



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Porter-Bown

Instructor John Snively (third from left) and assorted science students take a moment out of their rigorous schedule for a photo shoot.

## Natural history: not for the birds anymore

**SHADRA BEESLEY**

Staff Writer

Imagine going on a four-day vacation and getting school credit for it. For a group of Clackamas students, that dream is pretty close to reality.

From May 9-12, Natural History class was in session. Jennifer Porter-Bown, John Snively, Bill Guthrie, and a crew of students went on a journey to learn about the geology and biology of Oregon. First they drove to John Day country in central Oregon to investigate the fossil beds, and get in some good rock hunting. After they'd had their fill, they continued to their destination: The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the largest inland marsh in the U.S.

The Malheur refuge is located on the east side of the Cascades at the base of the Steens Mountains, and is considered part of the great basin

desert. The marsh contains 50,000 acres of water less than six feet deep. It harbors many different types of fowl, as well as deer and antelope.

The great basin desert is known for its turbulent, unpredictable weather and the group got to experience this phenomenon first hand. Friday morning they woke up to a blanket of snow. "It snowed most of the morning," Porter-Bown said, "but then it warmed right up." Following the snowstorm, the class experienced a weekend of beautiful, sunny weather, complete with lots of bird watching.

Porter-Bown reported seeing 142 different species of bird. "I think that's probably a record," she mused. The field-trippers even saw two deviant species of mid-western bird. They also got to see a baby Great Horned owl and observe the mating ritual of the Sage Grouse.

"It's hilarious to see all

these goofy birds puffing up their feathers," Porter-Bown described the Sage Grouse's habits. The males all congregate in a part of the marsh called a lek to show off for the females. The females then pick their mate for the season. Last Sunday, nine males and three females were in attendance, and Porter-Bown declared that the spectacle was well worth waking up at 4 a.m. to see.

Besides seeing all sorts of different wildlife, the group also got to explore different types of land formations. Outside the marsh, they explored the Diamond Craters, a volcanic complex containing several lava tubes.

The students who attended this trip earned one biology credit for keeping a journal of the different species they saw (plants and animals), and turning in a paper about what they learned. The course is entitled BI-163 - Natural History.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Porter-Bown

Students try to identify a species of saltbrush at the John Day National Monument in the Painted Hills. On the four-day trip, biology and geology students got to see their subject matter up close and personal.

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