



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A male mallard duck takes flight from one of numerous ponds on the property of Jack Simons recently outside of Pendleton.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Jack Simons places piles of tree branches strategically across his property to give small birds a safe place to roost away from predators.

Backyard birds

Turn your tiny piece of the world into an avian oasis



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Jack Simons checks on one of the many wood duck nesting boxes he has placed on his property outside of Pendleton. Simons employs various strategies to attract wild birds to his property.

Bird watcher Jack Simons uses native plants, brush piles and feeders to attract variety of birds

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Jack Simons doesn't need television or a good novel for high drama. All he needs to do is step onto his back deck and look around.

On a recent morning, Simons stood sipping from a steaming cup of coffee and noticed an eastern kingbird carrying something wiggly in its beak. His interest was piqued.

"I went and got my binoculars and looked closer," Simons said. "The bird was feeding praying mantises to its babies."

He watched entranced for the next half hour as the parents delivered 11 praying mantises to their four offspring.

Other days, Simons might notice raptors swooping low to hunt prey or waterfowl landing on the pond.

All of this activity is by design. The bird lover, a member of the Pendleton Bird Club, transformed his 12 acres into an avian mecca of sorts. After he placed nesting boxes, a wood duck set up in one and a screech owl minded four eggs in another.

As Simons wandered recently on his Pendleton-area property, which butts up against the Umatilla River, the sound of bird life ebbed and flowed and ebbed around him. A woodpecker made drumming noises. A pair of wood ducks squealed as they shot up from a pond where they had been



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A female screech owl makes a nest in a wood duck nesting box.

"It's important for people to know their little piece of the world is an important part of the conservation effort. What they do at home does matter."

— Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware wildlife ecology professor

swimming. Songbirds twittered. Canada geese honked as they flew overhead.

Simons said his strategies to attract birds include growing native plants that produce a variety of berries, seeds and nuts. He placed perches and brush piles, set out feeders and kept standing dead trees. He spreads corn for the Canada geese. Three ponds provide water.

His reward? A steady influx of bird life from kestrels to killdeer, hummingbirds to hawks, barn owls to black-capped chickadees. The most unusual bird was a snowy egret, normally seen much farther south.

You might think you need many acres and a natural source of water like Simons enjoys to create your own avian oasis, but you'd be wrong.

University of Delaware wildlife ecology professor Doug Tallamy wrote "Bringing Nature Home" as a guide for those seeking to attract birds to the tiniest of yards — even those in the middle of cities.

"Especially in the middle of the city," said Tallamy this week by phone. "Birds migrate right over cities. They get tired and come down to have something to eat."

Having native plants is key,

See BIRDS/4C



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A male screech owl sites in a wood duck nesting box in a tree on Jack Simons' property outside of Pendleton.