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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. The mailing address is 2150 E. 2350 N. Hamer, Idaho 83425. Refuge Headquarters Phone: 208-662-5423. The Refuge Manager is Rob Larrañaga.

National Wildlife Refuge Week, October 8-14: Each year, during the second week in October, the National Wildlife Refuge System celebrates National Wildlife Refuge Week with events that help visitors better understand the mission and achievements of our national wildlife refuges. Students from Idaho Falls and the West Jefferson School District will be touring the refuge and the bird banding station. On Saturday the 14th, a bike-a-thon for Hamer Elementary School students will be hosted by the refuge, and sponsored by the Hamer Parent Teacher Organization as a fund raising event to purchase playground equipment and raise funds for autism research. Another objective of their activity is to expose the children to the refuge and take in some good old exercise while doing so.

Fall Migratory Landbird Research: Dr. Jay Carlisle of Idaho Bird Observatory and his research team were able to continue with the migratory bird study at Camas NWR thanks to cooperative contributions of Snake River Audubon Society, Portneuf Valley Audubon Society, Idaho Fish and Game, and the regional office of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The fall work started shortly after the spring season work was wrapped up in mid-June. They began the study on July 20 with ten mist nets, measuring six variables in each captured bird, and will continue until Oct. 15th



This is the second year for a fall study at Camas, which provides excellent opportunities for comparisons of numbers and species of birds on the refuge during fall migrations over time. The team, for example, banded more Lazuli Buntings, 28 in 11 days of the 2006 effort than they did in all of the fall 2005 study (18 total, all ages). Upper right is Chad Merkley, research assistant, who was especially gracious with student visitors. Below, Dr. Jay Carlisle with facinated visiting birders.



The research team will have completed studies at Camas NWR in the fall of 2005, the spring of 2006, and the fall of 2006. Our hope ideally would be to continue this effort through another year at least, to provide comparisons of spring data as well as the fall activity over time. The research potentially would provide extremely useful data about the benefit of rest and nutrition at Camas NWR to migratory birds, as well as fluctuations in numbers of particular species which

could alert to population losses or habitat losses over time. As of September 30th, they had captured 4158 birds of 72 species, and have two weeks remaining in the research. We are so grateful for the skills and abilities of this research team and their unusual willingness to share this adventure with children, birders, groups, and visitors of all descriptions. Dr. Carlisle is a gifted teacher as well as ornithologist, and the interest they have generated, particularly in students, has been wonderful for conservation goals in general and Camas NWR in particular. The Winter or Spring Newsletter will include a summary of Dr. Carlisle's findings/conclusions from the 2006 study.

Status of Water on the Refuge: The increased flows in May kept a better part of the historically flooded core marsh area and adjacent wetlands supplied with ample water through the beginning of the summer. It appeared that flooding in the early part of the nesting season resulted in the greatest numbers of duck broods later in the summer. Incidental observations revealed an increase in duck production this year. Due to the increased water levels, Sandhole Lake (which went dry in 2004) and Rays Lake continue to hold several thousand migratory ducks, geese and other waterbirds. Holding water this late in the season should set the stage for maintaining good levels next year.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Honors Volunteers John and Sharon Dollar! The Dollars retired from careers in business computer programming (John) and specialized open-heart surgery nursing (Sharon) in Birmingham Alabama in the late 90's. They elected to volunteer in the National Wildlife Refuge System, worked in several locations and first came to Camas NWR in June of 2004. Their arrival coincided with staffing cuts at the refuge, and they have proven to have invaluable skills, abilities and enthusiasm for Camas. Their impressive academic credentials as well as their eager participation in training for entirely new skills has provided an expertise for Camas in GPS mapping of noxious weeds (John), heavy equipment operation (both), endless hours of fence removal, ditch digging, transplantation of native trees, participation in the first and subsequent baseline butterfly counts, support of Jay Carlisle's migratory bird research, numerous construction projects, public use facility maintenance, and lawn mowing, as well as bird counts, nest monitoring, public relations activities such as Dubois Grouse Days and Hamer parades, and tours of the refuge for visitors.

As of the end of June, 2006, John had logged 2049 hours and Sharon 2044 hours of invaluable volunteer work for the refuge. Rob estimated the monetary value of the volunteer work (including Elizabeth Smith and a few others) contribution just for fiscal 2005 at well over \$40,000 and has not yet calculated the value of the Dollars' contribution for 2006. Without these amazing folks, progress in development and maintenance in many areas of refuge activity would simply not have been possible in

the last two years. They have just left the refuge for several months for a well earned vacation in Oregon and Washington, and plan to return after the first of the year. Refuge Manager, Rob Larrañaga nominated them and they were chosen to receive the 2,000 hour Volunteer Director's Certificate of Appreciation award for their outstanding contributions and service to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We cannot express the depth of our admiration and gratitude to this dynamic and fine couple. We miss them already and hope they will choose to be with us again as able. Please contact Rob to obtain information regarding volunteering opportunities; there is always a need for help, and all skill levels are welcome.

