



## Malheur Musings - April 2017

### Things Can Only Get Better!

Gary Ivey, President



Malheur Refuge headquarters.

Friends,

You may have wondered why we have been so silent over this long winter. Tragically, last November our Executive Director and only employee, Tim Blount suffered a heart attack which was followed by 3 strokes. Tim has been slowly recovering from this tragedy and has greatly improved, but unfortunately, he is unable to return to work. So now we are seeking to hire a new Executive Director. Tim has returned to actively watching birds and taking photos. We wish Tim the best in his future.

Although the acquittal of the defendants in the first Malheur Refuge occupation trial last fall was very disappointing, better justice was served in the second trial. Of the seven defendants to stand trial in February, three plea bargained and pleaded guilty to lesser charges while four were tried on felony charges. All four were all convicted of various felonies by a jury on March 10. Additionally, they were each also convicted of at least one misdemeanor charge. The trials are now behind us and it is a relief to get past that. We hope to get back to normal business soon.

Some better news is that Malheur Refuge was able to fill six vacant positions so a new crew is there to help manage Malheur. The new Deputy Refuge Manager is now Jeff Mackay, the new habitat ecologist is Ed Sparks, the new fish biologist is Joe Barnett, the new wildlife biologist is Alexa Martinez, the new administrative assistant is Suzanne McConnell, and the new fire fighter is David Kannas. We wish them all great success at Malheur and look forward to working with them to help serve Malheur Refuge and the public who enjoy it.

Also, very good news is that the Refuge headquarters compound and museum is now open to the public. However, the offices won't be open for a couple of weeks after all the security measures are completed. Watch our

couple of weeks, after all the security measures are completed. Watch our web page for news of the official opening of the visitor center and our nature store.

We are looking forward to opening our Nature Store again and for life at Malheur to get back to normal so we can work with Refuge staff to make refuge improvements where they are needed!

## Chad Karges Receives Theodore Roosevelt Lifetime Achievement Award

Carl Woodward, Board Member

Interior Department Secretary Sally Jewel's office provided the backdrop for the presentation of the National Wildlife Refuge Association's prestigious Theodore Roosevelt Lifetime Achievement Award to Chad Karges, Refuge Manager of Malheur NWR. In the presence of an Interior Department Honor Guard and surrounded by family, friends, members of the Fish and Wildlife Service and representatives of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Chad was recognized for his outstanding work in working with and developing community support for the Refuge, and in engaging with the local ranching community to gain recognition of the benefits of mutual cooperation in the management of the refuge and its surrounding lands to the advantage of all involved. Chad was also recognized for his outstanding leadership during the crisis created by the illegal occupation of the refuge by armed militants during January and February 2016. [Read more....](#)



David Houghton presenting the award to Chad Karges.

## Visiting Malheur Refuge and the Harney Basin in Spring

Gary Ivey, President

When is the best time to visit during spring migration in the Harney Basin?" It depends on whether you would like to see large concentrations of birds or lots of different species.

In early March only a few spring migrants have arrived in the area. These include Greater Sandhill Cranes, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, Canada, White-fronted, Snow and Ross' Geese, and Northern Pintails. Sage Grouse begin displaying on their leks. Lesser Sandhill Cranes begin arriving in early March along with other duck species. During this early spring period, the majority of the birds can be found feeding in flooded hayed meadows near Burns. Raptors are also abundant in the Basin by late March. Migration in the Blitzen Valley of Malheur Refuge is much less spectacular because the area is outside the major migration paths. The refuge is the best area to see the local Trumpeter Swans (try Benson Pond) and to get a look at Greater Sandhill Cranes.

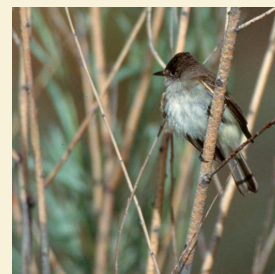




Ross' Geese feeding on the Silvies River Floodplain. Photo by Gary Ivey.

