



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2017

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

Number 60

From the President

In the past few years I have become a very strong advocate for getting our kids out into nature. My work with our Environmental Education Days and the Youth Conservation Corps as made me see just how important it is and that we are currently failing to do all that we can do. Getting kids in nature might be more vital than you think.

We already know that our children spend a lot less time outdoors than they did 20 years ago. Only 6% of children will play outside by themselves in a week. And it is not just getting kids outside but getting kids into nature. A walk in nature can do some amazing things for your physical and mental health. A walk through town does not have the same effect according to a study published last July in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The study found five interesting conclusions.

Hiking does really clear your head. It leads to lower stress levels and being less moody or brooding.

A hike can make you more creative and help in problem solving skills.

Hiking boosts your focus and can help kids (and adults) with ADHA. In the case of reducing symptoms of ADHD it was the combination of nature and physical activity that gave the greatest benefit. Nature may just be one of our best medicines.

Hiking helps to recharge (and I would also say refocus) your body and mind. If you are a parent a 90-minute hike in nature has also been shown to improve your kid's grades. Get those school kids out.

Lastly a hike makes you feel better about yourself. I for one can attest to that. There is nothing like a good hike to put your mind in a more positive place.

Not only is hiking good for our youth but it is good for everyone. We need to put in a better effort to get our kids out in nature. It is the responsibility of all of

us, even those of us who have no children such as myself. 94% of parents in one survey felt our schools needed to do more about getting kids into nature. With budgets the way they are it is a difficult task but one that is of utmost importance not only for having a better educated population but also a population that understands and cares about the importance of our wild places. Schools play a vital role in areas with high rates of poverty where many of the parents find it difficult to have the time or money to get their kids out. It does take a village!

What can you do? If you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle and you have the time come out and take a hike at the refuge. The McDowell Lake trail is a great place to start.

You can also come out and help at our Environmental Education Day with the 2nd and 5th grades from the Colville School District.

There will also be hikes and activities that are family friendly that will be offered this spring and summer at the Refuge. Keep an eye on our website and our Facebook page.

Now get out a take a hike!!

Dan Price . President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

It's a new year with a new President, a new Secretary of Interior—designate and soon a new Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's reassuring that Congressman Ryan Zinke, President Trump's nominee for Interior Secretary, is a supporter of public lands, unlike the earlier front-runner for the post from our own congressional district. Time will tell what policies he and the yet to be determined Director will advocate. At least divestiture of federal public lands seems a little less threatening.

The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation and the Bundy's are again in the news. In Portland the "B" list occupiers are on trial for a variety of crimes. Federal prosecutors learned lessons from the earlier trial and are casting a wider net of potential crimes, but the earlier acquittal will cast a shadow on this trial. In Las Vegas, Cliven, Ammon and Ryan Bundy, along with others, will soon be tried for their armed standoff with the BLM a couple of years ago. The results of that trial will either reinforce the concept of federal land management or erode over a century of federal stewardship. Honestly, I'd rather get my dose of judicial drama through rogue lawyers and runaway juries in John Grisham thrillers.

In December Dan Price and Laurie Kulp, Refuge Friends President and Secretary respectively, participated with Refuge staff and representatives from the Regional and Washington Office in a workshop evaluating the potential impacts of climate change on this refuge's infrastructure. Climate change could impact natural processes like wildfire frequency and intensity, as well as spring runoff volume, timing and duration. Refuge buildings, particularly the maintenance/fire cache complex, would be very susceptible to wildfire damage or loss. We also felt roads and bridges were vulnerable to damage from events like rapid snow melt and above average runoff volume. We discussed several projects such as tree thinning around the buildings to reduce fire threat and arming bridge abutments to withstand higher than normal flow events. Since we're now aware of these threats, we'll be looking at ways to protect these important facilities in the future.

Dan Price and I have compiled and edited the new formal agreement between the Friends and the Refuge. Recent changes in national policy sought to clarify some issues regarding the relationship and division of responsibilities between national wildlife refuges and their respective Friends groups. Most of the issues driving the policy change didn't exist within our affiliation, so there's very little change to our current excellent working relationship. The Friends are and will continue to be a "priceless" asset to this Refuge!