Above right, Sharon Dollar operating one of the mowing tractors.



“Wildlife Refuge Funding Cuts Hitting Home.” In a press release for July 20, 2006 the National Wildlife Refuge Association cites a Congressional Hearing in Washington D.C. “At a hearing today in the U. S. House of Representatives, the National Wildlife Refuge association (NWRA) detailed the mounting budget crisis facing national wildlife refuges and urged Congress to take swift action to address funding shortfalls for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Noting the escalating operations and maintenance backlog of 3.1 billion, the Refuge Association voiced concern about a declining budget that hurts wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and volunteers working for the refuge system, as well as 40 million Americans who visit and appreciate national wildlife refuges each year.”

“The president’s fiscal 2007 budget requests approximately 11 million less than last year’s request. Compounding the \$11 million cut, the Refuge System requires an annual budget increase of approximately \$16million just to stay level due to increased costs for salaries, energy, and other needs...Refuges are currently managed at a cost of less than \$4.00 an acre. By comparison, the National Park System receives more than \$20.00 per acre for management.” Clearly the funding outlook for all of the refuges is bleak, and the value of volunteer efforts is therefore even more crucial to the survival of the Refuges than it has been in previous years. Contact Michael Woodbridge at mwoodbridge@refugenet.org for updated information about the funding shortfalls.

October Controlled Burn planned for Camas NWR. The goal for a planned prescribed burn in the Rays Lake unit located in the southern section of Camas NWR is to reduce hazardous fuel loading and maintain and improve the wildlife habitat on the Refuge. Wildland fires have been actively suppressed in the area for over fifty years creating higher than normal fuels loadings. This prescribed fire project will reduce future potential fire behavior by consuming dead/down grassland and willow vegetation. The burn will use fire as an ecosystem management tool to maintain habitat diversity by stimulating new growth from old willow plant communities. The tender new growth will be most welcome by the resident elk herd. Interagency assistance will allow for the safe completion of this burn.

Monitoring and Planning for the Potential Arrival of Avian Flu in North America. The Refuge *Update* publications by the National Wildlife Refuge System, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for May/June 2006 and July/August 2006 describe the massive efforts of partnerships between many agencies and research stations across the Pacific northwest and Alaska, as well as Canada, to monitor populations of nesting and migratory birds for the presence of Avian Flu. There are many strains of Avian Flu, most considered “low pathogens”, not dangerous to human populations and unlikely to produce massive deaths in birds. “On September 1, 2006, the U.S. Department of Interior and Agriculture announced that the low pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 had been detected in fecal samples from Mallard Ducks in Maryland. Testing has ruled out the possibility of this being the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain that has spread through birds in Asia, Europe, and Africa.” The Refuge *Update* publications indicate that the anticipated spread of the highly pathogenic flu, if it in fact appears in North America, will most likely cross from Asia to the Aleutian Islands and Alaska, and could proceed south along the Pacific flyway. In partnership with the states, some surveillance activities are taking place on national wildlife refuges throughout the summer and into the fall. In Idaho Deer Flat NWR, Bear Lake NWR, Minidoka NWR, and Grays Lake NWR are all either sampling for the virus or sampling hunter-harvested waterfowl taken in those areas. Other locations within the state, including Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area to the south of Camas NWR are involved with the monitoring. Experts in the USFW Service as well as the CDC seem to be confident that best possible monitoring is occurring now, and it should be noted that massive efforts are also under way by the Center for Disease Control to educate the public about hygiene and protective strategies to prevent contracting the virus should it appear on this continent. Staff at the Southeast Idaho NWR Complex have received the training and the protective gear to participate with the required sampling and/or collection of dead birds if needed.

Two successful Trumpeter Swan Nests! These four juvenile Trumpeters, light gray and curious, were observed right beside the Wildlife Viewing road on September 2nd. Another family was observed that date on the south end of Toomey Pond, parents and five youngsters.



Anticipated Schedule of Fall waterfowl migrant arrivals: Migration schedules for ducks and geese are prompted by freezing conditions in the north. When food sources freeze, the birds depart for open water and available food. Ducks arrive from August (teal) through November, and since the geese are often the last to leave the frozen north, some arrive when Camas is frozen over and may stop at Mud Lake or American Falls Reservoir. The largest numbers and varieties of ducks and geese can usually be observed at Camas in late October. The refuge is often full of spectacular clouds of waterfowl. Approximately 400 sandhill cranes peaked on Camas in late September with several hundred utilizing receding water levels in Ray's and Sandhole Lakes. This is also a prime area to witness the initiation of fall via the bugling of bull elk. Observation of white-tailed bucks in rutting behavior is best during the Thanksgiving holiday, allowing for excellent photo opportunities. Contact the Refuge office regarding fall bird hunting opportunities. And Enjoy your Refuge!

