

# Return of western snowy plover to Gearhart proves elusive

**Plover** from Page 1A

In 2013, the City Council agreed to assist the state in developing a shorebird conservation area meant to help the recovery of the species and enhance the habitat for other shorebirds. By limiting seasonal access, officials hoped the western snowy plover would return to traditional nesting sites.

While Nehalem Bay State Park saw the hatching of a western snowy plover chick last May for the first time in 30 years, most nesting sites on the North Coast, including Gearhart, haven't seen the species in a "very long time," Laurel Hillmann, an ocean shores specialist with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, told the City Council on Wednesday, Feb. 6.

Less-trafficked areas on the central and southern coast are more inviting, she said, and will be the focus of future nesting protections.

The restricted area makes up about 25 percent of the 77-acre beach area between Gearhart and the Necanicum River.

Gearhart's seasonally posted signs advising of snowy plover habitat will no longer be posted, Oregon State Park Ranger Ken Murphy said.

"The current restrictions will go away and we will monitor the site," he said.

If a nest is spotted, rangers could be on the scene within a couple of hours to put up fencing during the monthlong incubation period.

"It's not as though we're abandoning the bird in this location," he said. "If anything, this is a plan that helps us manage this location better while also not putting restrictions in place that keep normal activity from going on that is traditional in this area. It's a different management strategy. We will still be here looking for the bird, hoping that it nests and managing it accordingly if it does."



The western snowy plover, slow to make a return to Gearhart (Oregon Coast Aquarium).



Left: In 2017, wildlife biologist Vanessa Blackstone searched the beaches of Nehalem Bay State Park for nests of the endangered Western snowy plover (Colin Murphey/EO Media Group).

Below: A snowy plover found on the Oregon Coast is rehabilitated at the Oregon Coast Aquarium (Oregon Coast Aquarium).



# Gearhart looks to work with state on elk problem

**Elk** from Page 1A

mayor for his letter and for a description of the issues surrounding the elk that frequent the Seaside/Gearhart area.

He said public opinion of the elk in the area is divided, with strong feelings on both sides of the issue. He suggested a meeting with the community to better understand their perspective.

"This would also be an opportunity for ODFW to present a range of potential management options, including elk removal, and receive public feedback," Biederbeck wrote. "If the city of Gearhart is willing to host a public meeting, we will gladly work with you on and drafting an agenda and selecting a date that allows for ample public notice."

In April 2014, the city did just that when Biederbeck spoke as part of a six-person panel that discussed the ubiquitous herd of Roosevelt elk that frequently visits Gearhart. More than 50 Gearhart residents attended that meeting.

With numbers in the herd ballooning since that time, Mayor Brown and councilors plan to ask the department to do more. Brown said that was one of the questions the city sought clarification for in their January letter. "It would be nice to find out what folks can and cannot do."

"Can I make some noise? Can I rattle a can at them?" Council member Paulina

Cockrum asked. "Or will that start a stampede?"

"Folks that haven't been around a herd don't know that," Brown said. "That's the kind of information we are seeking."

**'CAN I MAKE SOME NOISE? CAN I RATTLE A CAN AT THEM? OR WILL THAT START A STAMPEDE?'**

Paulina Cockrum  
Council member

Brown said the best thing residents can do is write a letter to the city or post on the city's website with positive and negative feedback. "We want that information to the ODFW. They can give us information on ways to warn people, on safety issues. They're the only ones who can control wildlife populations. It's not the city. We want to get opinions, feedback, documentation and we'll send them to the ODFW. Together with this information, we can find ways to help mitigate safety, traffic accidents and dangerous situations. It's a challenge for sure."

# The Great Backyard Bird Count held this weekend

Seaside Signal

The 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count takes place from Friday, Feb. 16, through Monday, Feb. 19, at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, Fort Clatsop.

Visitors can join in the count by recording bird observations in the park or in their own backyards. Binoculars will be available for loan within the park.

The park also plans four days of bird-related opportunities. A "great pink heron scavenger hunt" will be ongoing using the Netul Trail along the Lewis and Clark River.

On Saturday, Feb. 17, Mike Patterson leads bird walk at 8:30 a.m., meeting in the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center lobby.

On Sunday, Feb. 18, Travis Koons, a curator at the Oregon Zoo, speaks about California condors at 1 p.m. in the Netul River Room of the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center.

