

Half mystery, half magic: In search of great gray owls

A photographer finds his passion

By IAN McCLUSKEY
Oregon Public Broadcasting

It's dawn. The rising sun is just starting to break through the boughs of ponderosa pine, gleaming on the frosty grass of a small forest meadow in central Oregon.

Woodpeckers drill, "Rrr-rrt-rrrrt-rrrrt." Doves coo. But Ken Shults keeps his ears piqued for only one bird call: a low, "Whooooo-whooooo."

He tips back his felt fedora, cupping his hand to shade his eyes as he squints.

He scans for any sign of motion against the dappled backdrop of boughs, pine needles, sunlight and shadow — a flutter of a feather, a slow twist of two intense yellow eyes.

Today he returns to a place he has been coming week after week, month after month, year after year.

Armed with tripod, camera and zoom lens, he is on a search to find one of the most elusive birds in America: the great gray owl. "I



Ken Shults

The rings of feathers around the owl's eyes scoop in sound like radar dishes.

think these birds are made of half magic and half mystery," Shults says. "They can disappear into a forest like they were made of smoke."

Great gray owls are so elusive that they've been nicknamed "the ghosts of the forest."

Even their scientific

name, *strix nebulosa*, speaks to this mysterious quality. *Strix*, the genus name, comes from ancient folklore. These were magical birds, sometimes associated with witches, and bearing ill omen. The species name *nebulosa* comes from the latin meaning misty, foggy

or obscure. So in short: half magic, half mystery.

They've also been nicknamed the "phantoms of the north" because they live in the cold northern forests of Europe, Alaska and Canada. In the U.S., they may appear in the northern Rockies, Cascades and Sierras.



Ian McCluskey/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Photographer Ken Shults searches for great gray owls in the forests of central Oregon.

Although they are not federally listed as endangered, finding one is a rare occurrence. Great gray owls move silently through a forest and will quietly perch, rarely drawing attention to themselves. Cloaked in dappled feathers, they blend almost invisibly into trees. Unlike many birds, they usually won't flush when someone walks by but will remain motionless.

Wildlife biologists have learned that owls are highly territorial and that if they play the call of an owl in their territory, most owls will

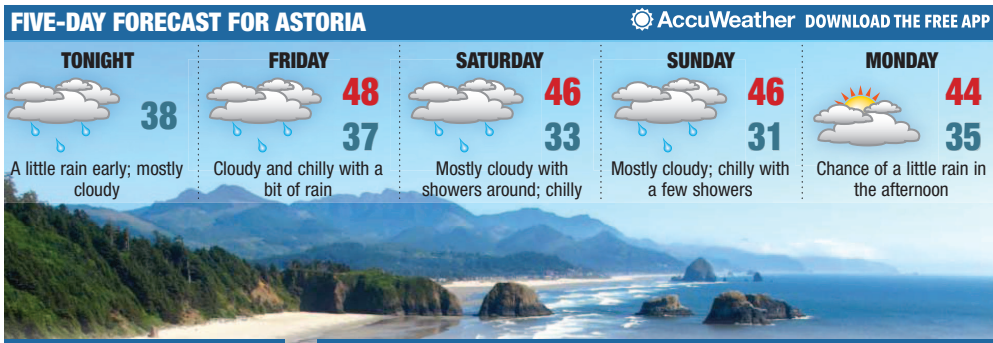
hoot back. Great gray owls, however, will often ignore such calls.

After five years of searching, Shults has probably seen fewer than a dozen, he estimates.

He has discovered only one nest.

"It's a big bird, but a much bigger forest," he says, then heads to another meadow.

Finding great gray owls requires intense focus. "So part of the trick is to train your brain to not see the tree," explains Shults. "You're looking for everything that's not tree."



ALMANAC
Astoria through Wednesday.

Temperatures

High/low	46°/36°
Normal high/low	52°/37°
Record high	64° in 2017
Record low	21° in 1949

Precipitation

Wednesday	0.11"
Month to date	4.78"
Normal month to date	3.48"
Year to date	9.71"
Normal year to date	13.68"

SUN AND MOON

Sunset tonight: 5:39 p.m.
Sunrise Friday: 7:19 a.m.
Moonrise today: 12:26 p.m.
Moonset today: 2:56 a.m.

