

The Grebe

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 25

SUMMER 2019

Wonder what
happens at night
on the refuge?
Check it out on
Pages 4 & 5.

Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge

Our mission is to promote, protect
and provide resources to preserve
and enhance

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge

for the enjoyment of present
and future generations.



Friends of Deer Flat Board of Directors

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Bob & Sheryl Faller
Newsletter Editors

From the President's Keyboard: **"What's in Those Nesting Boxes?"**

I decided to try a new experience this spring and joined the team of volunteers to inspect and clean wood duck boxes and a few owl boxes.

Headed by Jim Jorgensen of Southwestern Idaho Birders Association (SIBA), we inspected boxes on the north side of Lake Lowell—from the New York Canal (off Tio Lane) to the refuge maintenance shop. The canal was pretty full, but the lake level wasn't high enough to hamper our access, only thick brush. **My husband Chris and I walked these trails for several years, aware of numbered nesting boxes hanging from the trees along the way, but we had no idea what exactly lived inside them. Well, now we know.**

Using ladders to access each box, we first knocked to give a warning of our approach. In a few cases, squirrels came flying out (and I'm going to assume they were red squirrels as I've read those are the only tree squirrels living in Idaho). We inspected each nest to look for eggs and egg shells, which would have indicated successful wood duck nests. We found a couple old duck nests but the majority were or had been inhabited by tree squirrels, including several with live young. We also found two with sleeping screech owls, which we left alone.

For those boxes with old, uninhabited nests, we removed all nesting materials and replaced them with fresh sawdust. The job was a bit dirty but absolutely fascinating to see what treasures were hidden just above our heads. Jim explained that each year presented new nesting results. Successful bird nesting could occur or not occur in any location, north or south of the lake.

Certainly, the squirrels have learned to take full advantage of free housing!

Tricia Matthews
Friends Board President

Friends Reach Out to Our Community



Over the past three months, Friends Board members have reached out to the community at various events, such as the Caldwell Information Fair, Dia de los Ninos, Snake River Raptor Festival, and the Refuge's "Get Outdoors" Festival. Participation in these activities provides us an opportunity to increase public awareness of the Refuge and the Friends group, as well as provide education about regional birds, fishing, and upcoming Refuge programs.

The outreach booth has been enhanced this year with the help of Cathy Eells' addition of a personalized Friends tablecloth. Mary Jo, Schumacher also added a color-coded wheel on which each color relates to a challenging question about the Refuge and its wildlife. Successful wheel spinners win fun prizes. We also include a raffle prize at each event to encourage public participation.

Through these types of activities, Board members have reached out to thousands of children and adults, securing new Friends memberships, Refuge volunteers, and family participation at Refuge events and programs.



"Dia de los Ninos"; photo by Mary Jo Schumacher

Friends Reach Out to Active Volunteers

In addition to our connection with the community, the Friends co-sponsored several events to bring Friends members, the Deer Flat Chapter of Idaho Master Naturalists, and Refuge volunteers together to socialize and learn about each group.

After government shutdown delays, spring was welcomed in April with a Yellow-Bellied Marmot Day potluck where Bob Christensen (*shown to the right*) educated and entertained about the Refuge's version of the groundhog. The event included the distribution of Master Naturalist certifications as well as many raffle prizes.

In June, these groups gathered again to indulge during the annual Ice Cream Social at the Refuge.



Update on Sagebrush Steppe Restoration

by Bob Christensen

The mild winter, along with ample spring moisture, has been a boon for the native shrubs and forbs planted in our restoration plots east of the Refuge visitor center. The sagebrush and saltbush in the three-acre Plot 1 (which was planted in November of 2017, then hand-watered and weeded during the 2018 growing season) are very robust, and the bunch grass that was seeded in October 2016 is coming in with greater abundance.



Plot 1- Sagebrush, bunchgrass, milkvetch & cheatgrass 5/31/19

In Plot 2 (about two acres), the shrubs and forbs, which were put in the ground in November 2018, are also growing with vigor. But, alas! The wet spring has also over-favored weedy vegetation, such as cheatgrass, wild mustard, and peppergrass. These undesirable species have outgrown and overshadowed the preferred shrubs and forbs, even though there was a concentrated effort to weed around them on Earth Day, April 20.



*Planting day
11/3/18*

So, anyone who likes to garden is welcome to come out and help us uncover sage and forbs hiding among the forest of weeds. You might even find some surprises under the weed canopy, like wild onions, yellow fiddlenecks, lavender daisies, white penstemon, and blue flax.



