

## The Black-capped Chickadee: What's Not to Love?

By Sheryl Blossom

My favorite bird is the black-capped chickadee. There, I said it. No colorful plumage. No garish "look at me" call. No heart-warming reason like a life-long commitment to its offspring. No miraculous migration pattern that keeps it flying for days on end without stopping. It is certainly not rare. Nope. My real reason for loving this little bird is simple: it is cute.

Without doubt, the black-capped chickadee is one of the most charitable birds for watchers. It can locate your bird feeder faster than a politician can find cover for a questionable vote. It will faithfully visit your feeder numerous times each day and has the polite sense to hang there for long periods. This gives novice birders ample opportunity to repeatedly thumb thru identification book(s) and proudly announce a positive i.d. — often their first. I speak from experience.

And, while it is true that the black-capped chickadee is one of most frequent to winter feeders, it does not eat. On the contrary. It hides seed, and other food items it collects from your feeder. Each and every food item is placed in a different spot, requiring a chickadee to remember thousands of food stashes for winter survival.

Apparently, this cute bird has the good sense to eat well-portioned meals and an admirable drive to exercise between them. I guess the exercise part is a given if you have to fly to a thousand spots to nibble on one seed or locate a single peanut. Still, you have to love its commitment to good health. No wonder most chickadees live up to six plus years. (Their summer diet consists of healthy favorites like berries, yummy spiders and fat caterpillars.)

And why can this bird remember where it stashes all its food? Get this. Each and every autumn black-capped chickadees

allow brain neurons containing old information to die, replacing them with new neurons so they can adapt to social and environmental changes. Seriously. You have to love (or at least strongly admire) the black-capped chickadee. When parts of their old brain stop working — they just replace it with a new one. How cool is that?



Photo from Audubon Society

I must admit, this little bird has the parenting thing down. These hard-working, monogamous birds produce one brood each year — ranging from 1-10 eggs. Both dad and mom play an active role. Incubation is about 13 days, birds nest for about 14 days and they are ready to fly. In less than 30 days, they have completed much of their parental obligation to as many as ten children. They do continue to assist in feeding for several weeks but clearly are no longer bound to the nest. It is hard not to love their efficiency.

Black-capped chickadees are social and curious birds. They reside in flocks, are quick to investigate people and assist small migrating birds unfamiliar with the area. They make it a point to know everything

going on in their home territory, but appear not to offend with their nosiness. Woodpeckers, nuthatches, wrens, vireos and warblers are regular neighbors to the chickadee. Should danger lurk, many bird species respond to the 2-4 note bell of alarm sounded by the chickadee. (By the way, their short calls are considered one of the most complex in the bird world.)

I guess you could say the black-capped chickadee serves as a territory's Neighborhood Watch, Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Wagon. It's a big job for a cute bird.

Lucky for me, the black-capped chickadee is permanent part of Baker County's landscape year-round. I find great comfort knowing this endearing, small, white-cheeked, black-capped visitor will most assuredly arrive on local feeders each and every winter. It is charitable, complex, committed to good health, a neurological phenomenon, a great neighbor, an efficient parent, and it loyally brings hours of enjoyment to bird watchers.

Yes. It is all those amazing things. But I still favor this little bird for one simple reason: it is cute.

**Tweets from the Nest:**  
*Contrary to popular belief, owls cannot turn their heads all the way around (you know, like Linda Blaire in the Exorcist.) Due to an extra vertebrae and a single ligament on the back of the neck, owls can turn their heads 270 degrees. Given that owls eyes are locked in their sockets, it is one heck of a handy feature when seeing what's up behind you.*

## SUMPTER

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Also last week, the members of the Sumpter City Council had several training and networking opportunities. Tuesday morning, the mayor, all council members, and city recorder attended a get-together in Baker City conducted by Grant Young of the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). He is part of the Regional Solutions Center located in La Grande at Eastern Oregon University. Halfway, Baker City, and Baker County also had representatives in attendance. Mr. Young commented that his job is to provide the cities of the ten northeastern Oregon counties help with technical matters and planning changes. His take-away from the meeting was that assistance of the most interest to attendees was in the area of buildable lands inventory, digitization of records, and code updates.

Wednesday, Mayor Melissa Findley, council members Bob Armbruster and Annie Oakley, and City Recorder Julie McKinney attended a luncheon round table discussion in John Day about Human Resources issues. McKinney stayed for the afternoon class.

Thursday, a Mayors' Council was held in Huntington. Again all council members and the city recorder were in attendance. There were also representatives from Huntington, Haines, Holladay Engineering, Infrastructure Finance Authority, Baker County Sheriff's Department, DEQ, and Baker City. After the updates given by each city, Scott Fairley of the Governor's Office spoke about the budget proposals the governor has given to the legislature. Money is proposed for an industrial park in La Grande, forest restoration, infrastructure, business retention, water development for agricultural applications, and career development for youth.

