

Turnbull Wildlife Refuge Friends Newsletter



President's Report Fall 2020

by Lorna Kropp

The Friends of Turnbull Board has continued to work through online Zoom meetings while the Nature Store remains closed and activities for groups of the public are not possible. The accomplishments during this quarter are: the establishment of a "FOTNWR Investment Policy;" a decision was made to fund two requests for needed equipment for both the Environmental Education program and the Refuge Biological program; consideration of an investment strategy is in process; and, finally, a fun Annual Membership Meeting on Zoom which we were introduced to Lisa Wilson, the new Refuge Manager, and we shared photos by member photographers.

1) The Board-appointed Finance Committee wrote a Policy statement to guide our decisions regarding investments and spending. The goal is to achieve a long-term return for a stream of annual distributions to support the Refuge program. This seed-money for expenses such as EE interns stipends and biological equipment will need to be supplemented by annual Fund-raising events. "The distribution of Fund assets will be permitted to the extent that such distributions do not exceed a level that would erode the Fund's real assets over time."

2) The Finance Committee report recommended that the Committee engage an Investment Manager and that the portfolio investment funds be balanced and 80% liquid. The Board is still deciding on the proposed investment strategies, taking a cautious approach during this time.

3) At the September meeting, the Board received a list of purchases needed for both the Environmental Education and Biological Programs. The purchases, totaling approximately \$10,000, will include new microscopes and nets for aquatic studies and a new taxidermy mount for the classroom. The Biological program purchases will include two new trail cameras, binoculars, and GPS/iPads sets for mapping invasive species on the Refuge lands.

4) The Annual Membership Meeting was held on September 22nd over Zoom. After an annual report by President, Lorna Kropp, and a financial report from Treasurer, Molly Zammit, we were introduced to the new Refuge Manager, Lisa Wilson. For the program, member photographers were asked to send up to 5 photographs taken at the Refuge recently. Thanks to our participants for some great sharing and creative photographs.

While the Nature Store remains closed, our apparel supplier, Zome Design, is offering a new item through our online-store: Logo-embroidered Masks. You can support the Friends with an order of a stylish mask with the Blue Heron logo and Turnbull NWR for \$14.99. We will get 20% of the proceeds if we can sell at least 24 masks. They will be useful and could make good gifts. We will send out several MailChimp notices when they are available. Support Friends of Turnbull with your mask-wearing!

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Wrens are some of the most fascinating birds to visit your yard

by Madonna Luers

Backyard birders may wonder “who’s that?” when tiny, quick-moving members of the Wren family arrive on their property in the spring.

These assertive, noisy birds hardly fit our definition of a reclusive troglodyte, but they actually make up the family Troglodytidae. One Native American term for wren translates to “big noise from little size.” The Anglo-Saxon word “wren” carries a connotation of lasciviousness, perhaps because of the males’ polygamous behavior. Whatever we call them, wrens are fun to get to know, especially since some species readily use or even prefer human-made nest boxes.

Washington is home to six species of wrens. Three are particular to special habitats not usually found in residential backyards, as noted by their common names – Marsh wren, Canyon wren, Rock wren. But the other three species are relatively common in the open woods, dense shrubbery, or gardens that many backyards include.

The Pacific wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*) is the smallest at about 3-1/2 inches in length. It also has the shortest tail, a mere stub in comparison to other birds; but, like most wrens, it cocks that tail in a perky upright position. Also like most wrens, it has a chunky body, slender and slightly curved bill for insect-eating, and basic brown plumage.

Along Washington’s coast, the Pacific wren is a year-round resident. But in the rest of the state it moves in for spring and summer breeding and migrates to the southwest for the winter. (Until a recent taxonomic split, this species was known as “winter wren”.) The male arrives in April, usually a week or two before females. He busily builds several nests, usually low in dense brush, often streamside. A mating female chooses a nest, and then the male shows the remaining nests to another female for a second mating.

The most common is the House wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), a spring and summer resident of Washington that winters in or near Mexico. Its larger size (4-1/2-inch length) is gained mostly in its longer tail. Otherwise it looks very similar to the Winter wren, perhaps with less prominent barring on the belly. Its common name comes from its nesting

affinity for birdhouses, or house porch lights, cans, hats, boots, or nearly any cavity-like, man-made item that appears to provide some measure of security. House wrens have even been known to nest in the pockets of pants hanging on clotheslines!

The early-arriving male House wren cleans out a nest site, which may include destroying another bird’s nest and nestlings, then builds a foundation with twigs. He repeats this in several sites within his half-acre or so territory, all the while warbling loudly. When a female arrives to inspect the sites, his song changes to a high, squeaky one and he performs wing quivers and flutter flights to entice her. When she chooses a nest, she lines it with soft grass and feathers. The male brings her food while she incubates eggs.

House wrens often have a second brood, sometimes with the same mate, but sometimes not. The male repeats his nest cleaning, building and courting rituals. The female leaves her first brood for the male to feed so she can start the second.

