

The Chat

Number 391
October, 2012

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world

Rogue Valley Audubon Society

www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for submissions is the 20th of each month



CHAPTER PROGRAM MEETING

TUESDAY, OCT. 23 - 7:00 PM

JOIN BRENDAN BREEN OF KBO as he speaks on VULTURES

It is an opportunity to hear about the conservation and fascinating adaptations of vultures, one of the most important and most imperiled groups of birds in the world. Brandon Breen has worked with turkey vultures and California and Andean condors, and is Vice President of the Turkey Vulture Society. Brandon's presentation will be sprinkled with anecdotes from his personal experiences with these birds.

Brandon Breen is the Outreach and Communications Specialist for the Klamath Bird Observatory. Brandon recently moved to southern Oregon after finishing his M.Sc. in Conservation Biology at the University of Minnesota. Brandon's thesis investigated a human-wildlife conflict involving sheep farmers and turkey vultures in the Falkland Islands. Brandon is passionate about clear and accurate communication of conservation issues.



Chapter meetings are held at 7:00 PM on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Medford Congregational Church meeting hall, 1801 E. Jackson Street in East Medford. The meeting hall is located north of East Jackson Street between North Berkeley Way and North Barneburg Rd. It is most easily accessed from North Barneburg Rd. Just make a left turn into the church parking lot at the tree in the middle of the road.

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President's Page by Bill Hering

As we are all aware, the 2012 fall migration is well underway. It's a great time for birding in the Valley. Birders are busy - but not too busy, I hope, to assist RVAS in the coming months. There are many opportunities — here are two that you should consider.

Just a little over a year ago the Conservation Committee decided that, in addition to our long-standing attention to regional and national bird conservation issues, we should increase our focus on local bird conservation concerns. As a first step they initiated RVAS conversations with Denman Wildlife Area managers, and much has been accomplished. There are many more birding locales in Jackson County that can and should be monitored. To do that, the Conservation Committee will need a few more active members. This is an opportunity to invest a small amount of your time in a very important effort, and to make a difference. **Robert Mumby** and **Pepper Trail** are the Co-chairs of this committee; a phone call or e-mail will get you included.

Thanks to the efforts of **Denny Niebuhr**, **Lynda Stevenson**, **Gaylene and Judd Hurley**, **Alex Maksymowicz** and **Larry Wright** (and no doubt many others I cannot recall), in November of 2009 RVAS opened a second Project Feederwatch location at the Jefferson Nature Center. **Katy Reed** of Wild Birds Unlimited donated the feeders, support poles, and seed. Medford Grange and Wild Birds Unlimited have continued to assist Project Feederwatch Medford with seed donations. **Judd Hurley** has managed the whole process, ensuring that seed is obtained and feeders are filled so that every other Saturday, from November through March, the public is able to participate in this citizen science effort. Judd has done an incredible job. THANK YOU, Judd. Now someone is needed to continue this effort. It doesn't need to be one person; there's work to share. And Judd will always be available to smooth the transition. This is a great opportunity to support the Audubon cause in Jackson County, with immediate results. If you will let me know that you may be interested, I'll be glad to discuss what is involved.

Thanks, and Good Birding!

Field Notes: The Changing Seasons

Compiled by Stewart Janes

It's shaping up to be an unusual fall and winter. Forest birds are showing up on the valley floor and other areas they don't normally occur. **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** appeared in Ashland and Medford beginning 9/8 (ES, SJ). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** have also abandoned the forest for backyards in Medford and Jacksonville (SJ, LN). One was even seen 14 miles out to sea on a pelagic trip out of Brookings on 9/15 (SJ).

Mountain Chickadees were observed on Roxy Ann on 9/12 (JT), in Ashland on 9/4 (ES), in Medford on 9/21 (SJ), relatively low on Grizzly on 9/10 (FE), and of course, the guest that never really left Liz Northrup's yard near Jacksonville this year. Then there are the **Red Crossbills** that are throughout the Siskiyou in numbers from Ashland (SV, ES) to Selma (SJ). Many years there are none. **Clark's Nutcrackers** were on Mount Ashland on 9/9 (FL) and Hobart Bluff on 9/20 (SJ). Add to that the **Pygmy Nuthatches** on Mount Ashland on 9/2 (BA, VZ) and on Roxy Ann on 9/18 (JT), and you would have to admit strange happenings are afoot. This all suggests a failure of the cone crop this year. Stay tuned, I'm sure there's more to this story, but we will have to wait and see.

