized the work schedule for that project yet, but I will send out an email as soon as I do.

We have scheduled a work party to tidy the McMEET for **Sunday May 2nd**. Participants will enjoy raking, weed pulling, branch removal etc. All the fun things that you so look forward to; so make sure you get it on your calendar.

Mill Butte

The Mill Butte trail is close to being finished, but we still haven't been able to smoke the cigar. To reach the finish line just requires several days of dedicated effort. This work doesn't require any particular skills (my specialty), just a good attitude. If we could just get 5 or 6 of us out on the trail for a few days we could have our second Refuge trail finished. Once again I will send out emails once I schedule these exciting work parties.

Auto Tour – Rookery Road

After bringing McMEET and Mill Butte to their exciting conclusions, this will be our next trail endeavor. This trail will begin at the pull out area on Rookery Road and meander past a beautiful stand of old ponderosa pines, finally reaching a promontory overlooking the beaver ponded section of Bear Creek. This trail will provide visitors enjoying the auto tour an opportunity for a short walk to a quite lovely view as well as providing the Refuge with an excellent opportunity for interpretation. We may not get to this trail this year, but I get nervous if we don't have plenty of items on the to-do list.

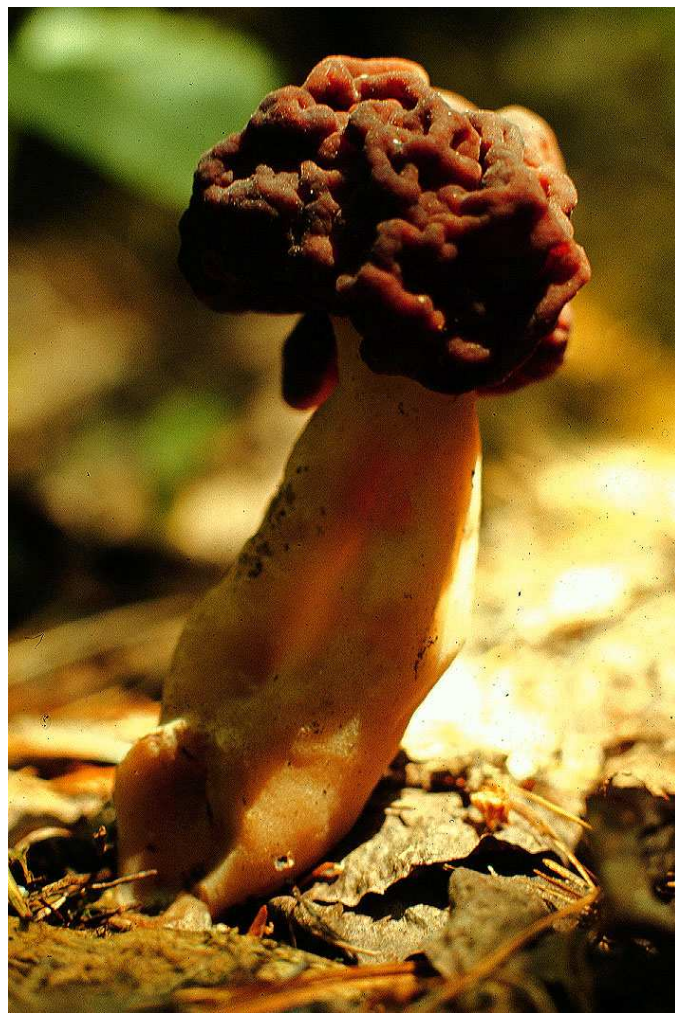
If you are interested in trail building please give me a call (6850478) and I will put you on the special list.

I look forward to working with you this spring/summer.

Rick Moore

Spring Mushroom Foray

Mycologist Jim Groth will again lead a one-day mushroom foray on Saturday, May 15 on the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. Emphasis will be on collecting morels for the table, but stress will also be put on identification and ecology of all fleshy fungi encountered. Meet at the Refuge headquarters at 9:30. Follow the brown signs as you head east out of Colville on Highway 20. Bring a bag lunch, water, collecting bag (no plastic) or basket, rain gear, and wear long pants. Also bring binoculars if you wish—birds and plants will be included for those interested. We should be finished by 3:30 PM. Please call Dr. Groth (509-684-1379) if you intend to participate. There is a limit of 30 people, so call early.



False morel

Little Pend Oreille Refuge Manager Steve Fowler Retires

It is hard to imagine Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge without Steve Fowler. He arrived in June of 1994 during the first year US Fish and Wildlife Service resumed active management of the refuge following 28 years of oversight by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. He left a fire management officer (FMO) position in a North Carolina refuge complex to serve as LPO's assistant manager and FMO. In this role, he helped build and direct the maintenance and habitat management programs until 2007 when Inland Northwest NWR Complex was created and he was tapped to be the LPO manager.