I knew the day was coming when I would write these words, and it's finally arrived. Barbara Harding, our purchasing agent, will be retiring from the Fish and Wildlife Service on March 31. Barba-

ra started working here 18 years ago as a part-time employee/full time refuge lover. After a couple of years she was deservedly converted to full time status, charged with keeping the refuge staff in line, on time and out of jail. "Purchasing clerk" doesn't come close to describing her service and value to this refuge. As part of a small staff, Barbara performed many functions, both those listed in her position description and many that aren't: typist, editor, webmaster, dispatcher, custodian, chauffeur, meeting planner and cake baker/morale officer. She made sure everyone was paid and there was toilet paper in the restrooms. Barbara's departure leaves a big pair of hiking boots to fill. She'll be missed.



Barbara celebrating 15 years on the refuge.

Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager

Refuge Biologist's Report

You may have noticed we got a little snow this winter. Those of you that are regular readers know I wrote about animal tracks in my last column. This was a great winter for tracking and I hope you got a chance to come see the refuge this winter. One of the highlights of winter on the refuge is always the staff and friends winter bird count in January. In spite of the abundant snow we had a good turnout. Eight folks turned out and found 22 species. If you were wonder-

ing how this compares to previous years we had 21 species in 2016, 24 in 2015, 28 in 2014, and 23 in 2013. So numbers are pretty typical for the last 5 years. The number of participants is pretty average too as we had 8 in 2016, 7 in 2015, 7 in 2014, and 9 in 2013.

This year's list was:

Red-tailed hawk, Wild turkey Downy woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker White-headed woodpecker, Northern flicker, Pileated woodpecker, Clark's nutcracker, Common raven, Black-capped chickadee Mountain chickadee, Red-breasted nuthatch, White-breasted nuthatch, Pygmy nuthatch, Brown creeper, Pacific wren, Golden-crowned kinglet, Song sparrow, Dark-eyed junco, Red crossbill, Pine siskin, American goldfinch

Counts for the last 5 years for some of the more common species were:

Dark-eyed Junco	
2017	12
2016	2
2015	2
2014	4
2013	2

Chickadees	Black-capped	Mountain
2017	19	4
2016	14	5
2015	43	11
2014	24	3
2013	29	15

Red breasted Nuthatch	
2017	36
2016	15
2015	41
2014	38
2013	56

What you see in these numbers is a lot of variability. So why is that? Chickadees and nuthatches like finches and many of our wintering species, are highly nomadic. That means they don't necessarily migrate south but they do move around a lot in search of food. They are extremely cold tolerant. Mountain and black-capped chickadees along with red-breasted nuthatches will overwinter north of the Arctic Circle

if there is sufficient food. Where they go depends on where they are finding food not just seeds but they need hibernating insects as well. Juncos on the other hand typically migrate. Although, how far depends on weather conditions. What that means is the juncos that nest around here move to points farther south such as Oregon or California, which is why you generally don't see them in early winter. Then we see birds from Canada and Alaska which move into our area for the winter. That is why we often have the juncos leave in October just to return in December. However the last several winters have been pretty mild so many juncos from farther north have not had to come this far south even though our nesting birds still left. Juncos are definitely moving around more and we had unusually high counts of juncos on the Colville and Chewelah Christmas Bird Counts as well this winter. Continent wide maps on eBird also show a lot fewer juncos in Alaska and Western Canada this year and higher numbers throughout Washington, Idaho, and Oregon than have been recorded in recent years.

However this supposed to be the spring issue. So let's think spring. That means melting snow, budding wildflowers, leaves on trees and birds singing. Speaking of birds singing how often have you thought about the common robin? If you have not lately (or even if you have) keep reading.

Critter of the Season



It is the one bird practically every American (or Canadian) knows. You have seen them tugging on worms in your lawn but have you ever stopped to appreciate the American robin? It's also known as *Turdus migratorius*. *Turdus* is Latin for thrush so the scientific name is translated as the migratory thrush. It is the largest thrush that regularly occurs in the United States. It is also the most widespread birds in

the USA and Canada. At some time of year you can find them from the Florida Keys to the northernmost point of Alaska and from Coast of Nunavut to Costa Rica. That range includes the Refuge. They can be found almost anywhere on the refuge but one of the most reliable places is right here at the refuge headquarters almost any day from spring thru fall. In addition to those worms in your yard, they will eat quite a variety of insects and fruit. They forage on the ground and the foliage of vegetation. You may have seen them cocking their head to one side so they can get a better look at some morsel. They also almost constantly probe with their bill on the ground, in grass or leaves and other vegetation looking for insects to eat. They can be pretty particular when it comes to eating fruit. Fruit needs to be high in fructose (fruit sugar) but not sucrose (cane sugar). They are able to distinguish the ratio of the different sugars and will not eat fruits that exceed 15% sucrose. They are important seed dispersers for many berry producing plants.

