



Audubon Society of Corvallis the **CHAT**

November 2011

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#3

General Meeting

Thursday, November 17, 7:00 – 8:30 pm
First Presbyterian Church

Oregon Coast to Guatemala: A Photographic Journey by Terry Steele

Unlike “destination” photo shoots planned months in advance for lighting and techniques suitable for expected species and conditions, this journey covering thousands of miles is an “opportunistic photo shoot”—sometimes managing just one shot at the chance appearance of a bird, reptile, amphibian or mammal. From the surprise blow of a whale in the deep blue waters off Oregon to the ocean-blue neck bordering the exquisitely colorful Ocelated Turkey in the jungles of Central America, Terry Steele captures it all—much like you would experience it traveling yourself. Well, maybe Terry uncovers a bit more adventure than most of us would find, and com-



Terry Steele

municates with an entertaining style of story-telling for which Terry is well known among birders and nature lovers.

Terry Steele is a widely-known wildlife photographer living near John Day in eastern Oregon. He has long traveled the world capturing images that most of us only dream about. ASC is happy to have Terry back to display some of his latest work.

Dave Mellinger

Migratory Bird Treaty Act Migratory Birds, Treaties, and Protecting our Feathered Friends — Part I

100 years ago, early Audubon members helped lead a growing public outcry against the wanton and wholesale slaughter of birds for the meat market, and for the feather trade in millinery decoration. Trade in domestic wildlife had recently become illegal (the Lacey Act of 1900), and citizens recognized that migratory game birds, such as waterfowl, moved across international borders to complete their life cycles, and thus could not be afforded protection without international cooperation. The passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1917 (MBTA) also began the U.S. Game Warden program, which became the present U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). For law

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enforcement historians, this program also began the use of undercover agents, without which many wildlife crimes could not be prosecuted.

The MBTA is now recognized under bilateral treaties between the U.S. and Canada (through Great Britain), Mexico, Russia, and Japan. Not only game birds, but nearly all species found in the U.S. are now protected under the MBTA, and it is easier to list those that are not protected—House Sparrow, European Starling, Eurasian Collared-Dove. The list now stands at 1007 species. Japan similarly has bird protection treaties with Australia, China and Russia along the Australasian Flyway, and the European Union also internationally protects their migratory birds. However, many gaps in these agreements still exist—think whether Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa are not significant for migrant birds!

Protection afforded birds under our MBTA is far broader than even the Endangered Species Act (ESA) we hear so much about. USFWS has broad authority to permit hunting and possession for specified uses, but outside permitted actions, all native birds, parts of birds, eggs, nests, or even products composed in whole or in part of these can neither be sold, bartered, traded, carried, shipped, transported, exported or imported. The precise language of the Act leaves no stone unturned, these are all unlawful acts, and neither negligence nor ignorance are an excuse to avoid prosecution as a misdemeanor, punishable by up to \$15,000 fine, 6 months in jail, or both. Actual prosecutions under MBTA are limited to the discretion of USFWS, which chooses high-visibility, clear, and egregious activities in which juries and judges will clearly see knowing and callous crimes, such as the killing of hundreds of hawks and falcons by roller pigeon fanciers in clubs here on the west coast.

Unlike MBTA, the ESA provides protection for habitat in its definition of “harm” to covered species. The ESA also allows citizens to sue for application of the law, and importantly also provides a means whereby USFWS can permit the “incidental take” of species.

Next month, in Part II, I would like to explore some of the implications of the MBTA as it pertains to wind energy development in North America. Some questions to consider: Can USFWS “permit” bird mortalities, even if they aren’t otherwise protected species? What happens when “our” migrants, using most western hemisphere flyways, are concentrated into Oaxaca, and intersect significant new wind energy developments at Salinas Cruz in the Tehuantepec District? What interests and goals do wind developers and bird conservationists share in common? And for context, which anthropogenic bird-mortality hazards are most significant, and which can be most effectively reduced—domestic cats, window strikes, wind towers, night-time lighting, communication towers, or transmission lines?