Phase	Date
Full	Feb 19
Last	Feb 26
New	Mar 6
First	Mar 14

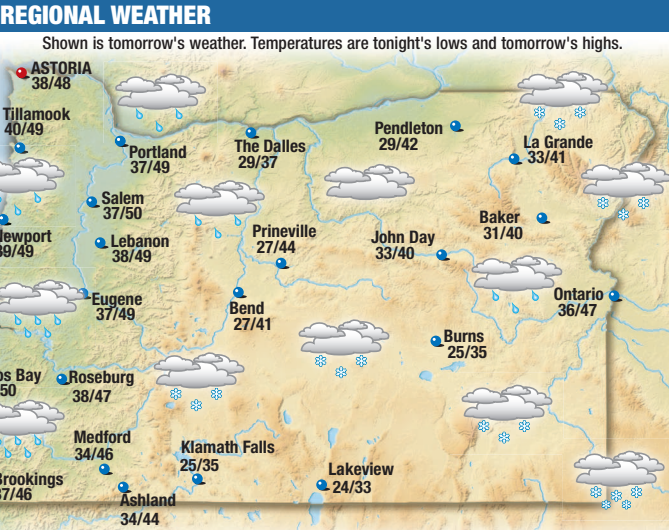
UNDER THE SKY
Tonight's Sky: Mars low above the southwest horizon. Will remain evening object through August 2019.

TOMORROW'S TIDES
Astoria / Port Docks

Time	High	Time	Low
8:46 a.m.	8.9 ft.	2:45 a.m.	3.8 ft.
10:52 p.m.	7.0 ft.	4:21 p.m.	0.3 ft.

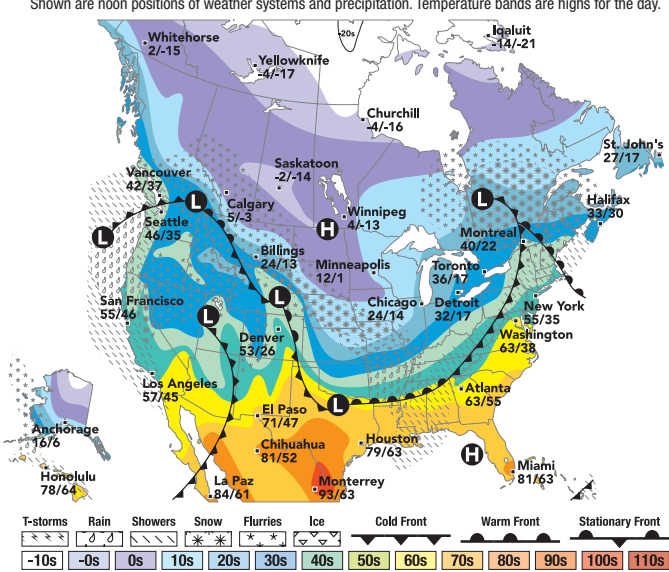
NATIONAL CITIES

City	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Fri.	W
Atlanta	64	48	pc	63	55	c
Boston	40	33	s	52	33	sh
Chicago	44	11	c	24	14	c
Denver	52	24	pc	53	26	pc
Des Moines	35	2	c	12	5	sn
Detroit	41	28	c	32	17	c
El Paso	75	59	pc	71	47	c
Fairbanks	3	-19	s	0	-7	s
Honolulu	75	65	sh	78	64	pc
Indianapolis	49	24	c	32	21	pc
Kansas City	47	14	c	18	9	sn
Las Vegas	56	44	r	60	41	pc
Los Angeles	62	49	r	57	45	sh
Memphis	64	48	c	54	32	r
Miami	77	65	pc	81	63	pc
Nashville	63	49	c	51	35	sh
New Orleans	72	60	c	75	64	c
New York	44	39	pc	55	35	c
Oklahoma City	69	31	pc	40	22	c
Philadelphia	48	38	pc	58	33	c
St. Louis	59	20	c	27	16	sn
Salt Lake City	50	37	sh	47	29	r
San Francisco	57	46	r	55	46	sh
San Jose	42	36	r	46	35	sh
Seattle	54	47	pc	63	38	c
Washington, DC	54	47	pc	63	38	c