*Earth Day weeding
4/20/19*

*Field of
mustard
over-
shadowing
sagebrush
5/31/19*



Critters in the Dark

by Bob Christensen

Have you ever wondered what kind of night life there is on a wildlife refuge—the flora and fauna kind that is? Well, after receiving a wildlife trail camera for Christmas from my son David, I thought it might be fun and informative to set the camera up along one of the more remote deer trails on the southeast edge of Lake Lowell.

During a March 15 hike into the East End to observe the bald eagle nest there, I asked my co-hikers to help me attach the small black *Wildgame* camera to the trunk of a young ash tree growing adjacent to a well-used game trail. I installed new AA batteries and pushed all the right buttons to activate the camera; then strapped it to the tree, hoping it would work as claimed in the brief manual that came with the device. The camera was then set to detect any movement by man or beast, quickly snap a photo, then immediately afterwards re-arm itself—ready for the next photo opportunity. *NOTE: As you will see*

in the topsy-turvy photo of the installers to the right, in my haste and inexperience, I mounted the trail camera upside down! I flipped the photos found on the next page for your viewing.

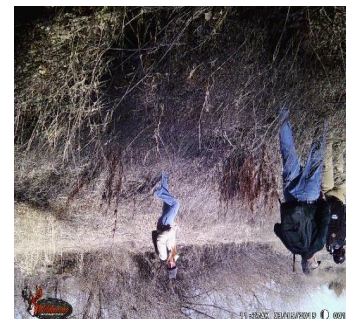


Figure 1: Mounting

As we stepped away from the camera set-up, my mind was already visualizing what the camera might record at this isolated corner of the Refuge. I knew that I would have to return before too many weeks and retrieve the camera, before the lake levels came up too high. So, for weeks I faithfully watched the lake elevations shown on the internet. Then, during the last week of April, when the lake was nearing its full capacity, I decided it was now time to go after the camera.

With my daughter Cindy and granddaughter Bekah, we hiked along the weedy and brushy path to the designated spot. On our way into the area, we flushed out several small flocks of mallards feeding and loafing in the shallow water, which had already inundated the cottonwood forest. As it was, I had to tip-toe through several inches of water to unleash the camera from the tree trunk and then hurry back to higher ground.

Returning home, I quickly pulled the SD card from the camera and inserted it into my PC. The anticipation was building into an anxious thought, “What if there is nothing recorded?” Thankfully, as I examined the different folders on the card, I finally found the right files. To my surprise, there were over 500 photos recorded! “Wow,” I thought, “what a treasure-trove I’ve come up with.” However, upon searching through the images, I soon realized that during that one and one-half month period, the movement-sensitive camera had recorded at least 500 images of just the grass, brush and weeds blowing in the wind. Carefully sorting through the photos, I was able to pick out 21 night shots of mule deer roaming through the area, plus several photos of magpies & mallards, two dogs, and one feral cat. There was also a night shot of a mystery animal running past the camera (in a blur of speed) and an interesting close-in bird silhouette (possibly a magpie that had just flown from where it had perched on top of the camera, leaving its white-wash calling card—Yuck!).

(Pictures continued on Page 5)

Critters in the Dark (Continued from Page 4)



Figure 2: First photo-capture of a deer



Figure 3: Deer family grazing through



Figure 4: Coming close in



Figure 5: Dog at dusk



Figure 6: Feral Cat



Figure 7: Mystery Critter - Any guesses?

Current Weather Data Now Available!

by Rex Hanson

In April, Friends of Deer Flat volunteers added a solar-powered, Wi-Fi-enabled weather station to the Refuge pollinator garden. A webpage link found on the Friends website and the Deer Flat Master Naturalist Facebook page allows anyone to check current weather conditions and plan their Refuge visit appropriately.

The weather station measures wind speed, wind direction, rainfall, outdoor temperature and humidity, atmospheric pressure, solar radiation and ultraviolet exposure (UV). In addition, calculated dew point, wind chill and heat index can be seen on the web page.



The data updates every 5 minutes and an historical weather record is also available from the web.



Help with Hispanic Outreach

by Mary Jo Schumacher

The Friends Board is excited to welcome Gisel Holdcroft to the Board as our Latino advisor.

Gisel has been a Nampa resident for more than seven years, and enjoys outdoors activities with her two daughters, such as hiking, bike riding on the Greenbelt, and taking the family's two dogs to the dog park. Gisel loves her job in education and is an advocate for expanding education throughout our community.