Jim Fairchild

Field Trip Schedule

Monthly Year-Round Saturday Field Trips

November 12: Meet at the Benton Center at 7:30 am

December 10: Meet at the Benton Center at 7:30 am

Our Saturday morning local field trip meets the second Saturday of every month at the Benton Center parking area, 757 Polk Ave, Corvallis at 7:30 am. Unless otherwise noted, these trips finish by noon. We identify local birds by sight and sound while enjoying the outdoors.

Contact Bill Proebsting at proebstw@gmail.com or 541-752-0108 with questions. Check the Mid-Valley Birding list-serv, <http://www.midvalleybirding.org/pipermail/birding/> for information on recent sightings. Watch the weather forecast and dress appropriately for field trips.

Our Annual Appeal

The envelope in this newsletter is to remind you that it is end-of-year donation time. We have a very active chapter and want to continue our programs. If you are considering additional charitable donations for tax purposes or as holiday gifts, please think about the Audubon Society of Corvallis.

Like most non-profits, membership dues help with basic operations such as mailing the newsletter and room rent for meetings, as well as some of our activities. But there are additional opportunities for outreach and habitat restoration that are in need of funding. Consider what your donation could support:

- \$10—Scholarship for one child to attend a class at Hesthavn
- \$50—Printing 100 Birding Corvallis brochures
- \$100—Support the Xmas bird count
- \$250—Bird Bands and equipment for Bluebird Trail
- \$500—Support for a bridge at Hesthavn

We have a very talented and dedicated volunteer force working for ASC. If you would like to fund a specific project or item, please contact any board member.

Thank you for donating so freely of your time and money in the past. It is the involvement of everyone that makes ASC a vibrant organization. Be assured that when you mail a check in the enclosed envelope, that money will be used to further enhance the outstanding conservation, restoration and education programs coordinated so ably by our membership.

The Board of ASC

Hesthavn News

How quickly the time has gone by and, here at Hesthavn, we are wrapping things up for the fall season. We have just finished our Saturday Open Houses. I hope you've had a chance to visit us this fall. We will be open again next spring, on Saturday morning's, starting April 7, 2012, from 9:00a-1:00p.

We will have occasional Restoration Rehabilitation Project days throughout the winter. If you would like to volunteer to assist, please email this address: volunteerasc@gmail.com and watch for the dates on our web site at <http://www.audubon.corvallis.or.us/hesthavn.shtml>.

We will, also, be having a 'town meeting' of sorts, in November, (date TBA) related to herbicide use at The Hesthavn Nature Center. Dr. Andrew Hulting, the Extension Weed Management Specialist, at Oregon State University, has volunteered to speak about this subject, for all who are interested. Should you wish to attend this meeting, please let me know at susan.atkisson@oregonstate.edu, so we will know how many people to expect.

*Best wishes and have a Happy Thanksgiving!
Susan Atkisson*

Fall NAMC Results

This year's fall North American Migratory Bird Count was held in Benton County on Saturday, September 17, 2011. Ten field observers and 7 yard observers found 101 species for the day. This was lower than average. Some highlights include a Baird's Sandpiper (2nd ever report), Western Screech-Owl (first report in 8 years), a Purple Martin seen at Cabell Marsh and a Vesper Sparrow (only second fall report).

I'd like to thank everyone who participated.

Marcia F. Cutler

Atop the Nestbox

Below is the bluebird trail nesting data for the 2011 season. The weather was kinder than last year, both in spring and in summer. Our overall failure rate was 22%, compared to 25% last year. We fledged 4.3 birds per occupied box, compared to 4.0 last year. We also fledged more unbanded birds. For a look at our numbers each year since 1999, go to the "bluebird potpourri" section of our webpage at: www.audubon.corvallis.or.us/bluebird_trail.shtml.