REGIONAL CITIES

City	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Fri.	W
Baker City	41	31	sh	40	20	sn
Bend	40	27	i	41	23	sn
Brookings	49	38	r	46	38	r
Eugene	46	37	r	49	37	sh
Ilwaco	43	40	r	48	39	r
Klamath Falls	42	25	r	35	23	sn
Medford	48	34	r	46	34	r
Newberg	43	38	r	48	37	sh
Newport	46	39	r	49	38	r
North Bend	48	39	r	51	38	c
Olympia	39	35	r	45	32	sh
Pendleton	35	29	sn	42	26	c
Portland	42	37	r	49	37	sh
Roseburg	48	38	r	47	38	r
Salem	44	37	r	50	37	sh
Seaside	43	40	r	49	38	r
Spokane	33	28	sn	34	25	sf
Springfield	47	38	r	49	37	sh
Vancouver	42	39	r	49	38	r
Yakima	33	23	sn	35	21	c



A soaked Rainier assesses flood damage

By CHLOE SKAAR
The Daily News

RAINIER — Rainier Mayor Jerry Cole said the city is "putting things back together" after declaring a state of emergency Tuesday in response to downtown flooding caused by Fox Creek.

The creek, which enters the city from the hills above downtown, backed up where it enters a culvert at C Street. Water poured across C Street and flowed downhill before rejoining the creek just west of the Grocery Outlet store, located between B and A streets.

The parking lot of Ark Real Estate, on B Street, was flooded until late Tuesday afternoon, said real estate broker Sarah Borders, but the office didn't see water inside.

"I got a phone call at 7 a.m. (Tuesday) that there

was water to our first step, so I got here as fast as I could," Borders said. "I called a chain of other (businesses) ... we had sandbags down here at 10 a.m. but until then it was really just maintaining the debris in the runoff areas."

Borders said most of the water in their parking lot had receded by 2 p.m., and the real estate office was open for businesses as usual Wednesday. But other stores along Columbia River Highway didn't have the same luck.

Earth-N-Sun and Grocery Outlet were both closed Wednesday due to flood damage. Borders said she also observed Don Pedros restaurant and Rainier RV Center Inc. standing in water throughout Tuesday.

Rainier's only large food store, Grocery Outlet, was in a direct path downhill from the creek overflow.

The store itself did not sustain any damage, but a portion of the parking lot near the entry doors was washed out where the property abuts the open section of Fox Creek, said Kyle Noble, a spokesman for the company.

The company is keeping the store closed indefinitely as a safety precaution until it can assess the damage, Noble said late Wednesday.

"Heavy rains have wreaked havoc on the surrounding landscape causing a flood adjacent to our store and damage to our parking lot," Noble said in a prepared statement. "We are currently working to get the appropriate personnel in place to evaluate and make the necessary repairs and ensure the store is safe to reopen to the public."

He did not have an estimate for when the store would reopen.

DEATHS

- Feb. 13, 2019**
- BARROW, May Dagne, 87, of Warrenton, died in Seaside. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.
 - KINNUNEN, Gertrude Elizabeth (Palo), 92, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

- THURSDAY**
- Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.
 - Warrenton Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

LOTTERIES

OREGON	WASHINGTON
Wednesday's Pick 4: 1 p.m.: 2-4-9-3 4 p.m.: 4-5-4-6 7 p.m.: 0-8-1-3 10 p.m.: 7-8-4-2	Washington's Daily Game: 5-5-1 Washington's Hit 5: 08-10-36-
Wednesday's Lucky Lines: 4-7-11-13-20-24-27-31 Estimated jackpot: \$47,000 Wednesday's Megabucks:	Washington's Daily Game: 5-5-1 Washington's Hit 5: 08-10-36-37-38 Estimated jackpot: \$220,000 Wednesday's Keno: 01-02-03-10-12-19-21-28-31-36-37-42-43-48-49-54-61-65-66-74 Wednesday's Lotto: 14-18-22-40-46-49 Estimated jackpot: \$4.3 million Wednesday's Match 4: 15-18-20-24

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