

Nifty Tidbits

By CHUCK RIGBY

One sure sign of spring, which some people anticipate, is the arrival of turkey vultures to Illinois Valley. Though not quite as romantic, or as regular as the swallows returning from Capistrano, they are still a natural indicator of the season. They winter in Mexico and Southern California and migrate up the central valley of California, over the Siskiyou Summit, and into the Rogue Valley in great numbers. They then disperse into the smaller valleys while some continue north as far as Southern Canada. The common name, turkey vulture, is derived from its naked head being similar to the ground-dwelling turkey. The scientific name, "Cathartes aura," is obtained from "cathar," Greek for "clean," and "aur," Latin for "ear." This could refer either to its carrion eating habits or the lack of feathers on its head. Only mature vultures have a red head, the immature males and females have a black head and neck.

Another interesting tidbit is that studies of their excreted material in Central California show approximately 25 percent of their diet is plant material. Vultures also eat small mammals such as moles and gophers and even insects. The vultures' fecal material is thought by some scientists to be antiseptic. They can consume rotting meat without harmful effects because the bacteria has been destroyed by their digestive system. This same white guano is not forced away from the body but dribbles down their legs and is thought to be a unique way of lowering the body temperature since they do not sweat.

Most birds have a syrinx, a structure in their throat which vibrates to produce sound. But the Turkey Vulture is lacking this structure. Therefore its only sound is a hissing noise when disturbed.

Vultures are easily recognized while they are soaring high above the valley floor searching for food. Their wings are extended with a slight V-shape as opposed to hawks and eagles which soar with a flat wing profile. They can soar for hours on rising warm air columns, called thermals, without flapping their wings. Their sense of smell is very acute in detecting dead animals. Natural gas maintenance workers often detect leaks in the pipes by watching where the vultures are circling.

Vultures have another unique ability, similar to kangaroo rats, to survive long periods of time without water. They can extract water from the food they eat and recycle water internally.

Turkey vultures were first recorded by scientists in 1839 in the Oregon area. This was by John Kirk Townsend who had come to Oregon with Thomas Nuttall in 1834. He often worked winters as a post surgeon for the Hudson Bay Company at Ft. Vancouver. One might suppose the Lewis and Clark Expedition would have reported them in 1805 - 1806. But they were only in Oregon from October to April when the vultures are farther south. They do report killing a California condor near the mouth of the Columbia River, showing their range was much greater than now. Today the condors are found only in small areas of Southern California.

Lewis and Clark make no mention of turkey vultures being seen anywhere during the trip. Either the range has greatly increased since then, or, more likely, they were so common and well known in the East that they didn't bother to record them.

A final tidbit, on May 14, 1804 the Lewis and Clark Expedition left St. Louis, Missouri to begin their trip. The year of 1803 was spent preparing the crew and collecting supplies as well as moving everything from Washington D.C. to St. Louis.