While Steve may not be reporting daily for duty at LPO now, his work endures - from the vigorously growing trees on the Sampson Orchard hillsides to the foundations of many refuge buildings. Steve oversaw so many important refuge projects – 2 headquarters remodels, new bunkhouse, shop, fire

cache and hazmat buildings, all the on-the-ground forest management from precommercial thinning, commercial thinning, lighting prescribed fires and putting out unwanted fires, and repairing roads that were negatively affecting refuge streams or loosening the teeth of refuge visitors.

As you can imagine refuge management is filled with delights and disappointments. He had a hand in many good decisions made at LPO including hiring excellent staff. He also worked hard on the difficult things including talking to irate in-your-face visitors and helping to complete several plans that are the foundations for LPO management – the first LPO Fire, Comprehensive Conservation, and Habitat Management plans.

His efforts have improved habitats for fish and wildlife, built trust and better relationships within the community and beyond, and established a strong foundation for future managers to build on. His integrity, knowledge, creativity, and sense of humor left a profound mark on land and people.

During the 2003 National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial each refuge was asked to install a time capsule to be opened in 2103. The LPO time capsule sits in the base of the flag pole at Refuge Headquarters. Words written by Steve are inscribed on the metal plate at the base "... elemental nature wisely kept, unfettered, undaunted, this teaming legacy of wild things in wild places handed down through the generations shall endure forever..."

Next time you walk through an LPO stand of tall Ponderosa pine, look for Steve. His work likely gave those trees more room to grow with less competition for sun and nutrients. Gaze up at those big trees. Big trees. Big shoes to fill!

Lisa Langelier
Complex Manager
Inland Northwest National Wildlife Complex

Refuge Update

Thanks to all who helped arrange and attended Steve Fowler's retirement celebration. He was very grateful for the show of appreciation he received from all who attended or sent their best wishes. It's

my privilege to substitute for Steve as the acting manager for a couple of months until his position is filled. So far the job hasn't been too bad; a good staff always makes things easier. I'm enjoying the job; it's challenging and the "new car smell" hasn't worn off yet!

The staff spent the last few months planning for the upcoming field season. We're starting to bring back seasonal employees in the fire shop and sending some off to training. Kelly Connall just returned from a detail on the Big Island of Hawaii as part of a fire protection severity crew on Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge. Regaling us with tales of wild pigs and cattle, fields of noxious gorse, mongoose trapping and the Fish and Wildlife Services' efforts to recover native Hawaiian bird species, you know he was on a working vacation.

We're sorry to be losing one of our fire crew to greater opportunity. Russ Schneider accepted an appointment with the U.S. Forest Service and will be moving to New Mexico in early March. Russ graduated from Kettle Falls High School and has been with the LPO NWR fire crew for several years. Our loss is their gain as he has been a solid member of the LPO team, and we will miss him.

We welcome to the Inland Northwest National Wildlife Refuge Complex Dan Matiatos, the new Deputy Project Leader. Dan comes to us from a refuge in Indiana and is stationed at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. He serves as the manager of that unit, as well as supervising the managers of Little Pend Oreille and Kootenai National Wildlife Refuges.

That's all for now. Spring is here and it's a great time to visit your refuge. Come on out and see us.

Jerry Cline, Acting Manager, LPO

2009/2010 Winter Observations

Where have all the finches gone? Winter finches, especially Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Cassin's Finches, and Red Crossbills have been hard to find. The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place December 19, 2009 in the Colville and

Kettle Falls area and finches were hard to come by then. Of these 4 species mentioned, we only counted 8 Red Crossbills. Our House Finch and American Goldfinch counts were much lower than the last few years. Here at the Refuge the only winter finches I've seen at the feeders are American Goldfinch and Pine Siskin. Our winter bird count in early January only produced Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins. How many finch species have you been seeing?

I could also ask- where has all the snow gone? The answer to that is east of here all the way to the east coast of the United States. As I was out walking on the muddy hillsides of LPO in mid February, I realized I had not been cross country skiing once this winter.

But back to the CBC for a bit. Wild Turkey is always a species with one of our highest number of birds counted, however this year they were the second lowest in the last six years. We counted 341, down from a high count of 865 in 2006. Red-winged Blackbirds were at an all time high of 111 counted. The previous high count was 55 in 2005. I saw my first Red Wing on the Refuge February 12, a male. Usually after the first Red Wings return we get one more snowfall that melts off the same day.

