

IN THE WILD



Staff photo by Tim Trainor
Sun tries to break through the snow clouds above Hurricane Creek, in Wallowa County, on Dec. 17. Heavy snow has made for excellent skiing and showshoeing in the area, past the residences where Hurrican Creek Road remains unplowed and pristine.

New Years Day a perfect time for first hike of 2017

Rangers will lead hikes in 21 parks

East Oregonian

Celebrate New Year’s Day in the great outdoors with one of 21 First Day Hikes scheduled at state parks across Oregon, including Emigrant Springs State Heritage Area and Cottonwood Canyon State Park near Pendleton. America’s State Parks and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are sponsoring First Day Hikes at participating parks, where rangers or volunteers will lead fun and educational outings for people of all ages. “This is us helping people have a little fun and

remember your parks are there for you any time of year,” said Lisa Sumption, director of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. “Bundle up and enjoy your first walk of the year with a state park ranger.” Day-use parking fees will be waived for all visitors participating in one of the First Day Hikes. Hikers should plan for inclement weather, dress appropriately and bring binoculars for wildlife viewing. At Emigrant Springs, visitors will gather at 11 a.m. for a snowshoe hike beginning at the Oregon Trail kiosk west of the park entrance. Emigrant Springs is located at the summit of the Blue Mountains, near Meacham

off Interstate 84. At Cottonwood Canyon, park manager Tom Peterson will lead a hike down the Pinnacles Trail along the John Day River. The trail runs easy to moderate, Peterson said, though he expects temperatures for the day will be at or below freezing. Peterson said he will discuss historic settlements of the area, and hikers could see wildlife including osprey, river otters, bighorn sheep and deer. Cottonwood Canyon is located on Highway 206 between Condon and Wasco. For more information on other hikes around the state, visit the Oregon State Parks website at www.oregonstate-parks.org.



Photo contributed by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.
First Day Hikes will be held New Year’s Day in 21 state parks across Oregon, including Cottonwood Canyon State Park seen here.



Photo by Michael Beaudoin
A short-eared owl leaves its perch, as seen through a birder’s binoculars.



Photo by Michael Beaudoin
The red-tailed hawk is common throughout Wallowa County, and more noticeable in winter when trees are bare.

BIRDSPOTTING

Birders brave negative temperatures for Christmas count

By MICHAEL BEAUDOIN
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

On Dec. 18 at 5:30 a.m., the sun not yet up and temperatures hovering in the negative numbers, a variety of souls were en route to Enterprise eatery Red Rooster. Some arrived in comfortable SUVs, some in rumbling pickups. They came from as far away as Troy to partake in the Christmas Bird Census, an event with roots that stretch back into the 20th century. Birdwatching, or birding, attracts an eclectic mix of committed and adventurous people who are curious about the detailed workings of nature. Andie Lueders, despite early morning car troubles, ran the meeting. In collaboration with Mike Hansen of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, she organized and directed the count. “Some of the regulars aren’t here this year, and some of the irregulars

are,” joked Diane Highberger, as the group met for early breakfast. The bitter cold may have held some back from committing to such an early morning. As Jeff and Nancy Greene arrived, the table was filled: friends chatted and ordered food and discussion turned to the day at hand. Prior to the turn of the 20th century, Americans participated widely in the “Side Hunt,” a holiday tradition in which hunters competed to shoot and collect as many birds (and other small game) as possible. This tradition faded with the rise of the early conservation movement. By 1872, with the formation of the first national park at Yellowstone at the direction of President Ulysses S. Grant, American attitudes about wildlife preservation were changing. Beginning on Christmas Day in 1900, the Side Hunt was replaced with the “Christmas Bird Census,” a concept began by Frank Chapman,

a respected ornithologist with the emerging Audubon Society. Chapman proposed to count the bird populations, instead of hunting them. More than a century later, the popularity of this pastime has grown. On the 101st count in 2001, there were more than 52,000 participants in seventeen countries. As the day began for Wallowa County birders, coffee was finished and count circles — each in a distinct habitat in Wallowa County — were assigned. The next hours were spent covering miles of Zumwalt Prairie roads, sighting everything from abundant mountain quail to six massive bald eagles, and countless other raptors. Dozens of solitary ravens drifted between the boughs of neighboring forests and groves. The snow was dense and the air still, and the high morning temperature of six degrees explained the frozen streams and irrigation channels.

Local census volunteer David Dranchak remarked that, after a day of birding, “you start to really notice the layer of birds over everything.” The crews counted birds until about noon, then met to compare results. Lueders gathered the checklists and prepared to collate the results for submission to the Audubon Society. This year’s Christmas Bird Count had 72,653 participants across the world — an all-time record. Those participants likely collected important data, as the long-running annual bird count has long proven insightful to the plight of North American birds. The data, gathered exclusively by volunteers, has been instrumental to researching habitat and population decline. It helped inform the Audubon’s “Common Birds In Decline Report,” highlighting a major reduction in familiar bird North American bird populations over the last 40 years.

SKI REPORT

- Spout Springs**
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON
- Anthony Lakes**
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: 4”
Base depth: 40”
Conditions: Open daily, except Christmas, through New Year. Entire hill open.
- Ski Bluewood**
Dayton, Wash.
New snow: 1”
Base depth: 40”
Conditions: More than 100” of snow since Nov. 1. Open daily through Jan. 2.
- Ski Fergi**
Joseph, Ore.
New snow: 6”
Base depth: 30”
Conditions: Open daily through Jan. 2. Food service open through holiday season.
- Mt. Hood Meadows**
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: 1”
Base depth: 66”
Conditions: Hard and fast frozen granular and hardpack groom with icy spots. Rain crust off piste. Avoid tree wells. Early season obstacles exist.

Anthony Lakes is open daily through New Year's Day (closed Christmas Day)

Live Music NYE with Tyler Brooks and the Hook (Pendleton)
sponsored by Prodigal Son Brewing

www.AnthonyLakes.com