Nesting attempts—233
Failures—52
First broods—111
Second broods—57
Third broods—1
Eggs laid—966
Eggs per attempt—4
Eggs hatched—822
% hatched—85

Banded—708
Fledged—714
% fledged—87
Fledged per occ box—4.3

Raylene Gordin

Field Notes

9/27/11-10/27/11

The general area covered by the field notes is a rough circle centered on Corvallis, extending to around Sweet Home, Monroe/Harrisburg, Marys Peak and the nearby Coast Range, and Monmouth/Dallas.

Cooler temperatures, ripening acorns and colorful leaves set the stage for the arrival of the first large flocks of Cackling Geese and other waterfowl. Breeding birds of higher elevations, such as Dark-eyed Juncos and Golden-crowned Kinglets, continued to increase in Corvallis neighborhoods as they retreated to low-elevation wintering habitat. Fall was in the air as the first frosts took out everyone's tomato plants and mushrooms popped up in response to the rain.

Locations: Finley = William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, Cabell Marsh and McFadden Marsh are located at Finley, TWG/SP = Talking Water Gardens and Simpson Park in Albany, EEW = E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area near Adair Village, MRNA = Marys River Natural Area in Corvallis, Stewart Lake = pond at HP in Corvallis, Philomath STP = Philomath sewage treatment ponds, Ankeny = Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge

Observers: Gail Andrews (GA), Matt Blakeley-Smith (MBS), Pam Comeleo (PC), Randy Comeleo (RC), Kelly Crockett (KC), Marcia Cutler (MC), Karin Donoyan (KD), Elsie Eltzroth (EE), Jim Fairchild (JFa), Karan Fairchild (KFa), Woody Fitzgerald (WF), Jeff Fleischer (JF), Julie Gibson (JGb), Joel Geier (JG), Amy Hill (AH), Jeff Harding (JH), Oscar Harper (OH), Susan Hatlevig (SH), Kaynor Heineck (KH), Hendrik Herlyn (HH), Amy Hill (AH), Carol Karlen (CK), Mary Beth Kramer (MBK), Frank Kolwicz (FL), Mike Lippsmeyer (ML), Lisa Millbank (LM), Molly Monroe (MM), Doug Robinson (DR), Jamie Simmons (JS), Paul Sullivan (PS), Brandon Wagner (BW), Jay Withgott (JW), Warren Volkmann (WV), Will Wright (WW)

Large flocks of **Greater White-fronted Geese** were still passing through the area in large numbers at the beginning of the period, often at night. Numbers decreased until just scattered families and individuals remained, usually mixed with flocks of Cackling Geese (m.obs.). A **Snow Goose** was also at Ankeny 10/23 (FK) and 10/27 (JW). White geese (Snow or Ross's) were seen within a flock of Greater White-fronted Geese flying over the Coast Range

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Field Notes *Continued from previous page*

foothills 9/30 (KF_a). These were too far away to identify the species. The Dusky subspecies of **Canada Geese** had arrived by late October (MM, JH). The first **Cackling Geese** showed up at the end of September, but numbers greatly increased by mid-October, when flocks of thousands had gathered at the local refuges. A goose wearing a numbered yellow neck collar at Stewart Lake 10/18 had been collared 7/28, when he was at the Yukon Delta NWR (JS). The first **Tundra Swans** of the year were at Ankeny 10/27 (JW). A **Gadwall** was at TWG/SP 9/27 (JF₁). Large concentrations of **Northern Pintails**, **Ring-necked Ducks**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Mallards** and **American Wigeon** appeared by late October. Impressive numbers of **Northern Shovelers** stopped to slurp soupy sewage at Philomath STP, where there were 1170 on 10/8 (DR), and many more started to turn up at other suitable wetlands. There were 5 **Ruddy Ducks** at Philomath STP 10/9 (SH), and more on 10/23 (WW). A single **Lesser Scaup** was at Philomath STP 10/9 (SH), and **Greater Scaup** numbers were increasing by the end of October. 2 **Surf Scoters** seemed to feel at home at Philomath STP, as they showed up 10/8 and were still reliable there through the end of the period (m.obs.). A **Bufflehead** arrived at Philomath STP 10/22 (DR). A female **Hooded Merganser** was on the Luckiamute River near Fort Hoskins 10/26 (JG_b).

