



Mountain Bluebird near Fort Rock

Birding Southeast Oregon

15-19 May 2010

22-26 May 2010

Tour leader: Eric Horvath

This trip visits the Great Basin Desert and marshes of Southeast Oregon, including the best birding spots, and areas of geological interest. Timed to coincide with the peaks of songbird migration and waterbird courtship displays, we will concentrate on getting close looks at many birds characteristic of the West. May is the perfect time for visiting since the bulrushes are still low, the temperatures are mild, and the bird diversity is superb. A highlight of the tour will be two days at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, famous for being one of the best birding locations in North America. We will also have time to identify and photograph wildflowers, learn some of the conservation strategies that The Nature Conservancy is using in the region, and enjoy the dramatic scenery of some of Oregon's most beautiful and remote places.

Itinerary

Day 1, SaturdayBend, Fort Rock, Summer Lake

We begin our trip at noon in Bend at a location where there is street parking for those driving over from the Willamette Valley. We'll travel southeast on Highway 31 to do some birding in ponderosa pine forests. Often we see Western Bluebird, Lewis' Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, and other interesting birds in some recently burned areas. In the afternoon we visit Fort Rock State Park.



Fort Rock State Park

Fort Rock is a stunning formation; the cliffs rise like castle walls from the flat surrounding desert. We will investigate the geologic history, involving vast a Pleistocene lake and violent volcanic eruptions. Nesting in the crevices and potholes of the cliffs are Prairie Falcons, Rock Wrens, and White-throated Swifts. In the surrounding sagebrush we will find Green-tailed Towhees, Sage Sparrows, and Sage Thrashers. Pioneer cabins recently relocated to the town of Fort Rock provide an interesting window on the rugged life of homesteaders here 90 years ago. From Fort Rock State Park, we will drive south through Christmas Valley to Summer Lake, arriving at our lodging at approximately 6 PM. Night at Summer Lake Lodge.



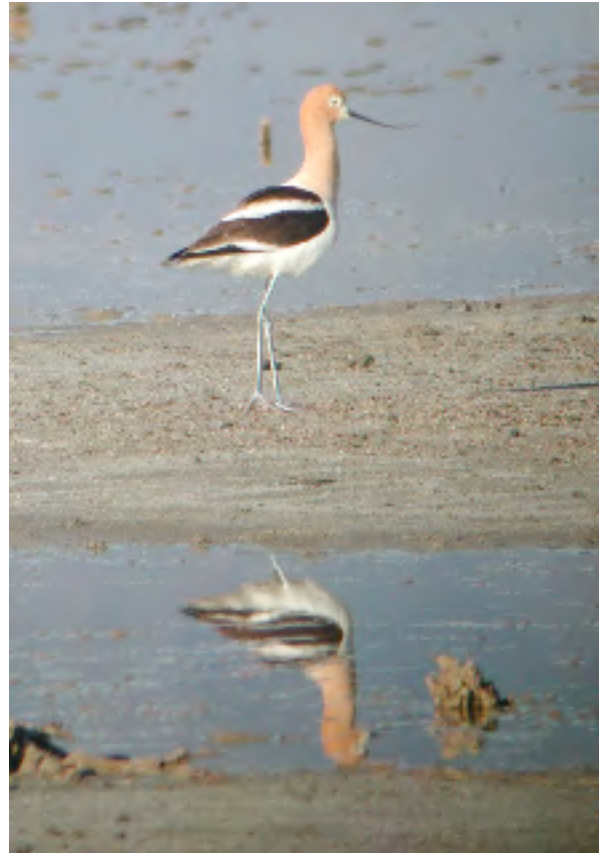
Green-tailed Towhee

Day 2, SundaySummer Lake, Christmas Valley

Summer Lake Wildlife Management Area is just across the road from our rooms, and we will begin the day by birding the marshes here. The alkali playa of Summer Lake is a good place to see Snowy Plovers, Black-necked Stilts, and American Avocets. Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Forster's Terns, and Marsh Wrens are some of the other species we will see here in the bulrush marshes.



Black-necked Stilt



American Avocet

Later in the day we'll drive over Picture Rock Pass to see petroglyphs (Native American rock art, here in the form of images of humans and antelope chipped into a black basalt boulder). The alfalfa fields of Christmas Valley have many ground squirrels in May, and we can expect to see a nice diversity of hunting raptors including Swainson's, Ferruginous and Red-tailed Hawks, and both Golden and Bald Eagles. Often Pronghorn Antelope can be seen in the irrigated alfalfa fields, and sometimes one can see badgers or coyotes.

