

Ptarmigans may get more federal protection

By COURTNEY FLATT
Northwest News Network

If you've ever been hiking in the Cascades, high up in the alpine meadows, and were spooked by a streak of a bird, a plume of feathers that darted right in front of your face, you may have come across the Mount Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan.

This chicken-sized grouse stays hidden, until you are right upon it. Then it squawks and flies away.

"They especially like those pretty little meadows that backpackers and hikers like to go to, with the pink heather and the flowers blooming in the little creeks below the snow bank. I like to joke that the main habitat feature that whitetail ptarmigan select for is a pretty view," said Terry Frederick, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

These birds need the cold, high alpine climates backpackers love to enjoy. They migrate between lower elevation winter areas and higher elevation summer habitat above the treeline.

Their habitat is quickly shrinking as climate change warms the areas they depend on. That's why the service has proposed listing them as threatened on the Endangered Species list.

"They aren't very well adapted to heat, and they will seek out shade and cool microclimates," Frederick said.

Climate change is their biggest threat. It's the reason the service made this decision. As these places warm, biologists expect more species to join the ranks of plants and wildlife solely threatened by climate change, from meltwater lednian stoneflies to eastern black rail to polar bears.

Although it's difficult to know how many of the birds are around now — their habitat is hard to get to and no



Jamie Hanson/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing listing Mount Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan as threatened because climate change will greatly disrupt the bird's alpine habitat.

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large-scale surveys have been conducted — biologists believe this subspecies is found throughout Washington's Cascades and possibly into British Columbia.

In the Northwest, Frederick said the Mount Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan subspecies will mostly lose habitat because of climate change. She said most of the alpine vegetation the birds rely on will be lost by the end of the century. All except at

Mount Rainier itself, she says, because it's so big and tall.

"Studies have shown there's this relationship that mountain tops are warming at a faster rate than other places except for maybe the Arctic," Frederick said. "Those warmer summers mean less melting snow, which supports the vegetation that the ptarmigan eat."

"Also, trees are moving upslope as the climate gets warmer and as they move

upslope, the space for alpine vegetation above the trees is shrinking and it's just getting squeezed and squeezed and squeezed until eventually there will be nothing left in many places."

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife says the birds are highly sensitive to climate change and will experience "increases in winter minimum temperatures, increased temperatures overall and reduced snowpack." The state calls it a species of greatest conservation need.

To protect the birds, Frederick said, they'll first have to find "small sites where there's refuge from the warming climate, and that's going to be a challenge to figure out how to create those."

She said they're "cute, funny little birds." They can't fly without screaming, she said.

Their constantly molting feathers — milky white in the winter, mottled white and brown in the spring, brown in the summer — camouflage them throughout the year. They have feathers on their feet, which helps them walk on top of the snow, like a snowshoe hare. They sit statue-like to hide from predators, mainly hawks and falcons, thus scaring many a hiker. They burrow in the snow during extreme weather.

"It's like a little igloo in there sheltered behind the ice and the extreme cold," Frederick said.

Without the high-mountain meadows and bare patches, the Mount Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan has few places to go. It's really not adapted well to warmer climates, Frederick said.

"There are those high mountain areas that conservationists used to think were protected," she said. "And they needed to focus on lower elevation areas that had other threats. Now we're starting to rethink that assumption."

RELIGION BRIEFS

Anchor Baptist Church

The congregation meets at the Astoria Christian Church, 1151 Harrison Ave. On Sundays, the service starts at 1 p.m.; Bible study is at 7 p.m. on Thursdays. For information, email anchorbaptistastoria@gmail.com

Grace Astoria

Pacific Unitarian Universalist

A Pacific Unitarian Universalist Fellowship service is being held via Zoom at 11 a.m. Sunday. For Zoom information, go to pacuuf.org

Astoria Christian Church

For service information and updates, go to astoriachristian.org or bit.ly/Astoria-Christian, call 503-325-2591 or email AstoriaChristian@gmail.com

Astoria First Baptist Church

A citywide Astoria Vacation Bible School takes place from 9 a.m. to noon, Monday through June 25, at Peace Lutheran Church, 565 12th St., for ages 3 to fifth grade. This year's theme is "Rocky Railway."

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there is a cap of 48 children, or four groups of 12 per group.

There is no on-site registration this year. To register, or for information, go to fbcastoria.org/vbs or call the church office at 503-325-1761.

First Baptist Church, 349 Seventh St., holds an in-person worship service at 10:45 a.m. Sunday. Social distancing is practiced, face coverings are required and hand sanitizers are available. The service is also broadcast at fb.me/astoriafirstbaptist

Sunday school starts at 9:30 a.m. There is no child care, but children are encouraged to join the service.

