

Birds of a feather

Lesbians flock together to enjoy the natural world

BY REBECCA ROYCE



LES members partaking of the great outdoors

I'll be the first to admit that when I initially came across Lesbians Enjoying the Sciences, I was assaulted by images of retired P.E. teachers and school nutritionists sporting Dorothy Hamill hairdos, all sitting about discussing the most interesting aspects of mitochondria—not your average dyke's idea of a good time.

Now let me be the first to reprimand myself for falling prey to gross generalizations and stereotypes. The women of LES are not home-bound gray women who force themselves into commingling once a month to retain their ties to humanity.

On the contrary, they surely know more about themselves and the environment and how each affects the other than do most people. They are intelligent, inquisitive, active women who explore every aspect of the world around them for the pure and unequivocal joy of discovery.

In fact, the two outings I participated in were so enjoyable, even refreshing, I do think they have another member on their hands.

My first excursion with LES began at the terribly early Sunday morning hour of 8 a.m. We met in Sellwood at Oaks Bottom for a nature walk organized by Susan, one of the few professional scientists in LES.

Members, about 40 at present, range anywhere from lawyers to civil servants to blue-collar workers. On this particular rainy morning, however, only four braved the damp November chill to explore Portland's anomaly of a wildlife refuge within city limits.

I had walked the loop at Oaks Bottom before, but apparently I had missed much of what surrounded me. My companions, however, didn't miss a thing.

They spotted almost 20 species of birds, many recognized by their musical calls. I got to see an osprey nest splayed across the top of a power line tower. I borrowed binoculars so I could spy on the heron rookery on Hartack Island, where a pair of bald eagles were nesting nearby.

These three women were a wealth of information on both the history of the region and its natural resources, and it was truly a pleasure to spend the morning in such amiable company.

The following weekend, LES met at the Oregon Zoo for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Stellar Cove exhibit. A senior zookeeper and friend of an LES member was kind enough to

take off two hours from her duties to provide the tour.

Now I have some ethical issues with caging animals, so I tend not to frequent such places, but the knowledge I gained during the course of the morning helped erase another misconception I had held. For instance, the mammals of Stellar Cove are not caught in the wild, as that method is highly frowned upon these days. Instead, they either are acquired from facilities of poorer quality (as is the case with sea lions Stella and Julius) or were unable to be released back to the wild.

What impressed us the most, though, was the technology and people power it takes to properly duplicate and manage the animals' environments. The methods used to control the specialized salt water mixture for each species are so effective, they boast a 100 percent recovery rate for the water used in the exhibit. By the time the tour was over, I had concluded that the \$6.50 I paid to enter the zoo was an incredible bargain.

As John Muir wrote, "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, [s]he finds it attached to the rest of the world." Lesbians Enjoying the Sciences not only do the tugging, they explore the attachments. Such experiences not only enrich the mind, they enhance the spirit.

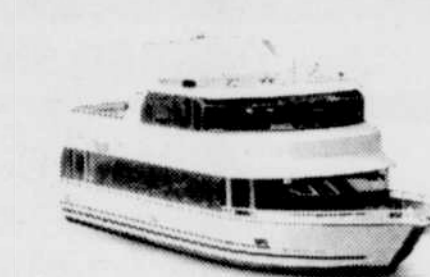
All members are encouraged to suggest activities at the monthly potlucks, and any lesbian is free to join the group or just show up for an outing. The annual membership fee of \$12 provides a monthly newsletter and helps finance certain wildlife sponsored by the group. Past and future activities include bird watching, snowshoeing, camping, fossiling, watching meteor showers, touring museums, aquarium outings, building bird and bat houses—and the list goes on.

These women know how to have a good time, so if you're looking for a way to get more out of life or simply spend a pleasurable day, I suggest you tag along. You just might fall in love with the natural world and discover a piece of yourself in the process. 

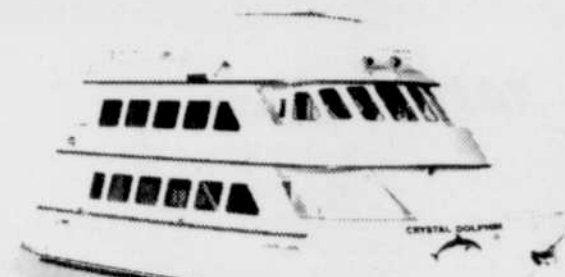
To join LESBIANS ENJOYING THE SCIENCES call 503-289-3605 or 503-466-0058 or send e-mail to lespmw@aol.com.

REBECCA ROYCE is a Portland freelance writer.

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