

Oregon's Woodpecker Wonderland With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



May 22 – 31, 2021

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NEW! When Steve Shunk, guide and author of the *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America*, joined Naturalist Journeys, he brought expertise and familiarity with Oregon and the Pacific Northwest to us – perfect timing as Woody Wheeler, a long-time and popular guide based in Seattle, retired. Steve hails from the Bend/Sisters area and his signature tour is based from here, on this expanded version, we blend Woodpecker Wonderland with time in remote Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and surroundings. Combine the delights of a historic downtown hotel and brewery with a quaint country Inn at Frenchglen.

This tour combines some of central and eastern Oregon's top birding hotspots. Experience some of the best bird diversity in North America, with over 200 breeding species. Expansive western scenery abounds.

The tour starts and ends in Redmond, Oregon, from which we drive a short way to explore the northern side of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and surroundings, with its vast wetlands and lakes. For millennia, migratory birds have fed and bred among the emergent wetlands and surrounding uplands of the Harney basin, and this ritual continues today. Many thousands of water birds, raptors, and songbirds return each year, along with thousands of birders, who visit to experience the natural spectacle occurring in this magnificent region. The birding highlights at Malheur are many, and we will spend three full days exploring wetland, desert, grassland, canyon, and riparian habitats.

Tour Highlights

- Travel with experts – our guide is author of the Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America. He calls our route Woodpecker Wonderland and you can expect to find 11 nesting woodpecker species!
- Catch migration and arrival for resident species as spring arrives to this wetland and mountain landscape
- Hear the rancorous calls of Yellow-headed Blackbirds; watch for marshes teeming with waterfowl
- Find five species of grebes and 10 species of western raptors
- Experience the rural west, its cowboy culture and wide-open spaces also home to wildlife
- Listen to Quaking Aspen trees trembling in the breeze while looking at the day-glow colors of Lazuli Bunting and Western Tanager
- Watch Vaux's Swift acrobatic in the sky against backdrop views of the snow-clad Cascades
- Watch Osprey harass Bald Eagle carrying fish over scenic mountain lakes with Bufflehead and Barrow's Goldeneye down below
- Learn how fire ecology has made a mosaic of habitat prime for birds across varied habitats
- In Bend, end great days of birding with top-rate local foods and a fabulous selection of brews and wine from the region.

Tour Summary

10-Day / 9-Night Tour w/ Steve Shunk

\$3390, from Redmond, OR

Airport is Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM)



Traveling through the refuge's top birding areas, we then spend two nights at the southern end of the Malheur Basin at Frenchglen, with great views of the rugged Steens Mountains. After time in rural enclaves, we then stay four nights in Bend, a great small city with a western vibe – mountain vistas, pine forests and the Deschutes River running through town.

Each day of the tour we explore a broad diversity of habitats, from riparian woodland to wetlands and lakes to lush and in places, burned coniferous forests.

The first half of the tour is a waterfowl and wetland extravaganza. For the second half, our daily itinerary will take us in search of 11 nesting woodpecker species – pretty incredible! Wander through recently burned forests in search of Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers; enjoy mature cottonwood and aspen galleries in search of three different sapsuckers; and visit older burns and mature mixed-conifer forest for Lewis's and Pileated Woodpeckers, respectively. Each day, we will encounter ponderosa pine forest, where we should find Williamson's Sapsucker and White-headed Woodpecker.

Itinerary

Sat., May 22 Arrive in Redmond, Oregon | Drive to Hines, Gateway to Malheur Country

Please plan to arrive at the Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM), servicing Deschutes County, by 2PM. We have a 2.5-hour drive to Hines. Stretch your legs after travel as we make a couple birding stops along the way. Settle into your accommodations and meet up for an early dinner and an early dinner and some evening birding in the Silvies River flood plain. This will be our first introduction to the diverse habitats of the Harney Basin.

Accommodations at the Best Western Rory and Ryan Inn, Hines (D)

Sun., May 23 Silvies River Floodplain | Malheur Lakes | Blitzen River

Over the next two days, we have much to explore. We spend time in various areas of the Silvies River floodplain. Sometimes referred to as the Malheur-Harney Lakes Basin, this closed sub-basin is named for Harney Lake, an alkali sink in this northwest corner of the immense Great Basin. The Silvies River drains from the southern limits of the Oregon's Blue Mountains and across its expansive flood plain, with its delta feeding into the north shore of Malheur Lake.



Each spring, regional water managers direct the flow of the Silvies through a complex network of canals and ditches to flood irrigate the private agricultural lands between the Blue Mountain foothills and Malheur Lake. Flood irrigation in the Silvies flood plain more-or-less emulates the 'natural' flooding that once occurred before immigrants settled the region.