After Mr. Fairley spoke, Timothy Bishop of Baker

County Marketing & Tourism (BCMT) gave an update. The 100,000 copies of the Oregon Festival and Events Association guide have been printed and the first distribution was in The Oregonian in the Portland area the last Sunday in Dec. Baker City's Memory Cruise is on the front cover and the sixteen events receiving extra training and sponsorship from BCMT are in an ad on the back cover. Sumpter's Flea Market and the SVRR Christmas Trains are included in that group. Eastern Oregon events were the largest section inside, and Baker County had over half of those listings. Baker County also figures prominently in an article being printed by a motorcycle magazine in The Netherlands.

Julee Hicks of Baker County Economic Development spoke of the upcoming Mining and Aggregate Summit in Baker City. The event will focus on education about mining. Greg Smith is attending three trade shows in the next few weeks to inform attendees of business opportunities in Baker County. There is no update on the Farewell Bend development as the new owner has been out of the country quite a bit lately.

County Commissioner Bill Harvey brought the meeting to a close with a few comments on job expansion and education about mining and managed forestry. He encouraged interaction between the cities of the county and the county commissioners, urging all to band together. The next Mayors' Council is scheduled for March in Baker City.

### People

Word has been received from part-time resident David Scott that his dad, William (Bill) Scott passed away Jan. 9, 2015, at the age of 98. As a youth, Bill came with his folks to this area for hunting and fish-

ing. As an adult, Bill's love of the area grew ever stronger, leading him to purchase in the mid to late 70s a large property developed by Les Moore, on Ibx St. Bill and his family (wife Bonnie and the five kids) enjoyed life in Sumpter for about ten years before deciding to return to living full-time in the Ontario area, selling most of the property to Jack and Ona Smith. Our heartfelt condolences to the Scott family and their friends on their loss. Bill was a super person and a wonderful neighbor.

### Morgans Win Excellence in Agriculture

Of special note, Bowen Valley ranchers Ralph and Myrna Morgan, at last Saturday evening's annual Baker County Chamber Awards Banquet, received the 2014 Excellence in Agriculture award—not just for raising cattle, but for all the participation in agricultural and other organizations they have done through the years. Congratulations!

### Churches

Sunday morning services are held at St. Brigid's in the Pines on the first and third Sundays of the month at 11 a.m. followed by a coffee 'hour.' The February 1 service will be lead by Rev. Dick Thew.

Weekly services at McEwen Bible Fellowship include Sunday School at 9:45 a.m. and Morning Worship at 11 a.m. and Wednesday evening prayer at 6:45 p.m.

News items received by this reporter by Sunday evening will be included in the Sumpter column the following week. Send in news and/or photos with captions of guests, births, group meetings, any special occasion. Due to space and time, details of the Poker Run and Outhouse Races will be included in next week's column.

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Cindy Carpenter

Carpenter is halfway through her third week as County Clerk and she says she is learning something new every day. She is a hands on learner, so the things that she used to watch be done are now making sense as she does them herself. One thing she is not especially looking forward to is running the tally machine.

"I have never, in my nine years here, even been close to this machine while they were running it!" she exclaimed. She appreciates the election board she will be working with during those times know how to use it and understand it, "but the responsibility lies here," she asserted, pointing to herself. That being said, she is currently taking proactive steps to avert any mishaps during the very important elections, which her office will be planning, coordinating and conducting. With the May special district elections just around the corner, she has scheduled a special meeting time, complete with hands on training, with the company from which the County purchased the tally machine.

"I've been reading the manual," she stated, "but I still want them to show me how to use it."

In the meantime, the office is getting a slight make-over as drawers and shelves are cleaned up and reorganized, and they are finishing up the longstanding task of digitizing all of the County's record books. Carpenter is expecting that project to be completed by the end of June. Candidate forms are being prepared and brought up to date, the yearly security plan is being revised and monitoring tasks to as-

sure they will make deadlines are a few of the other office projects currently underway.

The office has always run well in Carpenter's mind, and she appreciates how Green had created such high benchmarks throughout her terms in office. She plans to continue striving towards those benchmarks, and especially wants to meet and exceed them in the area of customer service.

"Our office offers so many outlets: passports, marriage licenses,

elections, records, etc. So customer service is going to have to be high on our itinerary, and I think I have the crew to do it," she said. As a citizen coming in to the Clerk's office, you can expect an air of openness, where no questions are wrong and none will go unanswered. Carpenter says that customers will be the number one priority, and welcomes everyone to come in to meet her and get to know everything her office can offer.

## Valentine's Day

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