

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Viewing Report

by ODFW

Late winter and early spring is one of the best wildlife viewing time periods in the Klamath Basin, which is a major staging area for migratory birds starting their northward migration to primary nesting areas. NEAR BURNS: The Harney Basin, located near the town of Burns, provides good viewing opportunities during March and April for a variety of migrating birds. Thousands of migrating snow, Ross's, white-fronted and Canada geese as well as ducks, sandhill cranes and tundra swans use the basin during their annual migration north to their breeding grounds. Birds are beginning to arrive in the basin with numbers expected to peak in the next few weeks. Good numbers of bald eagles are currently in the basin but begin migrating north about the end of March. Another attraction is viewing strutting sage grouse which do their annual mating display from mid-March through April. Sage grouse viewing is best during the first hour of daylight on days when the weather is good. The 26th Annual John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival and Art Show will be held in Burns from April 13-15, 2007. The Festival includes events such as birding, cultural and historical tours, workshops and an art show. For more information on the Festival you can contact the Harney County Chamber of Commerce at 541 573-2636 or you can visit their web site at www.migratorybirdfestival.com. The KLAMATH WILDLIFE AREA and LOWER KLAMATH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE are excellent locations to view thousands of ducks, geese, and swans. Snow, ross's, and white-fronted geese have just returned from the central valley of California. These geese will spend the next two months here in the Basin before continuing north to Alaska and Canada where they nest. These geese can be found foraging in agricultural fields near Midland. Numerous tundra swans (5000-10000) can be observed at Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge and private lands to the north of the refuge. Upper Klamath Lake is another location to view diving ducks including bufflehead, goldeneye, scaup, ruddy duck, redhead and canvasback. Bald eagles can be found anywhere there are concentrations of waterfowl, their primary food source this time of year. SUMMER LAKE WILDLIFE AREA Viewing opportunities remain good as northward migrants and local breeding species continue return to the Wildlife Area and stage in good numbers. Favorable weather conditions prevailed during the past week and extensive bird use coupled with new spring arrivals made for excellent viewing conditions. Waterfowl species remain very apparent and are widely scattered across the Area. Ducks are in their brilliant nuptial plumage now, and courtship activities are intensifying. A waterbird count conducted on March 21, 2007 found over 12,000 ducks, nearly 30,000 geese and about 100 swans present at that time. Arctic nesting greater white-fronted and snow geese continue to stage in impressive numbers, but many snow geese have moved on north and others will soon follow. Tundra swans departed during the past week with just a small number remaining at this time. Greater white-fronted geese are widely scattered throughout the Wildlife Area, while snow geese have been actively feeding and roosting throughout the day in shallow emergent marsh areas found on the north and west sides. Northern pintails have declined since last week, but large numbers of N. shoveler and Am. green-winged teal have arrived. Cinnamon teal (a common Wildlife Area breeder) are increasing. While most diving ducks (canvasback, lesser scaup, ring-necked ducks and bufflehead) have departed, nearly 2,500 were still present during the count and continue to utilize the deeper ponds and lakes to forage for submergent aquatic plants and invertebrates. Resident Canada geese are becoming very secretive as they disperse to nesting territories while non-breeding birds remain in small flocks. Sandhill cranes continue to increase in number, have moved to breeding territories and are becoming more apparent and vocal. Nesting is underway at this time for some of the established pairs. Early migrating shorebirds (Am. avocets, long-billed dowitchers, killdeer and yellowlegs) as well as gulls and other waterbirds continue to arrive and increase in number. Resident and wintering raptors remain scattered throughout the Area as well as on private lands along Highway 31. Northern harriers are especially numerous over marsh and hay meadow areas and both red-tailed and rough-legged hawks are frequently seen. Rough-legged hawks are beginning to depart, heading towards arctic nesting areas.

Prairie falcons, bald and golden eagles are frequently seen during this time of the year. Bald eagles are increasing in number as they following migrant flocks of waterfowl returning north. Great-horned owls have

been very vocal during the night, and nesting for some pairs has begun. Passerine species (primarily sparrows) remain fairly common around the Headquarters Complex, Summer Lake Rest Area, homestead sites and shelterbreak plantings at the north end of the Area where they are attracted to tree and shrub cover found at those locations. Tree swallows are becoming very numerous, and arrival of other species continues with spring appearance of Am. crow, bushtits, cedar waxwings and yellow-headed blackbirds over the last week. Viewers can expect to see increased numbers and diversity of some species on a regular basis over the next few weeks especially if favorable weather conditions continue. However, as arctic nesting migrants replenish energy reserves they will depart for other northern staging Areas and numbers will decline. Be sure to check the list at Headquarters for new arrivals and unusual birds. Wetland habitats have returned to excellent condition due to the favorable weather pattern. Ponds and other still water areas remain open and ice-free. Runoff has created shallow temporary wetlands that are highly favored by many migrants. Habitat management actions of controlled burning, drawdowns and drying of semi-permanent and seasonal wetlands are creating favorable foraging sites for many species. Natural food sources of seeds, tubers and plant parts remain very abundant and available in nearly all wetland areas. Emergent bulrushes, cattails and other sedges and rushes are lodged over due to strong winds and snow. Bird access and use has increased in these areas and viewing opportunities of these habitats have improved dramatically as well. Upland sites are in excellent condition due to lush green-up of grasses and forb emergence that is beginning to occur. The Wildlife Viewing Loop is now open and will remain that way until next fall. Other major dike roads (Bullgate, Windbreak and Work Road) are closed to motor vehicle travel from March 15th through August 15th to reduce disturbance to northward migrants and early nesting waterbirds (primarily Canada geese, mallard and sandhill cranes). Viewers are urged to use care when driving roads since many are soft and muddy especially edges adjacent to ponds and canals. Secondary and minor dikes will remain closed to motor vehicle traffic and cross country travel by motor vehicles or ATVs is prohibited. Non-motorized access and viewing opportunities are available across the entire Area at this time. Camping is permitted at four sites on the wildlife area. For additional information on viewing opportunities please contact the Wildlife Area at phone (541) 943-3152, fax (541) 943-3204, or email at odfws1wa@gooselake.com