South of the Silvies flood plain, three lakes—Malheur, Mud, and Harney—form the top of a lopsided T that defines the northern limits of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. The Blitzen River forms stem of the T, running due south about 35 miles, from its delta at the southern shore of Malheur Lake to the mouth of the Blitzen Canyon. The primary source of the Blitzen River is the snowmelt from Steens Mountain, a 35-mile-long fault block that rises from the valley floor, at 4,000 feet elevation, to its summit at nearly 10,000 feet. The Blitzen delivers the vast majority of the water that feeds the 140,000-acre Malheur Refuge.

Accommodations at the Best Western Rory and Ryan Inn, Hines (D)

Mon., May 24 & Tues., May 25 Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

We continue our in-depth exploration of this fascinating area, traveling beyond the lakes to Frenchglen. Between Malheur Refuge and the surrounding uplands, we will search for over 150 breeding species, including: 5 different grebes; over 15 nesting waterfowl; 10 species each of raptors, shorebirds, and sparrows; and up to 8 different flycatchers and 6 swallows. Yellow-headed Blackbirds will be abundant along the fencerows, with both Willets and Wilson's Snipe scattered among them. Thousands of Franklin's Gulls and White-faced Ibis breed on the refuge, along with over 100 pairs of Sandhill Cranes. Additional breeding bird highlights include rare Oregon nesters such as Trumpeter Swan, Eastern Kingbird, Bobolink, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

While we delight in Malheur's breeding bird phenomenon, we will also immerse ourselves in a very busy songbird migration. This desert oasis attracts an amazing array of migrants, including flycatchers, vireos, tanagers and warblers. We could encounter flocks of Western Tanagers joined by any of 10 likely warblers, out of 20 possible warbler species. Black-headed Grosbeak and Lazuli Bunting frequent the feeders at the visitor's center, with hummingbird feeders hosting up to four different hummer species.

Accommodations at the Drover's Inn, Frenchglen (B,L,D, both days)

Wed., May 26 Malheur National Wildlife Refuge | Bend

We enjoy another morning of birding and exploring Malheur. Malheur offers many other highlights, including iconic herds of wild horses; nearly 60 species of wild mammals on the refuge alone; carpets of desert wildflowers; a dynamic cultural history, from the first Paiute residents to the later cattle barons, as well as stories from the recent occupation of Malheur Refuge. The region will provide us with an amazing experience, but our adventure has just begun!



After breakfast on our last day here, we will head west, with a couple of birding stops before reaching downtown Bend—ready to explore the Cascade Mountains. The drive is about three hours in total, we pretty much make the day of it!

In Bend, we will spend five nights at McMenamin's hotel at the historic [Old St. Francis School](#). Construction on the original school began in early 1925, and the first class graduated later that year. Minor expansions occurred in the 1950s, but a major project in 1968 included the construction of a cafeteria, stage, gym, and meeting rooms. In 2000, the school relocated, and the property was purchased by McMenamin's. The McMenamin brothers, Mike and Brian, started their business in 1983, and the company has become a northwest institution, with historic venues converted to tourism properties throughout Oregon and Washington. You will thoroughly enjoy your stay here, and you should be prepared to spend some time in the on-site Turkish bath!
Accommodations at the St. Francis Old Schoolhouse, Bend (B,L,D)

Thurs., May 27 — Sun., May 30 Birding Woodpecker Wonderland!

Woodpecker searching gives us the framework for our days, but the diverse habitats in the region will expose us to a correspondingly diverse array of breeding species and late migrants. The eastern slope of the Cascades is characterized by stratified montane habitats that range from juniper woodlands to alpine tundra. Several factors contribute to this diversity phenomenon:



- The annual rainfall gradient from the Cascades crest to the Ponderosa Pine forest ranges from 120 inches to 10 inches in as few as 10 miles; this is 'rain equivalent', as most precipitation falls as snow. This horizontal gradient results in narrow bands of habitat, each of which is adapted to a different amount of precipitation.
- Several significant streams and two rivers flow from the eastern slope, supporting riparian habitats characterized by aspen, willow, alder, and other streamside vegetation.
- 'Natural' fire regimes in the region vary by elevation and habitat type, with more frequent, less intense fires typical at lower elevation pine forests and high-intensity, infrequent fires at higher-elevation mixed-conifer forests.
- All fires burn in a mosaic of intensities, with patches of high- intensity, mixed intensity, and low intensity fire interspersed throughout a given fire perimeter.