Robins build nests just about anywhere and their nests are made of grass and mud. In that nest the female typically lays 3 to 5 eggs. They eggs are incubated for about 2 weeks then the young fledge in another 2 weeks. The eggs are blue. Have you thought about why blue? It turns out that research published just last year gives us an answer. It turns out that blue eggs reflect just the right amount of light especially ultraviolet light. This provides just the right amount of both light and heat inside the egg. Too pale and it may absorb too much ultraviolet. Too dark and it can get too hot inside the egg. For those of who may do photography think of it as neutral gray for ultraviolet.

The next time you are outside whether you own lawn or our National Wildlife Refuges take time to appreciate this common but often overlooked thrush.

I would like to say one final thing. Barbara Harding who writes the next column will be retiring a couple of weeks after this gets sent out. I am sure Jerry already mentioned it but I will say it for myself: Thank you Barbara for all your hard work these many years on behalf of wildlife and the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. If you get a chance to see her please tell her thanks and Happy (Birding) Trails.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Winter Wildlife 2016-17

On November 21, I walked out for the mail around 3 pm. Jerry looked up from his computer and saw 2 otters in the lawn just outside his office window. They were frolicking around as otters do, then disappeared into the tall grass. He met me outside as I was returning with the mail and handed me a pair of binoculars. He told me about the otters and had me walk behind Headquarters to look for them. I could hear noise in the creek that runs down to the Little Pend Oreille River but it is difficult to look down into it so I never did see the otters. What I did see was a huge chunk of our sentinel cottonwood tree down on the ground. Not many branches left for the eagles to perch on. We have enjoyed watching many bird species use that tree over the years. From birds mating to nesting holes, hunting perches and a high lookout perch. I am sorry to see branches breaking off bit by bit.

The first bird seen at our Headquarters' feeder was a black-capped chickadee on November 28. A northern flicker perched on the middle ledge of my office window. Not sure what it was doing- maybe just avoiding flying into the window. Pileated woodpeckers are my favorite woodpecker and I got to watch one on December 8 as it was on a snag searching for food. With that large bill, the wood chips flew off the trunk. Occasionally this winter, Clark's nutcrackers have been heard on Starvation Flat. I was glad to see an adult Bald eagle perched on our diminished cottonwood tree on December 8. I saw one fly down river the day before.

I am still waiting to see my first wolf on the Refuge. On December 6, staff discovered 14 piles of wolf scat in the road near the Christianson homestead. So close yet so elusive. Of course seeing a cougar is near the top of my bucket list. Jerry finally saw a cougar as he was driving out on Bear Creek Road on December 28. It was getting dark and he came around the corner just before our Refuge entrance sign and saw the cat in the middle of the road. It turned and looked at him then walked to the side of the road, jumped over the snow berm, looked at him again then walked into the trees. Could you ask for more??? What a grand sighting!

One of the things I really enjoy about winter is the opportunity to see mammal tracks in the snow and find out who has been where. Otter tracks were seen on December 15 coming out of the Headquarters Pond and going into Spring Creek. I've seen moose tracks cross Bear Creek Road by the corral heading for the river. Wolf tracks were seen around the Christianson homestead during our winter bird count. And

cougar tracks were seen on Bear Creek Road January 25. I do wonder how much energy animals have to expend to walk through deep snow or snow with a hard crust on top of it. On December 28 I watched two White-tailed deer cross Log Barn Meadow. The first deer was a small buck with an antler only on the left side of his head. The other deer walked slowly and laboriously a ways behind him with its ears back - clearly not happy. About mid field they turned towards the river and crossed it.

Dan Price had a great visit to the Refuge on January 3rd. He saw a mink and 2 otters in the LPO River behind Headquarters. Bobcats were seen crossing Chester Field on December 31 and by the snow park off Tiger Highway on January 4. Jerry saw a raccoon at the Durlan Springs gate on January 25-- quite a rare sighting on the Refuge.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff



Spring Mushroom Foray

Mycologist Jim Groth will lead a one-day mushroom foray on Saturday, April 29, 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 20 people, so call early.



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 2017 and eleventh Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2016) August 16th and extends until August 15th this year. Judging will take place soon and winners will be featured in, among other places, the Winter Pileated Post. Thank you for your submissions.

Contact me if you have questions at onionjoel@gmail.com. Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

Joel Anderson

Newsletter Necessities

Number 60 - Jim Groth - Editor

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

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

Calendar

March

8th --Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m.

31st—Spring wildlife program, 6:30 p.m.

April

12th Board meeting, 6:00 p.m.

May

10th – Board Meeting – 6:00 p.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.



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