

Produced by: Portneuf Valley Audubon Society
358 North Lincoln Avenue
Pocatello, Idaho 83201

Camas National Wildlife Refuge is 36 miles north of Idaho Falls on I-15. Exit at Hamer and follow signs east, north, and west over I-15 to the refuge, about 5 miles.

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Spring Brings Exciting Activity to the Refuge!

Water levels are as good or better than last year for surface run off and the most recent snow pack conditions for Camas Creek drainage show us at over 100%, which is higher than last year at this time. Last year In February we were preparing for what might have been the worst year in a six-year drought, but then March and early April brought great snow and rain to the mountains. The fall of 2005 also marked the second fall in a row that the high country had really good rain, which is not captured in the snow measurements. This should allow for saturated conditions that may send the snow melts to Camas even sooner than usual, and of course the more run off we get, the more wetland habitat we can we can make available to wildlife.

The Migratory Landbird Research! One of the main objectives of Refuge Manager Rob Larrañaga has been to replace invasive exotic vegetation on the refuge with native plants and trees. Enormous progress has been made with plantings, but much of the vegetation in use by migratory landbirds studied by Dr. Jay Carlisle in the fall research was exotic. One of the important findings of his research was that birds prospered, i.e. gained weight and stamina, even with the existing vegetation. We now have a baseline to study whether future weight gains are influenced by the recovery of native trees and plants in the area. Dr. Carlisle's study was able to demonstrate that at least eight species were recaptured often enough during their stay at Camas to show measurable weight gains in preparation for the demands of migratory journeys. Efforts are in progress to find funding for continued mist netting research during the spring migrations. Several entities, including Snake River Audubon Society and Portneuf Valley Audubon Society, have committed to donations for that purpose. We should know within a month if that research, so vital to evaluation of the benefits of Camas NWR rest and recovery for migratory songbirds, will continue during the spring 2006 migrations. Contributions toward that goal are, of course, appreciated!

The Sandhole Lake Wetlands Restoration Project was completed in 2005 as a part of the Cooperative Habitat Restoration component of the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). This project restored over 200 acres of wetland habitat that will provide tremendous resources for waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife that use the refuge during migration and breeding seasons. The relocation of an irrigation well was made possible through a partnership with Ducks Unlimited, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Intermountain West Joint Venture. The project cost just under \$150,000 to re-drill an irrigation well and run electricity underground to the site. The transfer of this well enables the securement of its associated water right. The wetland restoration project on the refuge is part of a strategy for the Management of the Rocky Mountain Population of Trumpeter Swans, which is a plan with an integrated approach that links NWR management objectives within the greater tri-state area with goals for restoring the trumpeter swan numbers. Augmenting the water level in Sandhole Lake will provide very enhanced habitat for the swans as well as an important roosting site for several hundred migratory sandhill cranes. A program of information and dedication of this project is planned at the refuge on March 25, 2006.

Plan to Enjoy Spring Migrations! The first Canada Geese arrived on February 24th in 2005, but because of low temperatures (-13 F on February 22) and more snow, Rob Larrañaga expects them to arrive early March, and the well pump will be started to fill the core Marsh units, starting with Big Pond, at the first sight of arriving waterfowl. In recent years, Swans and sandhill cranes have arrived the last week of February and the first week of March. In 2004 the refuge had over 2000 Canada Geese and over 200 swans, the vast majority tundra, by the second week of March. Several thousand ducks arrived during the same period, with a high percentage of pintails. The refuge also hosted 15-20,000 snow geese, the first time Camas had had more than a few hundred roosting. These birds typically roost at Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area to the south, but ice conditions on Mud Lake may have prompted the snow geese to take advantage of the open/pumped water on Camas. Sandhill crane and waterfowl numbers continue to increase through the end of March, and the spring migration is typically finished by the first week of April.

Bald Eagles!! Camas staff have conducted a weekly Bald Eagle count and numbers during February of 2006 have ranged from the mid twenties to the high thirties. They expect to see their high number anytime, as the high for 2005 occurred on February 24, 2005 when 42 were noted. They should be gone by the middle to the end of March, so take this opportunity to enjoy these majestic birds at close range now!