The Bewick’s wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) is more distinctive in appearance, with its long, sideways-flitting tail edged in white spots, its light-colored breast, long white eyebrow, and larger size (up to 5 inches). A year-round resident, it is most commonly found in western Washington but has been noted regularly throughout the state.

The Bewick’s (pronounced like “Buick’s”) wren was named by John James Audubon to commemorate his friend Thomas Bewick, an English naturalist and wood engraver. Although all wrens are prolific and loud songsters, the Bewick’s wren has one of the most beautiful voices. It begins high and rapid, changing to a lower register, ending in trills.

These wrens also readily use nestboxes, taking as much as ten days to build very sturdy nests. Like most wren species, egg incubation last about two weeks, and nestling care before fledging lasts about another two weeks.

These six weeks or so of high-energy wren courting, nesting, and rearing can be among the most fascinating for backyard birders, especially those who make and place nestboxes suited for them.

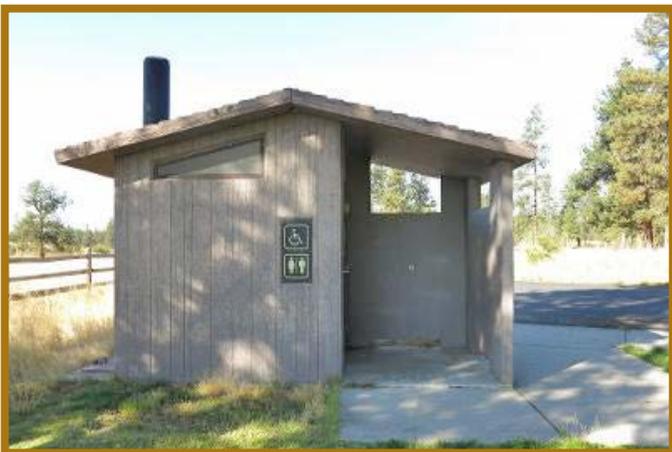
Refuge Happenings

by **Sandy Rancourt**
Visitor Services Manager

This summer brought a lot of changes and major adjustments for staff, volunteers and the visiting public. Precautions were put in place at the refuge to ensure everyone's safety as much as possible during a pandemic. The Visitor Center and restrooms were closed throughout the summer, but there was never a shortage of visitors. Many sought refuge and consolation in the outdoors from a nightmare situation with no end in sight. As if this world isn't stressful enough, the pandemic just added a whole new layer. Turnbull remains a beautiful place for such an escape and the onset of fall will present a colorful invitation. We ask visitors to please remember to keep dogs on short leashes, and remember our "pack it in, pack it out" policy for everyone's enjoyment.

Restroom Update

All vault toilets were reopened for the visiting public on Saturday, October 3, 2020. However, the public restroom at the Pine Lake Loop parking lot is currently closed for repairs. Turnbull's Visitor Center will remain closed until further notice. Vault toilets will be cleaned twice a week. We ask the visiting public to please use hand sanitizer and wear a mask while using the vault toilet for your safety and the next user's.



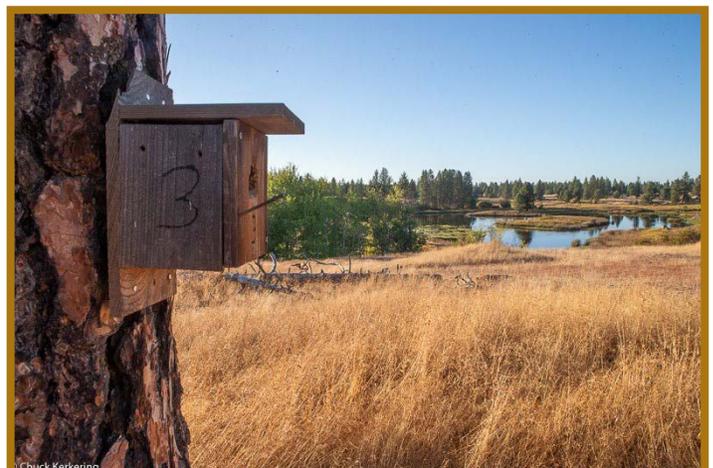
Vault toilets are now open on the refuge.
(S. Rancourt)

Biological Program

Despite the pandemic, important wildlife surveys continued with "safety first" in mind. Interaction was limited, individuals donned masks while interacting with other staff or volunteers and proper social distancing was maintained. Songbird point counts, aspen browse surveys, weed mappings, waterfowl pair surveys and wetland water level monitoring were just some of the annual surveys completed.

Bluebird Trail Monitoring

Several long-term volunteers who are frequent refuge visitors were recruited to monitor bluebird nest boxes this year. Chuck Kerkering, who normally helps with field trips that were cancelled, opted to monitor the Stubblefield Bluebird Trail this summer. This trail requires a great deal of walking, but it was exactly what Chuck desired. Buck and Sandy Domicovich were recruited to monitor the Upper Turnbull Trail, and Sharon Riggs returned for another year of monitoring the Blackhorse Bluebird Trail. Consistent bluebird trail monitoring allows us to acquire long-term information on this important species while providing a safe, isolated, and enjoyable opportunity for volunteers in a beautiful setting.