About a dozen **Mountain Quail** were on Marys Peak Rd. 10/13, and there were also 2 **Sooty Grouse** near the campground and 8-10 more near the radio towers (HH & OH).

Philomath STP had 6 **Horned Grebes** 10/8 (DR) and 10 on 10/22 (WW), and 1 was at Ankeny 10/14 (BW). Just one **Eared Grebe** was at Philomath STP 10/9 (SH), but 22 arrived on 10/21 (DR). In early October, a few **Western Grebes** stopped by at Philomath STP 10/2 and 10/8 (DR), with 8 on 10/9 (SH), and 1 in downtown Corvallis 10/3 (LM).

The **American White Pelicans** who spent most of the summer at Finley were last reported 10/13, when there was only 1 lonely pelican left (GA).

Most **Green Herons** have already left our area, but 1 was still present at Ankeny 10/14 (BW), and might just stick around for the winter like a few do most years.

The last, lingering **Turkey Vultures** glided south in mid-October (m.obs.). The last reported **Osprey** was flying over the north ridge of Marys Peak 10/8 (LM & DB). At least 2 **White-tailed Kites** were at the Finley prairies 10/3 (MM), 1 on 10/9 (SH), and 1 was at McFadden Marsh 10/27 (JG_b). A **Red-shouldered Hawk** was at the north prairie at Finley 10/3 (MM), and at Ankeny 10/14 (BW).

Rough-legged Hawks began to trickle south, with a dark-phase bird seen 10/21 on Robison Rd. (DR) and 1 at Ankeny 10/27 (JW). A **Merlin** was at the Monmouth Bi-Mart 10/20 (ML). Reports of **Peregrine Falcons** were sparse, but 1 seemed to be resident at Eagle Marsh at Ankeny throughout the period.

There was a single **Black-bellied Plover** at Philomath STP 10/2 (DR), and 8 were at Eagle Marsh at Ankeny 10/27 (JW). **Greater Yellowlegs** continued to be present in small numbers at most suitable wetlands throughout the area (m.obs.), but no Lessers were reported at all. A very rare bird for Benton County (possibly only the second record), a **Marbled Godwit** stopped by the Philomath STP 10/8 (DR). Most **Western Sandpipers** moved through last period, but 9 continued at Philomath STP 10/2 (DR) and several on 10/22 & 10/23 (WW). **Least Sandpipers** were also declining from high numbers in Septembers, with 3 at Philomath STP 10/2 (DR) and a few dozen on 10/22 & 10/23 (WW). 1 **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at the Philomath STP 10/2 (DR). 3 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were at Philomath STP 10/2 and 10/8 (DR). A flock of up to 27 **Dunlin** were at Philomath STP 10/22-10/23 (DR, WW), and 4 were at Ankeny 10/27. 1 **Short-billed Dowitcher** at Philomath STP 10/2 was calling, which helps differentiate it from the more common Long-billed. **Long-billed Dowitchers** were probing the mud in many locations; the largest group was a flock of 30 at Ankeny 10/27 (JW). **Wilson's Snipe** were increasing along wetland edges everywhere, but will soon be able to spread into flooded fields as the rainy season kicks in (m.obs.). The single report of a **Red-necked Phalarope** came from Philomath STP 10/8 (DR).



Marbled Godwit photo by Doug Robinson

Philomath STP attracted 2 **California Gulls** 10/22 (WW). A young **Herring Gull** was at Finley 10/22 (DR). A **Caspian Tern** visited the Philomath STP 10/8 (DR) was later than usual, as most birds head toward the coast in late summer.