On 9/10 as I headed for work I noted the crystal clear, blue, and vacant skies of fall. I realized what made the skies vacant was the near absence of our local **Turkey Vultures!** This was too early for kettles of vultures to be moving. Those usually start on or around 9/20. Where had our vultures gone? I began to wonder if local birds slip out of the valley without staging in kettles.

My job this year has taken me to Hobart Bluff and surrounding promontories several times. Sure enough. Sizable numbers of vultures in ones and twos are drifting south before the kettles from farther north arrive.

A pattern of increasing cohesiveness among migrating vultures as fall progresses seems to be the rule. Flocks of more than 1000 birds, when they occur, typically coincide with the end of vulture migration around the second week of October. And, by the way, the first kettles of **Turkey Vultures** this fall were seen 9/20 near Emigrant Lake (about 20 birds, SJ) and on 9/22 over Southern Oregon University (40-50 birds, JB, SB). Right on schedule.

While scattered individuals of many summer species will continue to be seen on into the early days of October including **Western Tanagers, Black-throated Gray Warblers, Yellow Warblers, and Common Yellowthroats**, the big southward movement of summer birds was noted by many in the first two weeks of September. These included **Nashville, Hermit, Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, and Olive-sided and Pacific-slope Flycatchers**. The last reports of **Rufous Hummingbirds and Black-headed Grosbeaks** were on 9/16 (LN, SJ).

Shorebird migration continued through the third week in September with **Western and Least Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Greater Yellowlegs and Semipalmated Plovers** seen regularly at both Emigrant and Agate Lakes. **Pectoral Sandpipers** were more common than usual this fall. **Solitary Sandpipers** were seen at both Agate and Emigrant Lakes between 8/29 and 9/1 (BA, JT, FE, DA). A **Sanderling** was at Agate Lake on 9/8 (JT), and a **Red-necked Phalarope** was present on 8/30 (JT). An unusual **Black-necked Stilt** was at Emigrant Lake between 9/9 and 9/13 (FE).

Other waterbirds of note include the **White-faced Ibis** at Agate Lake between 8/25 and 9/16 (JT) and a **Forster's Tern** at Emigrant Lake on 9/22 (JT).

Continued on page 8

The Chat - October, 2012

*RVAS Holiday Party with Raffle and Auction
Medford Congregational Church, 1801 Jackson St., Medford
Saturday, December 1, 2012*



UPDATE ON AUCTION AND RAFFLE ITEMS (MORE NEXT MONTH)

SISKIYOU FIELD INSTITUTE TUITION GIFT CERTIFICATE
SCIENCE WORKS HANDS-ON MUSEUM PASSES
COMING ATTRACTIONS THEATRES MOVIE PASSES
NIMBUS GIFT CERTIFICATE
FOUR & TWENTY BLACKBIRDS GIFT CERTIFICATE
DAGOBA CHOCOLATE COLLECTION
GRANGE CO-OP GIFT CERTIFICATE
WINTER AND SPRING SISKIYOU SINGERS CONCERT TICKETS

BOTANICAL WALK, MT. ASHLAND, WITH ALEX MAKSYMOWICZ
SPRING BIRDING, NORTH MOUNTAIN PARK, WITH VINCE ZAUSKEY
TWO NIGHTS AT SHELLEY TANQUARY'S LANGLOIS COTTAGE
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDING TRIP WITH FRANK LOSPALLUTO
BIRDING ALONG I-5 WITH HARRY FULLER
KLAMATH BIRDING TRIP WITH HARRY FULLER

*Tell Carol Palmer if you would like to help with the party
Tell Kate or Sooney if you would like to help with the auction
Be sure to buy tickets at the Oct., and Nov. meetings
Get tickets to sell to others you don't see at the RVAS meetings
Invite your bird-loving friends to the event*

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Sooney Viani sooneyviani@gmail.com; 541-482-5146

UPCOMING EVENTS

BEAR CREEK WATERSHED EXPLORATION MONTH: OCTOBER

This fall, local organizations will host activities and educational programs that promote watershed health, improved water quality or enjoyment of the Bear Creek watershed. Learn more and view the complete list of scheduled events and participating organizations at www.BearCreekSalmonFestival.net.

