

Sparrows, warblers sing at Luckiamute

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — On the border of Polk and Benton counties lies 315 square miles of lush wilderness, a riparian dreamscape in the making.

Here, the Luckiamute River carves a new path, fighting to get to the Willamette, taking river bank and gravel roads with it.

"The river's going to go where it wants to," said Gail Oberst, president of the Luckiamute Watershed Council. "This part of the river has been eroding for a long time. We're trying to let it meander. It's a sign of a healthy river."

On the morning of April 16, Oberst and Suzanne Teller, council outreach coordinator, took 23 people out for a hike through the Luckiamute State Natural Area collecting birds.

Collecting birds is a hobby of birdwatchers, or birders, that involves keeping track of what birds they identify either by sight or by the bird's song. That list can be a lifetime list — how many birds you've identified in your life — or an annual list — how many birds you identify in one year's time.

Joel Geier, local bird expert and Audubon ornithologist, stopped at a bend in the Luckiamute River.

"I'm going to try and wake a screech owl," he told the group as he imitated the predatory bird.

While an owl was not roused from his slumber, other birds were pretty anxious to hear this nocturnal nest-robber's song hours after the sun had risen.

A hummingbird that moved too fast to be identi-

fied as a Rufus or an Anna zoomed over to check out the group. Other birds answered Geier's call, which announced the birdwatchers' arrival into the area.

From the north trailhead parking lot to where the roughly 2-mile loop begins, an artificial forest of cottonwood and ash trees lines the right, casting shade along the trail. Most of the trail is protected by canopy, making it a pleasant walk even on a warm, sunny day.

Where the trail begins, a red-breasted sapsucker makes its home. He fusses at the large group of people in his territory, while the people watch him through binoculars and camera lenses, fascinated by his brightly colored head.

This is a good spot to see sapsuckers, Geier said. In fact, the red-breasted variety is one of the most sought-after birds in the region — at least for birdwatchers. For farmers and gardeners, the sapsucker can be a pest, killing off a tree branch by branch.

Later, in the Forest Gallery, Geier said all of Oregon's native woodpeckers can be spotted with regularity, except for the acorn woodpecker, who hasn't yet discovered the old oaks of the Luckiamute area.

All along the walk, hikers are greeted by native shrubs, flowers and trees. Most have been planted by volunteers, working to repair the habitat to its natural state. Others have a history of growing in the area long before the settlers came.

When birdwatching, it is important to look throughout the area, as birds can be found at various levels.

A white-crown sparrow makes its way along the tall

grasses. Watchers crane their necks to see an orange crown warbler flit from tree to tree. In the Gallery Forest, a brown creeper hops up an old cottonwood. A northern rough-wing swallow zooms around the riverbank where it has built its nest, while a red hawk circles lazily in the sky.

The Luckiamute State Natural Area is alive with bird songs, butterflies and beauty. The north trailhead loop generally takes about an hour, but if looking closely for birds or examining the local flora, it can take three or four hours.

For more on the Luckiamute State Natural Area and other Polk County features, see Explore Polk County on May 25 in the *Itemizer-Observer*.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Joel Geier, local bird expert and Audubon ornithologist, shows the group of birdwatchers the silt from the Luckiamute River, which floods frequently during wet winters.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Birdwatchers keep as still as possible, watching an orange crowned warbler dart between cottonwoods and Douglas firs in the Luckiamute State Natural Area on April 16 during the Luckiamute Watershed Council's annual bird walk.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

The native flowers, shrubs and trees were nearly as popular as the birds on the annual spring bird tour at the Luckiamute State Natural Area on April 16.

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Matinees are all shows before 6pm. New pricing for matinees are: Adult \$7.25 Children \$6.75 • Senior \$7.00 Pricing does not reflect 3D showings.

Friday - Sunday April 29 - May 1

THE BOSS (Digital) (R)	(12:00 2:25 4:50) 7:15 9:30*
ZOOTOPIA (Digital 2D) (PG)	(11:40 2:10 4:45) 7:20 9:40*
RACHET AND CLANK (Digital) (PG)	(12:15 2:35 5:00) 7:25 9:35*
JUNGLE BOOK (Digital 2D) (PG)	(11:35 2:05 4:35) 7:05 9:25*
MOTHER'S DAY (Digital) (PG13)	(11:25 2:00 4:30) 7:10 9:45*
KEANU (Digital) (R)	(12:20 2:40 5:05) 7:30 9:50*
BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE (Digital) (PG13)	(1:15) 7:00
CRIMINAL (Digital) (R)	(4:25) 10:00*
HUNTSMAN: THE WINTER'S WAR (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10) 6:50 9:25*

Monday - Wednesday May 2 - May 4

THE BOSS (Digital) (R)	(2:25 4:50) 7:15
ZOOTOPIA (Digital 2D) (PG)	(2:10 4:45) 7:20
RACHET AND CLANK (Digital) (PG)	(2:35 5:00) 7:25
JUNGLE BOOK (Digital 2D) (PG)	(2:05 4:35) 7:05
MOTHER'S DAY (Digital) (PG13)	(2:00 4:30) 7:10
KEANU (Digital) (R)	(2:40 5:05) 7:30
BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE (Digital) (PG13)	(1:15) 7:00
CRIMINAL (Digital) (R)	(4:25)
HUNTSMAN: THE WINTER'S WAR (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10) 6:50

Thursday May 5

THE BOSS (Digital) (R)	(2:25 4:50) 7:15 9:30
JUNGLE BOOK (Digital 2D) (PG)	(2:05 4:35) 7:05 9:25
RACHET AND CLANK (Digital) (PG)	(2:35 5:00) 7:25 9:35
ZOOTOPIA (Digital 2D) (PG)	(2:10 4:45)
CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR (Digital) (PG13)	7:00 7:00 10:15 10:15
BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE (Digital) (PG13)	(1:15)
CRIMINAL (Digital) (R)	(4:25)
MOTHER'S DAY (Digital) (PG13)	(2:00 4:30) 7:10 9:45
KEANU (Digital) (R)	(2:40 5:05) 7:30 9:50
HUNTSMAN: THE WINTER'S WAR (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10) 6:50 9:25

* Not showing Sunday, May 1st

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