In late afternoon we'll visit the Cabin Lake campground which is 10 miles north of Fort Rock State Park. This is an area where the Ponderosa Pine forest meets the sagebrush steppe, and there is a nice diversity of birds along the ecotone, some of which are relatively uncommon elsewhere. Here water is piped to a small pool at an observation/photography blind. Birds come to drink and can be seen well at close range. We can expect to see Lewis' Woodpeckers, Pygmy Nuthatches, Red Crossbills, and also perhaps Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, and White-headed Woodpeckers. Opportunities are excellent for bird portrait photos in the late afternoon light. Night at Summer Lake Lodge. In the evening we can have an optional trip to look for Flammulated Owls in the ponderosa pine forests of winter ridge.



Long-billed Curlew

Day 3, MondaySummer Lake to Diamond & Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

We'll depart Summer Lake after breakfast, and will drive on paved roads east of Christmas Valley to Highway 395, over Wagon Tire Mountain, and on to Burns via highways 395 and 20. In the vast sea of sagebrush we'll hear and see Brewer's Sparrows and Sage Thrashers. The songs of the Brewer's Sparrows are a long series of varied trills, remarkably complex and beautiful.

As we drive south of Burns, we'll pass through flooded fields with Long-billed Curlews, Willets, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Malheur National Wildlife Refuge has many great birding spots, and we will concentrate on the northern parts of the refuge today. The refuge headquarters has tall trees in a sea of sagebrush and marsh, functioning as a "trap" for migrants such as Townsend's Warblers and Western Tanagers. It can be exciting birding, since you never know what migrants will be in the ornamental plantings around the headquarters buildings. There is often a Great Horned Owl here. In the late afternoon we'll enter the Diamond Valley which has many White-faced Ibises and Franklin's Gulls in the flooded pastures, and Wilson's Snipe sitting on fence posts. Bobolinks, in striking black-and-white plumage, can be found along Diamond Lane. At Diamond, Oregon, we will stay for 2 nights at the historic Diamond Hotel.

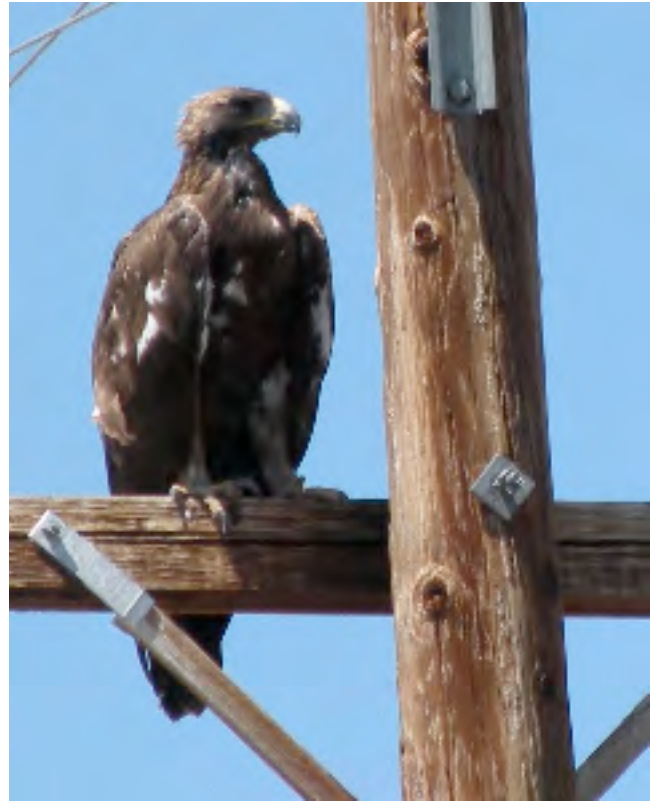
Day 4, Tuesday,.....Diamond & Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in late May has spectacular birding.. We will visit the rimrock above Buena Vista pond, where there is a panoramic view of the refuge marshes and snow covered Steens Mountain in the distance. Since this trip is timed for spring, we will not be going up Steens, as the road is covered with snow and the gate is closed in May.

We can expect to see a wide variety of waterbirds including Franklin's Gulls, Trumpeter Swans, and White-faced Ibises. All the ducks will be in stunning breeding plumage. We will look for sneaky marsh birds such as American Bitterns, Virginia Rails, and Short-eared Owls in the meadows, ponds, and willow thickets along the Central Patrol Road. We'll visit selected sites on the southern half of the refuge, including the Central Patrol Road and Blitzen River, Benson Pond, and Krumbo Reservoir. Many birds will be at the peak of their nest building and courtship displays, and the photo opportunities will be excellent. Other interesting areas include the Round Barn built by Pete French in the 1880's and Diamond Craters with its recent lava flows and superb geology. Grassland specialists such as Loggerhead Shrike, and Lark Sparrow can be found nearby.