NORTH MOUNTAIN PARK: SAT. OCTOBER 6

A KBO sponsored bird walk at North Mountain Park. Meet at the Northwest Nature Shop at 8 am.

BEAR CREEK SALMON FESTIVAL: SAT. OCTOBER 6

In its 8th year, the annual festival celebrates salmon and salmon habitat in our area with a variety of fun outdoor activities such as fly or spin-casting, exploring Bear Creek, listening to Native American drumming and story-telling, and learning how to become better stewards of local streams. For details go to www.BearCreekSalmonFestival.net

THE MOST UNUSUAL AND EXOTIC BIRDS IN THE WORLD

Join Joy and John Taylor, on Thursday, October 11, at 6:30 pm for another of their fabulous presentations. They will explore such birds as the Luzon Bleeding Heart Pigeon, the Himalayan Monal, the Cuban Toady of the West Indies, the South American Hoatsin, the Australian Tawny Frogmouth and many more unusual and exotic birds from all parts of the globe. John and Joy have searched for birds in Hawaii, Canada, The United States, Central America and Northern Africa. At the present time they have a life list of 893 species. John and Joy are the authors of *BIRDING HOTSPOTS IN SOUTHERN OREGON*. The program will take place at the Grants Pass High School, in room 116, through the doors to the cafeteria.

CENTRAL VALLEY BIRD SYMPOSIUM: NOV. 15-18

On November 15th-18th, 2012, the Central Valley Bird Club will be hosting the 16th Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium at the Stockton Hilton Hotel, in Stockton, CA. To view the line-up of speakers, workshops, and field trips check out our website at: www.cvbs.org

The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

The Conservation Committee held a meeting in mid-September to discuss local and regional conservation issues. The first item of business was our continued engagement with the Denman Wildlife Area. Committee co-chair Robert Mumby has been in discussions with Clayton Barber about possible habitat improvement projects, and they have identified riparian tree plantings around Whetstone Pond and in the Military Slough area as priorities. The committee approved Robert's continued work on this, with emphasis on larger native trees important to birds, such as cottonwood and Oregon ash. Volunteer opportunities may arise from this - watch future issues of the Chat for more information.

The meeting's main topic of discussion was how RVAS can best support the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges. As many Audubon members know, the water situation on the refuges this summer was disastrous, with no water deliveries to Lower Klamath NWR at all from April through August. As a result, nesting success by waterfowl and marsh birds was extremely low. Only in the past few weeks have some water deliveries resumed, but there is grave concern about the habitat availability for the huge numbers of migratory and wintering waterfowl that are now beginning to pour into the Basin.

The Klamath water situation is extremely complex. Fortunately, Bob Hunter (longtime RVAS member and former WaterWatch attorney) and Jim McCarthy, current WaterWatch staffer for southern Oregon joined the meeting and provided their expertise. Much current discussion in the Basin concerns the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, or KBRA, which would radically affect water distribution for the next 50 years. This is linked to, but separate from, the agreement to remove the Klamath River dams, which is the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement, or KHSA. Many conservation groups are excited about the removal of the dams, but less attention has been paid to the provisions of the KBRA. This promises more reliable water supplies for the refuges, but also would lock in the current program of commercial farming on refuge land (at the expense of wetland habitat), and affect many other aspects of water delivery. Bob and Jim also described worrisome legal details in the KBRA which could undermine any benefits to the refuges. The cost of the agreement to federal taxpayers has been estimated at \$500 million.