These factors combine to support nearly 150 species of breeding birds. Lakes in the region host nesting Hooded and Common Mergansers, as well as Bufflehead and Barrow's Goldeneye. Osprey and Bald Eagle occur along the shorelines, with Spotted Sandpipers just arriving on breeding territories. This is an excellent time of year for hummingbirds, with resident Anna's being met by migrant—and locally nesting—Rufous and Calliope. We find excellent study opportunities for Empidonax flycatchers, with Hammond's, Gray, Dusky, Willow, and Pacific-slope all on territories by mid-May. We will also stay alert for any of the eight local Corvid species, including Gray Jay, Pinyon Jay and Clark's Nutcracker.

Each of the habitats we visit will bring us a new array of songbirds. Cassin's Vireo, Cassin's Finch, and Pygmy



Nuthatch will be most common in ponderosa pine forest; mixed-conifer forest supports Hermit Thrush, Hermit Warbler, and Evening Grosbeak; and shrubby slopes will be loaded with Fox Sparrows and Green-tailed Towhees, with plenty of Lazuli Buntings and Nashville Warblers. Across the region, we will see Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak. Red Crossbills will be a regular distraction flying above the forest canopy, while Vaux's Swifts occasionally twitter overhead. Wherever we go, throughout these first few days, we can count on great birding and the amazing scenery of the Oregon Cascades.

Meals will be a combination of favorite local restaurants and some picnic lunches.

Accommodations at the St. Francis Old Schoolhouse, Bend (B,L,D)

Mon., May 31 Morning birding | Departures from Redmond

On our final day in central Oregon, we will enjoy some casual birding before heading to Redmond Municipal Airport. We will return you to the Redmond Municipal Airport in time for your scheduled departures after 1 PM. If you must leave in the morning ahead of that, you can arrange for a private shuttle back to the airport. (B)

NOTE: Our local woodpecker festival is scheduled for the weekend after our tour, and you may wish to stay on in the area a few extra days to attend. This event offers a great chance to spend time in the field with some of our best local guides, as well as birders from all over the country. If you wish to attend the festival, note that the event is very popular. In order to get onto any field trips, you should closely follow the East Cascades Audubon website—or subscribe to the local listserve, COBOL—and enroll immediately upon the start of registration. Contact us for further details.

Guide Steve Shunk

Steve has lived in Central Oregon since 1997, and he has studied the region's woodpecker diversity ever since. Steve started birding in 1989 in the San Francisco Bay Area, and he led his first birding classes in 1992. His first field job was a waterbird census with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Since moving to Oregon, Steve has conducted field studies from Oregon's coast range to the central Sierra Nevada. Steve's woodpecker research culminated in the publication of his Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America, published in May 2016. He is a frequent keynote speaker and field trip guide at birding festivals across the nation. Steve's infectious enthusiasm, his legendary birding ear, and his intimate knowledge of the region combine to offer you an incomparable birding experience.



Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM) by 2 PM on Saturday, May 22. Please plan departures after 1 PM on Monday, May 31.

Photo Credits

Lewis's Woodpecker, Steve Wolfe (SW); Pileated Woodpecker by Bill Pennell on Unsplash; Old St. Francis School Hotel, courtesy of the Hotel; White-headed Woodpecker, SW; Yellow-headed Blackbird, Doug Greenberg (DG); Malheur NWR, SW; Western Tanager, Barb Stone; Yellow-breasted Chat, Terry Peterson (TP); Anna's Hummingbird, Sandy Sorkin (SASO); Hotel Room, courtesy of Old St. Francis School Hotel; Pileated Woodpecker, Steve Shunk (SS); Calliope Hummingbird, SS; Nashville Warbler, DG; Green-tailed Towhee, Barry Ramdass; Gray Jay, Peg Abbott (PA); Spotted Sandpiper, TP; Hermit Warbler, SW

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is \$3390 DBL / \$4190 SGL, based on double occupancy, per person.

The tour price includes airport transfers, 9 nights' accommodations, all meals from dinner Day One through breakfast Day 10, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Redmond, Oregon or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines).

Items of Note

We travel in a large passenger van with comfortable seating for up to seven birders and our guide, so everyone will have a window seat. This is an active birding tour, typically we travel by vehicle from site to site, and each day will involve considerable walking. We may hike up to three or four miles per day, with mostly short walks at a 'birdwatcher's pace' but a few routes may take us up short, steep trails or over rough terrain.

As with all Naturalist Journeys tours, Steve will offer great birding in the context of a broad natural history experience, we take plenty of time to 'smell the flowers'—and touch the lava rocks, wet our hands in fresh springs, enjoy the antics of chipmunks, etc. We review our birds and other wildlife sightings at dinner each evening, but we will also discuss the broader discoveries of the day. We hope to send you home understanding of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest's ecology and current conservation issues.

If you have any difficulty meeting this schedule, or if you wish to arrive a day early and/or depart a day late, or arrive or depart later or earlier than we suggest, there is transport to and from the airport. There is also long-term parking there for those that drive.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.