A rare fall migrant inland, 1 **Parasitic Jaeger** turned up at the Philomath STP 10/2 (DR).

A few **Band-tailed Pigeons** were still coming to feeders 10/23, although most have probably left our area by now (KF_a & JF_a).

Many duets of **Great Horned Owl** pairs were reported; they breed in winter and may be sitting on the nest in January. **Western Screech-Owls** and **Barred Owls** were also calling in late October in the foothills SW of Philomath (KF_a & JF_a). At Mulkey Hill in NW Corvallis, a single

Northern Pygmy-Owl perched on a Douglas-fir 10/5 (PC & RC). A single **Burrowing Owl** was on Parker Rd. near Tangent 10/2 (JH). **Short-eared Owls** can be recognized from far away by their unique flight; 1 was at Finley 10/6 (MBS) and 1 on 10/9 (WW).

At least 20 **Vaux's Swifts** were still roosting at the Lebanon Hotel 10/5; probably some of the last ones seen in our area (KH). There were at least a dozen **Anna's Hummingbirds** along a 6-mile walk around SW Corvallis 10/13 (LM).

Lewis's Woodpeckers showed up near the OSU horse barn 10/2 (DR) and at Finley 10/6 (KD), and were noted at Finley by many observers in mid-October. A male **Hairy Woodpecker** with bright white underparts (like a bird from east of the Cascades) attempted to enter a mealworm feeder for Western Bluebirds at Stonybrook Village in SW Corvallis 10/1. He didn't fit well into the small entrance hole, so he had to give up and look for food elsewhere (EE, MBK).

Black Phoebes were seen at Finley 10/6 (KD), near Buena Vista 10/9 (ML), and Ankeny, with an impressive tally of 4 on 10/14 (BW).

The first reports of **Northern Shrikes** started to come in late October, from Ankeny 10/22 (JH) and south of Monmouth 10/24 (ML).

At least 18 **Steller's Jays** were streaming along Tampico Ridge near Adair Village 10/20 (JG). **Western Scrub-Jays** kept themselves busy throughout the period, screaming excitedly while caching the healthy acorn crop from Oregon White Oaks and cultivated oaks of all kinds (m.obs.). **Clark's Nutcrackers** made a surprise visit to the top of Marys Peak at the end of the period, with the first appearing 10/25 (WV), and then a group of 4 on 10/27 (KF & JFa). These birds can travel widely, especially when there is a poor cone crop.



Clark's Nutcracker photo by Doug Robinson

There were 2 **Horned Larks** reported from rural southern Linn Co. 10/16 (PS, CK, KC), near Philomath STP 10/22 (WW) and a healthy flock of 24 at Bruce Rd. 10/22 (DR).

The last **Violet-green Swallows** were reported 10/8, but there was still a **Barn Swallow** at Stewart Lake on 10/27 (JS). There were no more reports of **Tree Swallows** after 9/27 at TWG/SP (JF1).

A **Mountain Bluebird** was on top of Marys Peak with a locust in its bill 10/1 (AH). 105 **Varied Thrushes** flew west over Marys Peak in 30 min on 10/8 as they moved from breeding to wintering areas (DR).

American Pipits started becoming numerous in open field habitats this period throughout the area (m.obs.).

The last report of **Black-throated Gray Warbler** was one from EEW 10/13 (JG). The final **Common Yellowthroat** report came from MRNA 10/13 (LM). A likely first-fall female **Black-throated Blue Warbler** showed up at EEW 10/8; usually, only a few of these warblers show up somewhere in Oregon each year. A **Tennessee Warbler** was at the Homer Campbell Trail at Finley 10/4 (DR).

The last report of a **Western Tanager** was 10/13, as part of a mixed flock at EEW (JG).