FIELD TRIP LEADERS NEEDED

The RVAS Field Trip season has begun, and we need local birders to volunteer as trip leaders. Field Trip Chairman Jeff Tufts coordinates the events, but leaders have the option of choosing their destinations. Please contact Jeff at tallahto@aol.com to volunteer, or to get further information. Thank you

Conservation Column continued from page 6

The KBRA was signed in February 2010, but is stalled legislatively. Senator Jeff Merkley has proposed legislation to implement the KBRA, but this has not moved forward, and there appears to be little prospect for action in the current Congress. Therefore, although the KBRA has been the object of much discussion in the Basin, it is not where our current focus needs to be. That is the CCP, or Comprehensive Conservation Plan, process. This is a US Fish and Wildlife Service process that began in 2010 and is scheduled to be done by the end of 2012. In the words of the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges website, the CCP:

- Ensures that management of the refuge reflects the purposes of the refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System;
- Provides the public with an understanding of the reasons for management actions on the refuge;
- Provides a vision statement for the refuge;
- Ensures the compatibility of current and future uses of the refuge with its purposes;
- Provides long-term continuity in refuge management; and
- Provides budget justification for operation and maintenance and facility development requests.

Rogue Valley Audubon will be submitting comments on the CCP, and will remain engaged with the Klamath Basin refuges to advocate for adequate water supplies and an end to commercial farming of non-grain crops on refuge lands, which we believe is incompatible with their wildlife conservation purpose.

Stay tuned - you'll be hearing much more in the months to come.

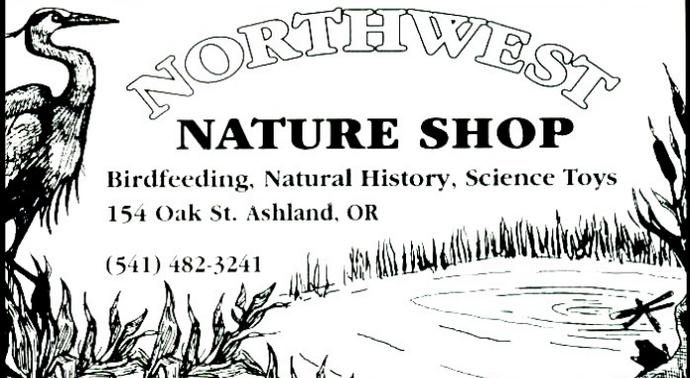
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Field Notes Continued from page 3

Waterfowl migration is picking up although most are still in dull eclipse plumage. The first greater **White-fronted Geese**, **American Wigeon**, **Green-winged teal**, **Hooded Mergansers**, and **Bufflehead** have all been noted. This is just the beginning.

American Pipits are now passing through the valley with early reports beginning 9/18 (FL, HF). **Cedar Waxwing** and **American Robin** numbers are also increasing sharply. They were first noted on 9/12. I haven't checked to see if the madrone berry crop is robust enough to retain them this fall and winter. The vanguard of the advancing **Golden-crowned Sparrow** army was noted on 9/12 (BH). They arrived in my yard on 9/13, three days earlier than the average. Early **Dark-eyed Juncos** on the valley floor were noted in Ashland on 9/22 (HF).

The most unusual sightings of the month included the five **Great-tailed Grackles** at Emigrant Lake between 8/27 and 8/29 (DA, FE) and the **Burrowing Owl** on Lower Table Rock on 9/22. Fall Great-tailed Grackles in the valley is something new. Maybe they are going to become established in Oregon after all. While isolated individuals are not unusual, both the number and date says this story is not yet finished. A **Brewer's Sparrow** was north of White City on 9/3 (BH).

Thanks to this month's contributors including Bob Arrigoni, Dick Ashford, John Bullock, Stephanie Bullock, Kate Cleland-Sipfle, Alan Contreras, Forest English, Harry Fuller, Bob Hunter, Frank Lospalutto, Eric Setterberg, Jeff Tufts, Sooney Vani, and Vince Zausky. Deadline for contributions to the Field Notes in the next edition of The Chat is October 20.



Photos of a dipper being banded and a banded dipper. See article about the American Dipper Study on Page 10.

RVAS BIRD WALKS

BIRD WALK OF OUSTERHOUT FARM IN WHITE CITY: SAT: OCT. 20

RVAS member and Medford Christmas Count chair Bob Hunter will lead a bird walk on the Ousterhout Farm in White City. Late migrants, early arriving seasonal species, and permanent Jackson County residents make this location a great spot for casual birding. Easy walking on level surfaces. Duration 2-3 hours. We'll meet at 8 a.m. at the east end of the Dollar Tree parking lot (southeast corner of Crater Lake Hwy. and Hwy 140), and carpool from there to minimize the number of cars to be parked at the farm.