Waterfowl numbers increase in the area through March and, depending on the weather, usually reach their peak during the last week of March. As time progresses, more and more species migrate into the basin: American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Western Grebes, Long-billed Curlews, and American Avocets are some of the birds that arrive in late March. More marsh birds, shorebirds, and passerines species show up as spring progresses into April, while the numbers of migrant waterfowl gradually decreases.

The number of bird species in the Harney Basin increases through April and peaks in late May or early June. By May, thousands of White-faced Ibis and Franklin's Gulls are present, along with a great variety of other waterbirds and shorebirds. Sage Grouse stop strutting by early-May. Rare species such as vagrant eastern warblers show up from mid-May to mid-June. Best places to search for "rare" birds are the Malheur Refuge Headquarters, P-Ranch, Benson Pond, and the small town of Fields near the Nevada border.



Malheur Willow Flycatcher. Photo by Terry Steele

If you are looking for rare birds to add to your list, then visit Malheur Refuge from mid-May to mid-June.

## Thanks to our Volunteers!

Alice Elshoff, Vice-President

As soon as we were allowed into Refuge Headquarters last spring, a group of dedicated gardeners pulled weeds, dug up rocks, shoveled dirt, hauled soil enhancer and planted a pollinator garden near Marshall Pond. As we were working, the nearby blossoming lilacs were full of Monarch butterflies, so hopefully the Milkweed we planted will some day be a help to them, since it is the preferred plant on which they lay their eggs in the fall.



Local volunteer work party, May 2016.

Bringing irrigation to help the plants get established made the weeds very happy and weed pulling continued through the summer and will be needed again next spring. Lots of job security there for weed pullers. The good news is that the plants are doing well and as they are all natives, they should winter well.

This fall, it took two weekend work parties to gather all the piles of barb wire that had been removed from old wildlife-unfriendly fences and stashed in the southern meadows over several years of fence removal. We gathered and transported 3 truck loads and one trailer full to headquarters where the metal



can be picked up and recycled. Not all of the piles were accessible by truck, so much had to be carried by hand. These were some dedicated workers! We also spruced up the trailhead at the Frenchglen Kiosk, shoveling, leveling, and graveling the area.

We started to conduct our Highway Litter pick-up on the 5 miles of highway, just north of Frenchglen, to honor our new sign which gives us credit, but the roadside was so clean we suspect that maybe the Frenchglen school has started doing it and enjoying the can and bottle credits. Either that or drivers have suddenly become more responsible. There will be plenty to do this spring. Check our web page for volunteer opportunities and we hope to see you.

## Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative

Gary Ivey, President



Greater Sandhill cranes on the Silvies Floodplain.  
Photo by Gary Ivey.

The Harney Basin Wetlands initiative is a product of the collaborative partnership which helped Malheur with their Comprehensive Conservation Plan. This initiative works to implement a basin-wide carp control strategy and adaptive management to improve the health of wetlands in the Basin; to maintain traditional flood irrigation practices on the Silvies River

floodplain and other private lands that sustain important seasonal wetland habitats; and to improve riverine and riparian habitats across the Harney Basin. Implementation of this initiative will provide broad benefits to wetland wildlife.

We are a partner in this initiative and we have pledged our support to assist moving habitat improvement projects forward. [For more info...](#)

## Friends of Malheur Executive Director Job Announcement

We are planning on hiring an Executive Director. If you or someone you know is interested in applying for the position, you can find the announcement on our web page and [here](#).





Malheur Black-necked Stilts. Photo by Gary Ivey

## Thanks for your support!

It's your refuge, regardless of where you live, and the Friends of Malheur are fortunate to have such friends as you. Thank you for all your support and we hope you can visit Malheur soon!



Malheur Long-billed Curlews. Photo by Gary Ivey

***Malheur remains at the forefront of the public lands debate and we, Friends of Malheur, are letting our voices be heard. Your continued support will help us support Malheur Refuge and in this struggle to protect National Wildlife Refuges and other public lands.***

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