Golden-crowned Sparrows were arriving and settling into winter hedgerows and feeding stations, with a few singing quavering songs in the morning (m.obs.). On 10/20, a **Swamp Sparrow** was at Cabell Marsh (DR); these are present in low numbers annually but not always easy to see. **White-throated Sparrows** are relatively uncommon winter visitors, and the first report was 10/24 (WF). **Savannah Sparrows** were still common and widespread throughout most of the period, but most will have headed south soon. Loads of **Dark-eyed Juncos** moved downslope this period, including a grayish "Cassiar Junco" on 10/27 (MC). This form is easy to confuse with the better-known "Slate-colored Junco." West of Lebanon, on Parker Rd., there was a single **Lapland Longspur** on 10/17 (PS, CK, KC).

1 very late **Black-headed Grosbeak** was at Philomath STP 10/2 (DR).

Western Meadowlarks started to show up in non-breeding areas such as along the Campus Way bike path at OSU 10/4 (KF), MRNA 10/13 (LM), but were still common at Bruce Rd. and the Finley prairies throughout the month (JGb).

A single **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** was at the top of Marys Peak 10/26 (DR). A **Cassin's Finch** was at the Marys Peak campground 10/26 (DR). Scattered flocks of **Evening Grosbeaks** were occasionally passing over Corvallis and more were in the forests around Marys Peak throughout the period (m.obs.).

Please post your reports to midvalleybirding.org, send them to lisaaves@peak.org, or leave a voicemail at 541-753-7689 by Thursday, November 24.

Lisa Millbank

50th Corvallis Christmas Bird Count—A look back at the beginning

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 20, 2011. This will be the 50th Corvallis Christmas Bird Count. I've done a little research into the origins of the Corvallis count. The first Corvallis count was conducted by A. J. Stover on Dec. 26, 1912. In honor of the 50th anniversary, I thought I'd recount his results (taken from the NAS historical records):

Ring-necked Pheasant—5
Oregon Ruffed Grouse—1
Northwestern Flicker—21
Coast Jay—4
Crow sp.—5
Oregon Chickadee—3
Slender-billed Nuthatch—1
California Creeper—3
Pacific Wren—10
Western Golden-crowned Kinglet—8
Western Bluebird—15
Western Robin—35
Oregon Towhee—1
Rusty Song Sparrow—6
Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco—500
Western Meadowlark—6
Brewer's Blackbird—75

Can you identify all these bird species? Some are pretty obvious: Ruffed Grouse, Northern Flicker, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Spotted Towhee and Song Sparrow. Oregon Chickadee is the Black-capped Chickadee and the Slender-billed Nuthatch is the White-breasted Nuthatch (there's been some discussion about splitting this species, in which case the name will revert back to Slender-billed, which is what happened with the Pacific/Winter Wren). The most obscure one to me was the Coast Jay, which turned out to be the Steller's Jay.

Who was A. J. Stover and why did he do this count? We'll probably never know for sure. After doing a little research, I've located an Allen J. Stover, who worked as a scientific illustrator at Oregon Agricultural College (now OSU) from at least 1915 to the early 1920's. Born in Mississippi, he was raised in Ohio and moved with his parents to Corvallis some time after the 1910 Census. He would have been 24 years old as of the date of the count. The family lived near the Cloverdale farms in what is now NW Corvallis (about 27th and Roosevelt). The birds listed could quite easily have been from this area.

The next Corvallis CBC was 50 years later when Joe Strauch, Jr., a doctoral candidate in Physical Chemistry, organized the 1962 Count. The count has occurred every year since.

There will be more information on this year's count in the November Chat and perhaps some more history too! However, it's not too early to sign up. Just contact me – see the back page for contact details.

Marcia F. Cutler



Plastic Bag Facts

1. Americans use 60,000 plastic bags every 5 seconds.
2. It takes 100 years to decompose a plastic bag and 450 years to decompose a plastic water bottle.
3. Every square kilometer in the "Pacific garbage patch" has 334,271 plastic bags in it.
4. Many sea bird and turtle species are struggling to survive living with an invasion of plastic bags in their habitat.

