



FRIENDS OF **MALHEUR** NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Malheur Musings - May 2018



Western tanager at Refuge HQ
Photo by Peter Pearsall

Director's Message

Dear Friends,

Late-spring migration is well underway at Malheur Refuge, with new species showing up every few days. It's natural spectacles like this that showcase the importance of Wildlife Refuges across the country--particularly those located along major migratory flyways.

Tens of thousands of birds will pass through Malheur Refuge this spring on their way up the Pacific Flyway, and thousands of birders will flock here to observe them. It's one of the reasons why Malheur is known as an oasis in the high desert: The various habitats protected within its boundaries serve as crucial stopover sites for an incredible abundance and diversity of wildlife, concentrating them in areas managed

specifically for their benefit. This oasis effect is especially pronounced at Refuge Headquarters, where cottonwoods, fruit trees and flowering shrubs planted decades ago draw passerine migrants like moths to a flame.

In a sea of sagebrush and other low-stature plants, large trees and ornamental shrubs are particularly enticing to these birds, and many birders time their Malheur visits to coincide with the leafing, budding and flowering of these planted species. Towering cottonwoods offer shade and foraging habitat in their branches, leaves and bark; sweet-scented crab-apple, cherry and lilac blossoms attract clouds of pollinating insects, which in turn attract insectivorous birds. Some of the species seen lately at HQ include warbling and Cassin's vireos; gray and Hammond's flycatchers; black-throated gray, orange-crowned, Nashville, yellow, Wilson's, Audubon's, Myrtle, and Tennessee warblers; Lewis's woodpeckers; ruby-crowned kinglets; red-breasted nuthatches; and Western tanagers. Other species of note are black-headed and evening grosbeaks; black-chinned and rufous hummingbirds; red-breasted sapsuckers; American white pelicans; black terns; white-faced ibises; avocets, stilts, phalaropes; and many more.

Speaking of new developments, we've finally made the move into our new space at Refuge Headquarters. The "Crane's Nest Nature Center & Store" is now open! Our hours of operation will match those of the Visitor Center (the prior location of the Nature Store), so please stop by during your Refuge visit and say hello to our wonderful volunteers!

On another note, the 2018 Annual Meeting is less than a week away! The meeting and staff presentations will take place Friday, May 18, from 2-4 p.m., followed by a social event in Burns that evening. On Saturday, May 19, we'll head out on tours of the Refuge. All active FOMR members are encouraged to join us!

To RSVP, please contact us at friends@malheurfriends.org with "Annual Meeting" in the subject line by no later than May 16. We look forward to meeting you!

Happy migration, everyone!

Peter Pearsall
Executive Director, Friends of Malheur Refuge



Spring Hours at Malheur HQ

The Visitor Center (pictured) and Crane's Nest Nature Center & Store share the same hours:

Open 7 days a week, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

Voltage Fire at Malheur Refuge

On April 27, a lightning strike started a wildfire in dry marsh vegetation about a mile northeast of Malheur Refuge Headquarters. The Voltage Fire, as it's now known, has burned approximately 1,500 acres and is currently 60-70 percent contained. No structures were damaged. It is the first Refuge wildfire of 2018 and is considered unseasonably early for this area.



Firefighters working the Voltage Fire
Photo by FOMR volunteer Kay Steele

Firefighters continue to suppress the fire, which smolders on in organic soils below the surface. It's a sobering reminder that our area is in drought and wildfires can spark up in an instant, even outside of the expected fire season.

Meet Shelly and Robert, MNWR Fishery Technicians

by Shelly Pickett and Robert Esquivel

Through funding provided by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, High Desert Partnership, Malheur NWR, FOMR and others, Shelly Pickett and Robert Esquivel were hired in April as Fishery Technicians for the 2018 field season. Both are assisting Refuge staff and partners with a variety of projects in and around Malheur Lake. [Read more here.](#)



From left to right: Candace Larson (Portland Audubon Field Biologist), Shelly Pickett, Alexa Martinez (MNWR Biologist), Robert Esquivel
Photo by Peter Pearsall

Dark Skies of Harney County

Visitors come to Malheur for its wildlife, its austere scenery, the freeing sense of space and solitude, the tangible connection to eras long past. But there is an entirely different side to this region that's only visible after dark, preferably on a cloudless night under a waning moon. That's when the skies above this wide-open landscape come alive with the billion-year-old shine of myriad stars and galaxies.



The Milky Way over Refuge Headquarters
Photo by Peter Pearsall

Night skies in and around Harney Basin are among the most stellar in the country. Under the right viewing conditions, this desert sleeps beneath a blanket of stars so thick and profuse as to beggar belief. [Read more here.](#)

Join Us for the Bobolink Survey!

On Saturday, June 9, in cooperation with Malheur National Wildlife Refuge staff, FOMR volunteers and field biologists from Portland Audubon survey for bobolinks on the Refuge. This survey, which dates back several decades at Malheur Refuge, involves walking established transect routes through wet meadow habitat, counting birds both seen and heard.

We could still use 5-6 more people to help with this survey, which can involve wading through knee-high water. [Get more details here.](#)



Male bobolink
Photo by Dan Streiffert

Crane's Nest Nature Center & Store: Historical Context



The building that currently houses the Crane's Nest Nature Center & Store was built in the mid-1930s by members of the Civilian Conservation Corps, at the same time as many of the other structures at Refuge Headquarters. In fact, most of the historic infrastructure located throughout Malheur Refuge was installed by CCC crews stationed there between 1935-1942. The stone blocks used to construct many of these buildings--including the one housing Crane's Nest--were quarried near Buena Vista Station, south of Headquarters.

Located near the display pond at Headquarters, the Crane's Nest building was the former residence of Refuge biologist David B. Marshall and his family during the 1950s. The display pond and adjacent trail are named for Marshall, who was known for his strong advocacy for wildlife and habitat conservation.

Dave Marshall long knew his life would center around birds. During a 1939 Audubon trip to southeast Oregon, a 13-year-old Marshall decided he wanted a career being paid to observe them. Birding was already in his genes.

His great-great grandfather traveled by covered wagon to Oregon carrying a pair of field glasses, and his parents were early members of the Audubon Society of Portland. Wildlife photographer and conservationist William L. Finley was a family friend.

Marshall began working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Nevada and California in 1951. In November 1955 he returned to southeast Oregon, transferring from Sacramento Refuge to Malheur as the Wildlife Management Biologist. He held this position for five years before transferring to the Regional Office in Portland, where he served as the Regional Wildlife Biologist for 12 years. He retired in 1981 after a distinguished 30-year career with the Service. Marshall passed away in November 2011 at the age of 85.

Marshall's legacy lives on in the trail and pond at Headquarters that bear his name. We at FOMR are honored and privileged to share this historical space with the public as the newly designed Crane's Nest Nature Center & Store.

As always, stay tuned to our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for updates!

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Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge | www.malheurfriends.org
friends@malheurfriends.org
36391 Sodhouse Lane
Princeton, OR 97721

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