LOST CREEK LAKE AND HOLY WATERS: SAT. NOV. 10

Lost Creek Lake and Holy Waters will be the destination for our monthly birding trip in November. Norm Barrett, former Forest Service biologist and accomplished bird photographer, will lead the group. Waterfowl are the main attraction at Holy Waters where the path just east of the water coming out of the dam affords great looks at such species as American Wigeon, scaup, teal, Ring-necked Duck, and Bufflehead. Bald Eagles are frequent visitors to this area, and an appearance by a Peregrine Falcon is always possible. Shorebirds, waterfowl, gulls and terns may be seen on the lake if we drive down the Medco A road to approach the lake shore. Easy walking. Duration 2-3 hours at the destination. Meet at the east end of the Dollar Tree parking lot (southeast corner of Crater Lake Hwy. and Hwy 140), and carpool from there.

FIRST WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS OFFERED EVERY MONTH THROUGH 2013. SEE BACK PAGE

Rogue Valley Audubon Society Membership

Members of the National Audubon Society are automatically enrolled as members of RVAS. If you are not a member of NAS you can still be a member of Rogue Valley Audubon Society. To join, please send a check for \$20.00 annual dues to RVAS, P.O. Box 8597, Medford, OR 97501. Include your name, address, e-mail address and (optional) phone number. If you have any questions about membership, please contact membership chair Robert Mumby at 541-535-2934 or rdmumby@charter.net.

Do you have a favorite retailer or service provider?

Is there a restaurant you would like to support? You can help them succeed while supporting RVAS. Consider using your personal contact to suggest they buy an advertisement in *The Chat*. For as little as \$100. per year our members can be reminded that a retailer or restaurant supports RVAS every time they see *The Chat*. For details, contact our Treasurer, Kathy Simonsen at simonsen@mind.net.

The Chat—October, 2012

American Dipper study on Ashland Creek
by Barbara Massey
bmassey@mac.com

The 2012 nesting season was so full of new information it cannot be covered in a short article. But here's a try. And if anyone wants to know more, please contact me or one of the other team members. We will probably provide you with more info than you could ever want, as we love to talk about dippers. Our group this season consisted of Eric Setterberg, Jeff Tufts, Frank Lospalluto, Barbara Massey, Bob Quaccia, Gwyneth Ragosine, Sally Jones, and Kathy Simonsen.

After observing the dippers in Ashland Creek for two seasons and finding no nests between the Main St. culvert and the spillway at the reservoir (a distance of $1 \frac{1}{2}$ miles), it became clear that there was a dearth of good nesting sites. This portion of the creek lacks the stream habitat that dippers usually use, like banks with burrows, mid-stream rocks that are safe from squirrels, and natural waterfalls behind which they like to build. They must resort to bridges and that is where we have found most nests. But many of the bridges do not have a suitable understructure that can support a nest. So Eric Setterberg built a variety of nesting structures - including platforms, nest boxes, and a polyethylene tube to give the birds more choices. In early March he and Frank Lospalluto installed them under foot bridges between Pioneer St. (the entrance to park headquarters) and the reservoir.

Two of last season's nest sites, the reservoir spillway and a culvert under Main St., were used again this year plus a new one on a buttress of the Pioneer St. bridge. This last one was partially built but then deserted, and a few days later we found a pair (same pair?) building a short way upstream in one of the new nest boxes. It was under the 3rd bridge downstream of the reservoir. We then watched all 3 active nests through two breeding cycles, all of which produced fledglings.

Banding was stepped up this year and in all there were 5 sessions with 9 dippers color banded - 4 adults and 5 chicks. John Alexander of KBO did the trapping and banding, with help from his staff. The creek was high and roaring in early spring, with fast current, and they were up to their waists stringing nets across it. But what a boon it was for us, as being able to identify individuals gave us a whole new understanding of the breeding cycle, particularly at the 3rd bridge where the adults and both sets fledglings were banded.