As a Friend of Deer Flat, she is most looking forward to exploring the incredible Refuge that lies so close to her home and learning how to preserve its beautiful wildlife for future explorers! Welcome to the Friends, Gisel! Your love for education and outdoors is a tremendous asset, and your Hispanic heritage and bilingual abilities will fill a much-needed void in the Board's outreach efforts. Bienvenida Gisel!



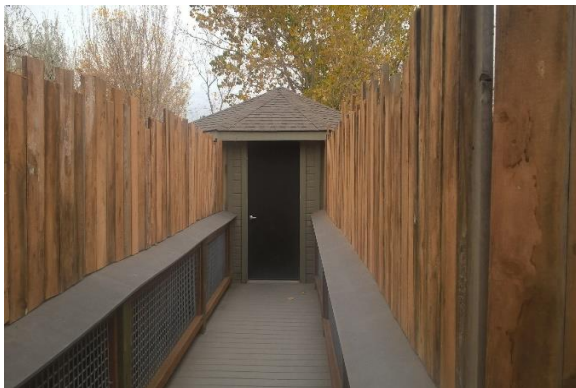
Photo by Mary Jo Schumacher

Wildlife Viewing Blind Takes on New Look

by *Bob Christensen*



Original pole fencing used to screen approaching viewers from wildlife.



New plank fencing on access ramp.



New plank fencing under construction - Steve Crouse

Those of you who have visited the wildlife viewing blind on the shoreline of Lake Lowell this winter and spring have had a new experience.

Instead of the old drift pole fences that were there to screen groups of people as they visited and left the blind, we now have a closed-in, rough-plank look to the approach.

The old fencing kept falling over, as the poles were continually loosened by the rise and fall of the lake waters. So, we came up with a new, more permanent design.

Rough lumber planks were attached directly to the access ramp, where they will not be subjected to the lake water levels.

This simple privacy fence, along with the adjacent trees and brush, offers adequate screening.

However, approaching wildlife viewers will need to move quietly to avoid scaring off birds and other critters coming into the feeders.

A special thanks goes to Brian Clifford, our Refuge maintenance leader, and his helpers John Bean, Mike Ferdinand, Steve Crouse, Adam Prickett, Caleb Elles, and Chris Matthews for all their hard work constructing the new fence this past fall.

The Grebe Nest Nature Store

**The Grebe Nest Nature Store is open limited hours (see below).
Friends' members receive a 10 percent discount on all store merchandise.**

- Mondays: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Tuesdays: **Closed**
- Wednesdays: 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
- Thursdays: 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Fridays: 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Saturdays: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The Nature Store is volunteer-operated and may not always be open during posted times depending on volunteer availability. We recommend calling ahead if you know you want to buy something during operating hours.

Yes!

I want to be a member.

Just copy this page, complete the requested information, cut along dotted line above form, and mail it with your annual dues to:

Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge
13751 Upper Embankment Road
Nampa ID 83686

Name(s)

Address

City/State /Zip

Phone _____

Email _____

Annual Membership Levels (Please mark one)

_____ Owl (senior or student)	\$ 10.00
_____ Deer (individual)	\$ 15.00
_____ Fox (family)	\$ 25.00
_____ Osprey	\$ 50.00
_____ Eagle	\$ 100.00
_____ Goldeneye	\$ 500.00



Join
the
Friends
of
Deer
Flat
Refuge

Yes!

I want to be involved.

Please mark all areas of interest and ways you'd like to participate.

- Habitat Restoration
- Staffing the Bookstore
- Organizing events
- Litter lifts
- Weed eradication
- Project Participation
- Photographic Documentation of Events and Activities
- Garden Enhancement
- Newsletter
- Publicity / Public Relations
- Grant Writing
- Fundraising
- Community Outreach
- Board of Directors
- Advisory on specific policies, protocols and processes.
- Other (please specify)

Engraved Bricks Order Form

Friends of Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge are selling engraved bricks to help support the many activities at the refuge. Your brick will be made a permanent part of the Pollinator Garden located just behind the Refuge Visitor Center.

Whether you are honoring a friend or family member, or celebrating a special occasion, our engraved bricks make a wonderful and lasting gift.



Each brick is 4" x 8" and may contain up to three engraved lines.

There is a maximum of 19 characters and/or spaces per line.

Brick price is \$50 for one; two or more bricks are \$90 each.

You are eligible for one FREE brick for each \$100 Friends membership.

Make check or money order payable to and mail to:
 Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge (c/o Bricks)
 13751 Upper Embankment Road, Nampa, ID 83686

Engraving information (please print)

Line 1 _____

Line 2 _____

Line 3 _____

Your information

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____