



Experiencing Malheur, For Dummies

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Oregon is a special place, for so many reasons and for so many people. It seems to have an indelible effect on visitors, as evidenced by the small but dedicated group of birders, naturalists and solitude-seekers that for decades have made annual or semi-annual pilgrimages to the place. First-time visitors to the area tend to come away awed, even reverent, and eager to return.

Located in remote Harney County, Malheur is a high-desert oasis for wildlife, an ecological jewel along the Pacific Flyway when such refuges for migratory birds are few and far between. It is a place that, through its subtle charms and hard-won acquaintance, speaks volumes to people, and stays with them wherever they go.

Here are some common-sense tips on how to make the most of your visit, whether you are a Malheur neophyte or a dust-bitten, sun-wizened high-desert devotee.

- Bring a good map. Outside of the well-marked Center Patrol Road and various others found within the Refuge, there are a great deal of side-routes in the general Malheur vicinity that may be of interest to visitors. Most of these roads are unpaved and some rather rough. It therefore behooves visitors to know which roads are which, how to find them, and where it is they lead to.
- Bring extra water, food, fuel and other supplies. Distances between points of interest in the high-desert country of southeast Oregon can be formidable. Be aware of where you can reliably find fuel, food and water. It isn't uncommon to encounter signs stating "Next services: Forget about it", or something to that effect. (Just kidding...mostly.) Gas up when you can and bring extra supplies just in case. Having at least one good, full-sized spare is also recommended—those seemingly interminable miles of gravel road are known to bestow flat tires to the underprepared.
- Wear sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, and pack multiple layers. Weather in the northwest Great Basin is mercurial: desiccating heat during summer days, chilly temperatures at night. Some areas see an almost 40-degree swing in temperatures from day to night in summer. The sun may shine mercilessly through the thin, dry air; thunderstorms may roll through, dropping the mercury in a matter of hours and turning dirt roads to slick mud. The desert wind, when it's really blowing, can be downright oppressive. Come prepared for all seasons, and if you happen to visit during late May or early June, resign yourself to voracious hordes of mosquitoes.
- Bring binoculars, a camera, spotting scope, etc. You're going to see amazing things at Malheur, and the better equipped you are to espy these things with clarity and proper magnification/field of view, the better off you'll be.

Enjoy your Malheur experience!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Pearsall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter Pearsall
Executive Director