The 3rd St. bridge site is worth a detailed account. On 3/16 we found a near-completed nest. It was finished by 3/23 but egg laying apparently did not occur for several weeks. By 4/12 the female was incubating eggs, and the male was observed busily finding larvae in the creek and bringing them to her. When not feeding himself or his mate he was usually standing vigil on a rock in the stream below the nest. Hatching occurred around 4/18 and a week later both adults were color banded. This date was chosen for two reasons. When parents are feeding young there is almost no chance of desertion and they are also easy to catch by mist-netting as they are constantly bringing food to the nest. When the 3 chicks were 10 days old (4/30) they were taken from the nest and color banded. This is the optimal time in their development to band because the legs are long enough to hold the bands and the chicks are not yet able to clamber out of the nest. While their chicks were being banded the parents waited on rocks below with food in their beaks and immediately resumed feeding after we returned the chicks to the nest.

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A week before the first brood fledged, the female was seen carrying nest material up under the bridge and also displaying to her mate. He seemed fully occupied feeding the chicks but, as later events testified, took time out for copulation. Fledging took place on 5/9-5/10 and the male became the sole feeder of the chicks as his mate was already incubating the 2nd clutch. On 5/11 Eric climbed down under the bridge and to photograph the new nest and found it had been built on the roof of the nest box. The female was incubating 4 eggs! She built the 2nd nest while the hatchlings were growing and had already begun to lay eggs before they fledged. (We knew from the literature that 2nd nesting is not unusual for dippers, but is usually in the refurbished first nest and not begun until the fledglings are feeding themselves.) The male did ALL of the feeding of the 3 fledglings for a week. Then he returned to take up vigil on his rock below the nest. The fledglings were seen foraging on their own 8 days after leaving the nest.

On 5/25 two chicks hatched in the 2nd nest - we don't know what happened to the other two eggs that were photographed earlier. Both parents fed the chicks until they fledged on 6/17, 23 days after hatching, but the male took over as soon as fledging occurred. The female played no role in feeding after either set of chicks left the nest. Five days post-fledging, on 6/22, he was seen downstream feeding the two youngsters, and farther downstream the female had resumed her non-parental life style. She was standing on a rock in mid-stream preening, then foraging in a desultory way, then basking in the sun. It is difficult to refrain from anthropomorphizing about this situation. She looked so serene, alone to do as she pleased after two intense breeding cycles.

Did she know her mate would take on the feeding and care of the fledglings? It would seem so. Her job was to build nests and incubate eggs, with some occasional feeding duties. And after that day we saw her no more. Her achievement - 5 chicks successfully hatched and reared. His role - most of the feeding of the hatchlings and total care and feeding of the fledglings. This was not the scenario we have seen in the two previous years, nor what has been reported by others. But having a banded group gave us the opportunity to watch closely and document all the unusual behavior that was taking place.

Our plans for next year include replacing the platforms with nest boxes, using the design that worked so well at 3rd bridge; adding a few boxes to bridges downstream of Pioneer St.; perhaps investigating a web-cam for one of the nests, and continuing to observe and band parents and chicks. We hope to continue this project for several years, as each year brings a few answers and a lot of new questions about the life history of the dippers of Ashland Creek. We are also grateful for the monetary support that has come from Rogue Valley Audubon through the Bob Black Fund; without it there would have been no banding. For more information about the 2012 season visit our website - [lithiadipperwatch](http://lithiadipperwatch.com). Frank is an excellent webmaster and although the 2012 field notes have not been entered since early June, they will be, now that the breeding season is over and he has some time. Anyone who is interested in spending time dipper-watching is welcome. Contact any member of the current team and join us. It is addictive.

ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

THE CHAT

Newsletter of the ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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MONTHLY BIRD WALK WITH MURRAY ORR

First Wednesday Each Month: Little Butte Creek Walk. For the Oct. 3 and Nov. 7 walks Meet at the Agate Road entrance gate of the Denman Wildlife Area at 8:00 and the walk will start at 8:30. (The gate is open between 8 and 8:30 only.) Please contact **Murray Orr, 541-857-9050** for details and if you are willing to join him in organizing these bird walks. He needs volunteers to help him open and close the gate and record observed species when he is not available. Walks will continue through 2012-2013.