Several years ago ASC took a stand against plastic bags and created the attractive and useful cloth "tote" bag. Familiar birds found in Oregon adorn the front of each bag. Please support this effort by not accepting plastic grocery bags. Proudly use a reusable cloth ASC bag. Hopefully we can be a small part of the solution to this ugly problem. We at ASC and the planet thank you.

John Gaylord

Malheur Volunteers Report

As of the end of September, 2011 there still was plenty of water in Malheur Lake, Mud Lake, and all the ponds at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) south of Burns. The water abundance was from the spring snowmelt south off of the Steens and also the Silvies River from the north side. Even the Alvord desert was flooded this year! The pelicans, egrets, terns, gulls, stilts, ibis were in abundance.

From the Narrows "causeway", it was a banner year with many Western grebes still with young on their backs. It was fun to watch the young ones develop during September.

The highway was a causeway due to the miles of water on both sides of the road. In contrast, several of the ponds accessed along the refuge's Central Patrol Road had limited views due to the high vegetation making it difficult for waterfowl watching.

At the other extreme, the best viewing was near the bridge over the Silvies River along Rue Red Road, the northernmost portion of MNWR. Malheur Lake has three times the water this year than in 2010!

If you plan on visiting MNWR Refuge next spring or fall, consider the northern part of the refuge. Rue Red Road has a sign along Highway 205. From Hwy 205 turn east for 5+ miles and you'll be surprised at bird/water heaven. Should 2012 have another good snowmelt; we suggest going to Rue Red Road for close-up shore bird and water fowl watching.

Andrea/Greg Foster MNWR September Volunteers

Birders on the Big Screen?

The Big Year Movie Worth Seeing,

Lisa and I recently saw the movie *The Big Year* in the theater. We hardly ever go out to the movies because we'd rather be out birding. I'm birder, not a qualified movie reviewer. With that caveat, I liked the movie. You birders can relate—we're more attracted to documentaries by organizations like National Geographic or the BBC. Our celebrities are people like David Attenborough and Jane Goodall. We don't expect Hollywood to make movies catering to birders featuring Hollywood celebrities.

If you haven't already heard, the movie is not a big hit and has mediocre reviews. But that's OK, it's still a good movie. We saw it with some non-birding co-workers of mine and they sincerely enjoyed it too, just not as much as we did. It's not great by movie standards, but it really is worth watching.

The movie's based on the book by Mark Obmascik of the same title. I highly recommend the book. It's a story of three, real-life birders who set out to break the North American Big Year record in 1998. The book also goes into some detail about the history of competitive birding and into the biographies of the main birders featured as well as discusses other famous birders. All of that couldn't fit into a movie. The movie changed the names of the birders, and events and details were changed to suit the movie format. It does do a pretty good job capturing the characters of the real-life birders featured in the book. Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson play the main protagonists with some other characters played by big names like Anjelica Huston, Brian Dennehy and Rashida Jones.

The movie captures the excitement of finding rare birds and accurately portrays the wonder and delight of those occasional close encounters. It conveys, perhaps even to non-birders, that we birders aren't just nerds irrelevantly looking into the trees—we're actually looking at beautiful and fascinating creatures. It's also nice to have birders as the main attraction in a movie, not a quirky sideshow. In the movie, birders are people with complex personalities. The craziness, and fun, of the movie comes from the competition, hectic traveling and the antics that go along with it.

For once, a main-stream Hollywood movie gets most all the details about birding right. I did say *most all*, and some scenes were a little disappointing but not egregious. For example, there's a scene where a storm fall-out of birds is occurring on the Gulf Coast during spring migration. The bird concentrations are exaggerated with dark clouds of noisy birds descending. The movie had birding consultants, but perhaps the director decided to exaggerate, in the brief time scale available in a movie, in order to capture the excitement birders feel during events like that. I've heard some birders criticize a couple of the rare bird encounters that weren't in the book, that were invented by the movie makers. That didn't bother me much. A little artistic license is allowed, and the fact remains, rare bird sightings are by nature implausible. Although, I still feel

that making things up is unnecessary.