Ferruginous Hawk



Golden Eagle

Day 5, Wednesday,Malheur National Wildlife Refuge to Bend

On our last day we will depart Malheur via the Narrows Bridge which can, depending on water levels, be good for close views of Clark's and Western Grebes. Along the Double O Ranch road we may see a variety of migrant shorebirds along with nesting Black-necked Stilts, Avocets, and Wilson's Phalaropes. We will look for Long-billed Curlews in wet pastures near Burns. Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, and Pronghorn Antelope can be found on the return to Bend. The trip ends at noon in Bend. A drop off at the Bend/Redmond Airport is possible for flights out after 2 PM.



Pronghorn Antelope



Western Kingbird



Bullock's Oriole

Leadership Eric Horvath holds a degree in zoology from Oregon State University, and has written a number of scientific papers on birds and mammals. Eric has conducted ornithological research in Oregon, Arizona, Mexico, Australia, and Peru, and has led birding tours since 1990 for The Nature Conservancy. His interests also include botany and geology. He lives on the Oregon Coast with his wife Claire.

Lodgings, Meals, Transportation Prices are based on double occupancy. In Summer Lake we will be staying in comfortable motels and cabins where the rooms have private baths. At the Diamond Hotel there are 5 rooms which share two baths down the hall. Also at the Diamond Hotel there are rooms with Queen beds and private bath available for \$70 extra. **Single supplement:** If you prefer to have your own private room and do not want to share it with a roommate, you may specify this and pay an additional \$200 (**made payable to Eric Horvath**). If we cannot find a roommate for you then the single supplement will apply. All breakfasts and lunches are included in the trip price, but dinners and alcoholic drinks must be paid for on an individual basis. Formal dress is not necessary. The group will be limited to 9 participants. Transport will be in a 15-passenger van with air conditioning.

Rigors We may experience temperatures in the 80's in some places. Temperatures and rainfall in SE Oregon in May are quite variable from year to year, and there may be some cold morning outings. There will be several easy walks on roads and trails for distances of up to 1 mile. On one day we will be driving for 4-5 hours. Be prepared for plenty of sun. There will be a few mosquitoes in some places, but this will be minor since May is early in the season. Many outings early in the day will be optional. If you choose to go on every optional outing, then the pace of the trip may seem intense. Many of the morning and evening outings are optional so that one can scale the trip to fit your interest and energy level.

Preparation Participants will be sent maps, an equipment list, bird lists, copies of selected articles, and a list of suggested reading to aid in preparation for the trip.

Cost

Reservation deposit	\$100	made payable to Eric Horvath
Final Payment (due 17 February)	\$595	made payable to Eric Horvath
Contribution (due 17 February)	\$100	made payable to The Nature Conservancy

Total Trip Cost (not including airfare):	\$795	

(The fair market value of this trip is \$695. The difference between the fair market value and the price of the trip constitutes a suggested tax-deductible contribution to The Nature Conservancy.)

Please send all checks to: Eric Horvath
P.O. Box 721
South Beach, OR 97366

Reservations

Reservations are made on a first-come, first-served basis. A deposit of \$100 per person is required to reserve one space. The final payment and contribution to The Nature Conservancy are due 90 days prior to the trip. Please make a note of this deadline.

Refunds

The contribution to The Nature Conservancy is non-refundable, but may be applied to a future trip. If you must cancel and a replacement is found, you will be refunded the amounts paid to Eric Horvath. Other cancellations are subject to the following: forfeit of \$500 of ground costs if cancellation is received between 90 and 30 days prior to departure. If you cancel less than 30 days prior to the trip, you will forfeit the full trip cost. The non-refunded portion of the trip cost helps defray non-recoverable expenses. If for any reason The Nature Conservancy cancels a trip, you will be fully refunded the amounts paid to Eric Horvath.

Participants are encouraged to buy trip cancellation insurance through a travel agent in case you cannot attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

Questions? Contact the Field Trip Program Manager at The Nature Conservancy of Oregon at 503-802-8100, or email Rudy Dietz at excursions@tnc.org 821 SE 14th Ave, Portland, OR 97214

The trip leader, Eric Horvath, can be contacted at 541-867-6791, or at horvath@pioneer.net



Great Horned Owl