On Monday, Feb. 19, Presidents' Day, the park will offer a birding walk in Span-

ish at 10 a.m. starting in the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center lobby.

Although leashed dogs are welcome at most of the park's outdoor programs, dogs are not allowed on birding walks.

The walks are wheelchair accessible but non-motorized users might need assistance for about 200 yards.

Park hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. Admission is \$5 per adult and free for youth 15 years old and under. Passes to National Park Service sites are accepted.

Bird field guides are available for purchase at the bookstore in the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center.

For more information on the worldwide bird count event or to submit bird counts, go to [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org).

The weekend's birding events at Fort Clatsop are sponsored by the Lewis & Clark National Park Association and the National Park Service.

For more information, call 503-861-2471.



LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

The Great Bird Count comes to Clatsop County.

# Oregon moves marbled murrelet to 'endangered'

By Mateusz Perkowski  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Oregon's wildlife regulators have "uplisted" the marbled murrelet from a threatened to an endangered species, which will likely result in stricter logging limits on state forestland.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted 4-2 to upgrade protections for the coastal bird at its Feb. 9 meeting in Portland.

The change to endangered status means that scientists at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, which is overseen by the commission, must complete "survival guidelines" for the marbled murrelet by June.

Those guidelines are expected to further restrict logging in the bird's suitable habitat, if existing protocols for state forestland are found to be insufficient.

Though Oregon's version of the Endangered Species Act only applies to property owned by the state government, some private forestland owners worry the uplisting will effectively move Oregon toward more stringent regulations for all forests.

Bruce Buckmaster, a commission member who voted against the change, said he shared their concerns.

"They're old enough to know it's an ironclad law they will undoubtedly be affected," said Buckmaster, a retired business owner.

Commission members originally considered ordering the agency to develop those survival guidelines without uplisting the species.

This proposal, set forth by commissioner Bob Webber, would have had the effect of creating a roadmap for the murrelet's recovery that wouldn't be legally enforceable.

However, the motion resulted in 3-3 deadlock vote, after which Webber changed his mind and supported the uplisting.

"I stated my preference but my least favorite option would be to do nothing," said Webber, an attorney.

The federal government listed marbled murrelets as



COURTESY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Friday voted to put the marbled murrelet on the state's endangered species list.

**'It's not urgent that you make a decision today. Murrelet populations are stable.'**

Jim James,  
executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association

threatened in 1992 and Oregon extended the same status to the birds three years later.

Washington and California consider the species endangered.

Marbled murrelets are known as the "enigma of the Pacific" because so little is still known about their life cycle, said Christina Donehower, strategy species coordinator for ODFW.

"Actual nests for marbled murrelets are extremely hard to find," she said.

The birds forage for fish and invertebrates in the Pacific Ocean but lay their eggs in depressions formed on the branches of large conifer trees, typically found in "old growth" forests, she said.

Nests are found as far as 60

miles inland along the coast, meaning the species must travel up to 100 miles round trip to feed its young.

Large conifer habitat for the species in Oregon's coastal forests declined by 58 percent between 1936 and 1996, she said.

Populations of the bird sharply fell in 1996 but the trend was stable to slightly positive between 2000 and 2015, when 11,000 marbled murrelets were estimated to inhabit Oregon, Donehower said.

However, demographic models for the species project it has an 80 percent chance of extinction in Oregon within the current century, she said.

The species is doubly challenged because, apart from

specialized forest nesting habitat, it's vulnerable to fluctuating ocean conditions.

The bird's reproductive potential is low to begin with, as it reaches sexual maturity relatively late and typically only lays one egg per year.

If food sources in the ocean are inadequate for fledging murrelets, the adults won't attempt to breed, as occurred in 2017.

"They might not be as resilient as other species to changing conditions," Donehower said.

Oregon State University is conducting a 10-year study of marbled murrelets that involves capturing the birds at sea, outfitting them with tracking tags and monitoring their forest nests.

Multiple woodland owners and timber industry representatives urged the commission against uplisting the species until the OSU research sheds more light on its life cycle.

Jim James, executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, said the uplisting would be premature before the science is better understood.

"It's not urgent that you make a decision today," he said. "Murrelet populations are stable."

An uplisting will likely require private landowners to submit plans for protecting the bird to state regulators, despite assurances the change will only impact state forests, said Rick Barnes, OSWA's president.

"We all know that's not the way things work," he said.

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