I didn't expect the movie to represent the culture of birding at large. That's not the purpose of the book either. My only reservation is that both the book and movie can convey a false impression about birding culture. *The Big Year* is more about the obsession of competition than the fascination birders have with birds. It seems to imply that the drive for competition is born out of the love of birds. Most birders I know, including some of the most knowledgeable and passionate, aren't that interested in competition. They may compete occasionally for fun, but they'd rather just be out enjoying nature. I know some exceptions, but they're not the norm.

Prior to the release of the movie, there was anticipation in the birding community that maybe this will help broadly expose birding to those unfamiliar with it. Not quite. I doubt many non-birders will go see the movie by themselves. Birders ought to see it though—if not in the theater, at least when it's available on DVD or online. People like myself are used to seeing documentaries about birds, but until now we didn't get to see movies about birding. In this way, *The Big Year* is ground breaking. Maybe the simple existence of the movie conveys that birding has a broader appeal than mainstream American culture usually gives it credit for.

Don Boucher

Contributors to the Chat

Dave Mellinger, Jim Fairchild, Ann Brodie, Lisa Millbank, Marcia Cutler, Don Boucher, Raylene Gordin, John Gaylord, Andrea and Greg Foster, and Will Wright



Brewer's Blackbird photo by Matt Lee

Audubon Society of Corvallis
www.audubon.corvallis.or.us

Co-Presidents:

Ann Brodie, annbrodie143@comcast.net, 541-757-1728
Jan Landau, landau.jan@gmail.com, 541-908-0039

Vice President and Program Chair:

Dave Mellinger, David.Mellinger@oregonstate.edu,
541-757-7953

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541-753-3677

Board Members

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Lori McGovern, lorimcgovern@hotmail.com, 541-905-2965
Tom Penpraze, tmpenpraze@comcast.net, 541-752-8814
Stacy Moore, peterandstacy@peak.org, 541-929-2063
Peter Moore, peterandstacy@peak.org, 541-929-2063
Karan Fairchild, alderspr@peak.org, 541-929-4049

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541-745-5088

Education Chair: Michelle Shula,
hesthavneducation@gmail.com, 614-579-1406

Bluebird Trail Chair: Raylene Gordin, gordin@centurytel.net,
541-258-6625

Christmas Bird Count Compiler: Marcia Cutler,
marciafcutler@comcast.net, 541-752-4313

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susan.atkisson@oregonstate.edu, 541-602-2750

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Birdathon Coordinator: Mary van Brocklin,
mary_vanbrocklin@yahoo.com, 541-745-7170

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541-758-2275

Field Trip Chair: Bill Proebsting, proebstw@gmail.com,
541-752-0108

Sales Table team: Sally Shaw, shaws@peak.org, 541-757-2749
Bev Clark, oreflygirl12@earthlink.net,
541-753-4456

Refreshment Chair: Gail Nickerson, gailhops@aol.com,
541-754-0406

Field Notes Compiler: Lisa Millbank,
lisaaves@peak.org, 541-753-7689

Newsletter Editor (Interim): Will Wright, chateditors@gmail.com
(541-753-4395)

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Audubon Society of Corvallis
P.O. Box 148
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the **CHAT**

Renew your membership before the date on the mailing label to avoid missing issues of the Chat.

Calendar

Nov. 2—Conservation Committee Mtg, 5:15pm
New Morning Bakery

Nov. 10—Board meeting, Jan Landau's house,
3257 NW Huckleberry Pl, Corvallis

Nov. 12—Second Saturday field trip, 7:30 am

Nov. 17—General meeting, 7–8:30pm

Nov. 24—Article submission deadline for December Chat

Nov. 24—Field notes submission deadline for December Chat



American Robin photo by Matt Lee

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