Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Viewing Report

by ODFW

Freezing weather has arrived in parts of Central Oregon and most small ponds and water holes are frozen and snow blankets the ground at higher elevation. Deer are in the rut, winter raptors are at their usual feeding areas and waterbirds are confined to open water areas.

Mule deer are on their winter range and a good place to observe them is the Fort Rock Valley south to Silver Lake and east to Christmas Valley. The deer are in rut and careful observers can see some big bucks attending to their does. Herds of five to twenty deer or more are commonly seen. This area is also excellent for winter raptors. Agricultural lands and shrub land on the edge of the forest are good places to look for rough-legged hawks, red-tailed hawks, golden and bald eagles and prairie falcons. The wintering population of Red-tailed Hawks has more individual with dark phase plumage than is seen in the summer. A good field guide is helpful in sorting out the color phases of the raptors.

Winter range road closures are in effect in many areas of Central Oregon starting December 1. Main roads are open but side roads and less traveled roads may be closed to vehicle travel. Watch for signs and report violations to the nearest Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife or Oregon State Police office.

Prineville Area Migrating birds

This is a good time to view wintering big game, including mule deer, pronghorn and elk on private lands along the Crooked River between the eastern end of Prineville Reservoir, to the town of Paulina, and north and east around Puett Rd. to the Paulina Ranger Station. Drivers need to turn south off of Hwy. 26 at the east side of Prineville, onto the Post/Paulina highway, with the best viewing between milepost 20 and milepost 60. Approximately 4 miles east of Paulina proceed north to Paulina Ranger Station via Puett Road and use binoculars or a spotting scope for antelope and elk using the western slopes of Powell Mountain.

Animals are generally most visible in early morning or late afternoon, and drivers need to be careful of animals crossing the highway. This is approximately 180 miles round trip from Prineville and drivers should be prepared for winter driving conditions. In addition to big game, viewers will have opportunities to see coyotes, waterfowl, and a wide variety of birds of prey including bald and golden eagles, prairie falcon, red tail and rough leg hawks.

Migrating birds

Recent winter-like weather appears to be triggering increasing movements of winter migrating birds to and through Central Oregon. Local reservoirs offer viewing of waterfowl and shorebirds as they feed and rest.

Flocks of Canadian geese and ducks have been using the mudflats at the eastern end of Ochoco and Prineville Reservoir. Ochoco Reservoir is visible from Hwy. 26, eight miles east of Prineville. Migrating and wintering birds of prey are on the increase with recent sightings of red-tailed, rough-legged, and Swainsons Hawks; Northern Harriers; bald and golden Eagle; prairie falcon; and Kestrels common.

The Crooked River between Bowman Dam and Prineville offers spectacular cliff scenery interspersed with close views of the Crooked River. Bald and golden eagles frequent this stretch of river and use the cliffs and pine trees for perching and roosting. Otter, beaver, raccoons and a variety of waterfowl and wading birds are also present in the river.

Madras Area

NEW: Haystack Reservoir, 12 miles southeast of Madras, still has open water and last week local birders reported a good variety of waterbirds including five species of grebes, western, pied-bill, horned, eared, and red-necked. A few snow geese and a white-fronted goose were also reported from the same area. Since waterfowl hunting season is open, look for ducks and geese in the center of lake away from the shoreline.

The Dalles, Mid-Columbia Region and Northern Wasco County

As the temperature drops and the snow starts to fall, White River Wildlife Area begins to see migrating deer and elk. Visitors wishing to view wintering deer are best served in the Smock Prairie area, where deer will congregate in open meadows to feed, while those wishing to view elk are more likely to be successful in the Friend area.

Directions to the White River Wildlife Area