OLCC scans documents to upgrade

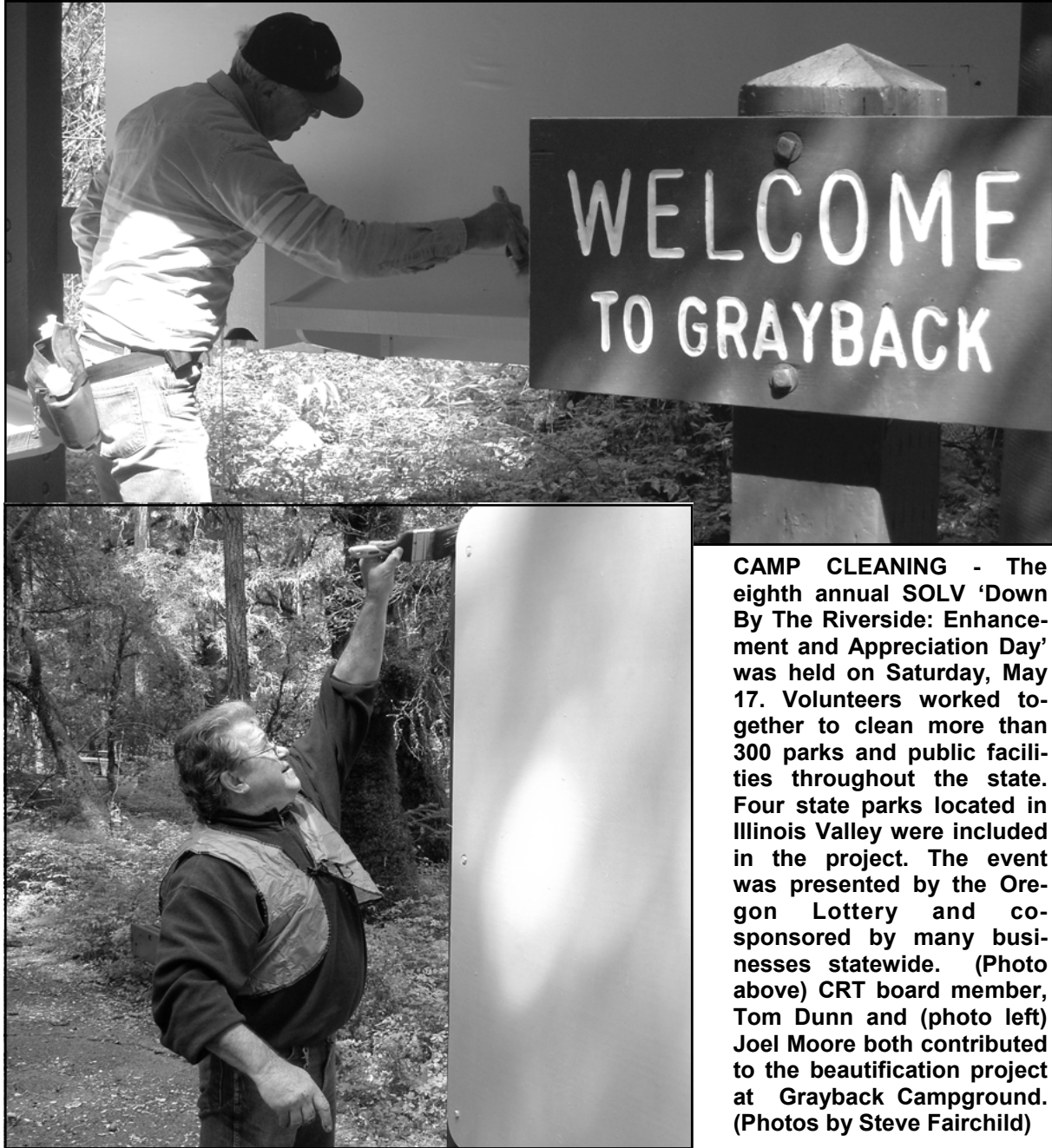
The Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) soon will begin electronically scanning more than two million paper documents into its computer database in a move to upgrade agency record-keeping and speed up liquor licensing.

The agency's Document Management System (DMS) project is under way, and the computer hardware should be in place by the end of June.

"With this system we'll be able to quickly access records, and that will be a big time-saving benefit to our staff, customers and the public," said Linda Ignowski, OLCC's regulatory director.

The system will allow staff members to e-mail, fax, or print directly from their computers.

And, in the future, compliance histories will also be included on the license inquiry system. Ignowski said that documents up to 25 years old will be scanned into the new system.



CAMP CLEANING - The eighth annual SOLV 'Down By The Riverside: Enhancement and Appreciation Day' was held on Saturday, May 17. Volunteers worked together to clean more than 300 parks and public facilities throughout the state. Four state parks located in Illinois Valley were included in the project. The event was presented by the Oregon Lottery and co-sponsored by many businesses statewide. (Photo above) CRT board member, Tom Dunn and (photo left) Joel Moore both contributed to the beautification project at Grayback Campground. (Photos by Steve Fairchild)

OSU-led group aiming to support family forestland

A new cooperative called the Family Forest Products Education and Marketing Project has been established to help support Oregon's family forestlands and forest products businesses.

The group was formed by Oregon State University (OSU), the Northwest Wood Products Association (NWPA) and the Oregon Small Woodlands Association (OSWA).

The group hopes to use education and outreach efforts to help owners stay committed to forest stewardship, enhance the productive potential and profitability of forest lands, generate more fiber from under used wood species, expand markets, create jobs and build a new infrastructure to accomplish these goals.

"Some woodland owners often do not consider the range of opportunities available through active management," said Scott Reed, of the Extension Forestry Program in the OSU College of Forestry.

"We hope that one or more pilot tests of this concept will demonstrate how owners can work together in ways that will improve their return on investments in forestland ownership, and also serve the manufacturing sector and create new jobs," he said.

Mike Gaudern, executive director of the OSWA, said that according to a recent poll, Oregonians want to see a balance between social, economic and environmental aspects of forest land in Oregon. All three are needed across the landscape, he said.

In the new cooperative, OSU will focus on educational programs in such areas as harvesting, quality control, wildlife habitat, recreation and aesthetics, timber and non-timber forest products, and transportation of products to markets.

The OSWA will try to identify area needs of family landowners, including collection and management of data from more than 2,500 of its members. And the NWPA will handle overall administration of the project, including assistance with processing, finished goods inventory, marketing and financing.

The cooperative also plans to work with small woodland owners to more effectively ensure a steady supply of forest products that will be able to sustain mills and wood products manufacturers in economically viable operations.

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