Astoria First United Methodist Church

For livestream service information and updates, email the church office at office@unitedmethodistastoria.org or call 503-325-5454.

Grace Episcopal Church

For updates, food pantry hours and in-person and livestream service information, call the church at 503-325-4691, email graceastoria4691@gmail.com or go to graceastoria.org or fb.me/

Peace First Lutheran

On June 17, 2015, members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, were the victims of a mass shooting; nine were killed, and several others were wounded.

In remembrance of the Emanuel Nine Commemoration and Day of Repentance, Peace First Lutheran Church is holding an open air prayer vigil today at 7 p.m. at 565 12th St. All are welcome.

For service information, go to astoriafirstlutheran.com under "Worship & Music/Videos & Resources" or bit.ly/FLCAstoria. To receive a DVD of the services and bulletin, call the office and leave a message.

Pioneer Presbyterian Church

WARRENTON — For service information, call the church at 503-861-2421 or go to pioneerchurchpcusa.org

St. Brendan The Navigator Orthodox Church

St. Brendan The Navigator Orthodox Church, 820 Alameda Ave., is holding Great Vespers at 5 p.m. Saturday.

On Sunday, Matins begins at 8:30 a.m., and Divine Liturgy is at 10 a.m.

Both services are conducted by Rev. Kevin Lien. All are welcome. Social distancing is still required.

St. Mary, Star of the Sea Parish

For information about the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry hours, and service and livestreaming information at both the Astoria church and Hammond mission, call 503-325-3671, email office@stmaryastoria.com or go to stmaryastoria.com or bit.ly/stmaryastoria

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

4-H holds conference for teens

The 4-H Summer Conference for teens will be held virtually June 22 to June 25, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. each evening, for youth in grades seven to 12.

Speaker Juan Bendana will deliver a keynote address and teach two workshops. There will be an hour with a magician, workshops, a game session and a time of celebration and recognition.

To register, go to beav.es/3fz. The cost is \$25. For scholarship information, call the Oregon State University Extension office at 503-325-8573.

GrassRoots Garbage Gang plans holiday cleanup

LONG BEACH, Wash. — The GrassRoots Garbage Gang is holding a community beach cleanup on the Long Beach Peninsula, starting at 9:30 a.m. July 5, to pick up Fourth of July debris. For information,

or to volunteer, go to ourbeach.org or email join@ourbeach.org

The group is also seeking volunteers to hand out trash bags to people entering the beach at major approaches on the night of July 4. Bags and safety vests are provided. For information, email magen.michaud@gmail.com

AARP seeks volunteer instructors

Volunteers are needed to become instructors and join more than 5,000 AARP Driver Safety volunteers nationwide who teach and organize the AARP Smart Driver classroom course, which helps older drivers stay safe on the road.

Training and resources are provided. No special skills or AARP membership are required.

Volunteers are also needed to teach new vehicle technology as AARP Smart Driver/TEK presenters, helping drivers ages 50-plus gain confidence to use their vehicles' new

safety features.

To sign up, go to aarp.org/ADSvolunteer

Medicare virtual fair offered

NorthWest Senior and Disability Services is teaming up with the State Health Insurance Assistance Programs National Technical Assistance Center from noon to 4 p.m. Wednesday to present the Welcome to Medicare Virtual Fair.

This free event, which is government funded, will teach participants about Medicare and assist them with initial enrollment decisions.

There will be general sessions with expert presenters on Medicare eligibility, enrollment costs and coverage options, with state-specific virtual exhibits. Chat will be available about how the program can help with individual Medicare enrollment questions.

Attend for any length of time. Go to shiptacenter.org for details, to see the agenda and to register.

— The Astorian



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HONOR ROLL

The following students have qualified for the honor roll by earning a 3.5 grade point average or higher at school.

Coastal Carolina University
Conway, South Carolina
Warrenton: Tatiana Baker.
George Fox University
Newberg
Astoria: Mitchell Geisler, Sarah Lertora, Henry Samuelson.
Gearhart: Jackson Januik.
Seaside: Niquilla Blodgett.
Warrenton: Matthew Burgher, Marin Donohue.

GRADUATES

The following students have graduated from college:

George Fox University
Newberg
Astoria: Mitchell Geisler, bachelor's degree, engineering.
Gearhart: Jackson Januik, bachelor's degree, management.
Gonzaga University
Spokane, Washington

Astoria: Caroline Kotson, bachelor's degree, human physiology, summa cum laude.
Warrenton: Bradley Rzewnicki, bachelor's degree, human physiology.
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa
Astoria: Emily Townsend, master's degree, teaching and learning.