White-headed Woodpeckers have been very visible this year. They have been seen by the corral on Bear Creek Road, around headquarters, along the Mill Butte Trail and around the Fire Cache. Black-backed woodpeckers were spotted near McDowell Marsh and Durlan Springs (which is the first gate on the left when driving into LPO on Bear Creek Road.) Durlan Springs is a walk in only area. In fact, that is where I saw by first and only Great Gray Owl in April of 2000. It sure would be great if we could find another one on LPO.

Beavers have been very active on the LPO River just downstream from HQ. They have really thinned out the alders and there is a new dam just a five minute walk from the office.

I know folks already have cabin fever and are getting spring fever. Some have driven out to the Refuge only to find our roads still closed. Lower portions of our roads are muddy and shaded and upper portions are still icy. Our gates will open mid April and some roads will still not be passable. Hang in

there everyone; the grass has already started to green up at my place. Next will be the buttercups blooming, then the songbirds returning and the biting insects and we all will be enjoying SPRING!

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Winter's Funeral



Photo by Jim Groth

Biology Ramblings

The arrival of redwing blackbirds at Refuge Headquarters is one of our best indicators of spring. Actually it's felt like spring since December; how I've enjoyed this mild winter! After back-to-back snowy years wildlife on the Refuge are enjoying a needed reprieve.

The last two winters were pretty rough on many species. Deer harvest this fall was down for the second year in a row, a result of low winter survival the previous two winters. This mild winter should result in higher than average deer survival and I'm optimistic about a rebound in the deer population.

Wild turkeys are another refuge resident that's had a tough time keeping body and soul together through the last two winters. Indicative of this year's lenient weather was the scarcity of turkeys loitering around headquarters. Most winters they cruise the headquarters area like homeless vagrants, mooching off the black oil sunflower seeds spilled from the songbird feeders by gluttonous flickers. Often they elect one of their crew to perch precariously atop the feeder, like a ridiculously rotund version of a Currier and Ives' weather vane rooster, with instructions to "Shake some of that black gold down to your homies!" This year the wandering band of banditos were few in number and only made a cou-

ple of quick walk-throughs by the feeders; the lack of snow doubtlessly making it easy this year to find food the old school way.

We celebrated winter with our ninth annual winter bird count. Eleven hearty souls braved the clear but cold morning indentifying and counting the Refuge's avian residents. A lack of snow precluded using snowshoes and skis, but it did make it easier to reach many parts of the Refuge less accessible most other years. Thirty six species were observed, the most ever recorded. The average over the preceding eight years was about 27 species observed, with a range of 20 to 34 species/year. Three hundred eighty-eight total birds were counted, slightly below the eight year average of 417. However this is well above last year's total of only 169 birds. While the number of species seen stays relatively constant, the total number observed can fluctuate greatly, influenced mostly by occasional species irruptions. For example, 784 birds were counted in 2003, with pine siskins accounting for 286 of those. Those pine siskins were the only ones recorded during five consecutive winter counts; no siskins were seen or heard on this count again until 15 were recorded in 2007. So, what we found this year is about average for a non-irruptive year.

Green-winged teal and Townsend's solitaire were the new species recorded this year. Neither species was a big surprise since both have been observed the Colville area during the winter. Our lack of open water most winters makes the teal unusual for this count. The solitaire is relatively infrequent on the refuge (hence its name) but it was only a matter of time before we would record one on the count. Thanks to the volunteers and staff for participating and please plan on doing this again next year.

Jerry Cline, Refuge Staff

Photographers Wanted!

The more time one spends out at our Refuge, the more one becomes aware of the variety of opportunities for taking wonderful photos of this unique place in our corner of northeastern Washington. Ours isn't a single season refuge. It changes from day-to-day, week-to-week, and season-to-season.

There are hidden corners of our Refuge to explore with one's camera. There are photo-ops just waiting for visitors on any of their trips to the LPO.

The 2009 Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last August 16th and will extend until next (2010) August 15th. We are looking for pictures of the flora and fauna, of panoramas, and of people using the Refuge. We are also looking for photos from students.

Information and entry forms are available from me at janderson@ultraplix.com. Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

Joel Anderson , Board Member



Newsletter Necessities

Number 32 - Jim Groth - Editor

To send comments, write articles for the newsletter, or to contribute items of interest, please contact:

Editor, *The Pileated Post*
P.O. Box 215, Colville, WA 99114
Email: larchsavage@yahoo.com

The Pileated Post is published quarterly and is mailed to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

Calendar

March

3rd - Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
27th - The Owl and Woodpecker - 7:00 PM

April

14th - Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.

May

12th - Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
15th - Mushroom Foray - 9:30 a.m.

Our Mission: The Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the conservation of native fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats on the Refuge, providing educational opportunities, and fostering understanding and appreciation of the Refuge.



Box 215
Colville, WA 99114

Friends of the LPO

Membership Application

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