Stubblefield Bluebird Trail.
(Photo, courtesy of John C. Kerkering)

Spalding's Catchfly

Refuge staff, University of Washington Rare Care, and volunteers spent several days during the spring and summer monitoring the threatened plant species Spalding silene, one of two threatened plant species found on Turnbull. Spalding's catchfly is a perennial endemic species found in the PNW. The thick hairs found on its leaves and stems are sticky enough to catch dust or insects. Spalding's catchfly was listed as threatened on October 10, 2001. Refuge biologist Mike Rule, bio-tech Michael Ploegman, Rare Care staff, AmeriCorps members Erik Lewis and Katii Abell and I all helped out with this ongoing study by monitoring numerous plots of planted seedlings and direct seeding of catchfly. The goal of the project is to establish two areas on the refuge with self-sustaining populations of at least 500 plants. Other partners funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are working on three locations (another in the scablands and two in the Palouse) with the same goal. To meet this end, each area has planted nearly 2,500 seedlings. Monitoring needs to be conducted for at least three years after planting to determine its success. The first plantings occurred in the fall of 2017 and the final in the fall of last year. We have had a mixture of success and losses, but preliminary monitoring is hopeful.

Spalding's Catchfly (center) is a threatened plant species found on Turnbull (S. Rancourt)

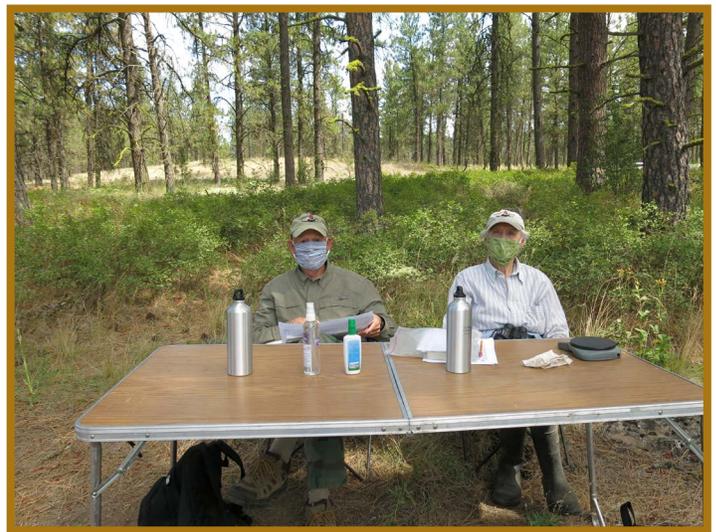


Mike Rule monitoring a catchfly plot. (S. Rancourt)

MAPS

(Monitoring Avian Production and Survivorship)

Our mist net banding station continued operation this year, but with a much smaller crew to allow maximum social distancing. Marian and Russell Frobe, Mike Rule and I had a pretty productive season that brought a diversity of species. Most of the banding days were hot and mosquito-infested, but well worth the thrill of the catch, including a variety of warblers, vireos, woodpeckers and flycatchers, as well as Bullock's orioles, bluebirds and feisty chickadees. Highlights were a Townsend's warbler, pine siskin, a gray flycatcher and, of course, the ruffed grouse seen below.



Marian and Russell Frobe, donning their COVID masks, have been assisting us with MAPS for over 25 years. (S. Rancourt)



Not a normal catch of the day, but this ruffed grouse made for a nice surprise. (S. Rancourt)

Environmental Education and Outreach

Although our field trip and summer programs were cancelled, we were fortunate enough to get quite a few environmental education and outreach programs completed before the onset of the pandemic. This fiscal year, over 4,700 individuals were provided environmental education on and off refuge. Although numbers were smaller than in normal years due to the pandemic, we were able to facilitate the Fall Field Trip and Night Hike Programs and the majority of the



Winter Outreach Programs. A huge thank you to all the volunteers, staff and members who assisted with the program this year.

Here's to better days to come.
(S. Rancourt)

Volunteer Program

Turnbull was very fortunate to get many projects completed before the pandemic hit. This fiscal year, more than 700 volunteers contributed over 10,000 hours. Most volunteer hours contributed were in the biological and public use programs. The field work was continued this summer with new safety protocols in place. Volunteers donned masks, social distancing was enforced, and individuals did not ride in the same vehicle. Our deepest appreciation to all our partners and volunteers for help making this a successful year despite all its challenges.

Riparian Restoration

Several riparian projects were completed this summer by master hunters who needed volunteer hours as part of their requirement for the program. After removing ¼ mile of deer fence and posts at the oxbow planting site south of Middle Pine Lake, Jim Gladden finished up his service hours by removing a total of 50 hardware cloth cages and enclosed 20 aspen, willow and cottonwood trees with larger cages to protect them from beaver damage in the Pine Creek Restoration Area. On his last day, a cow moose and calf found

their way into the protective fencing enclosure he was working in, but all ended well. All parties left without incident.

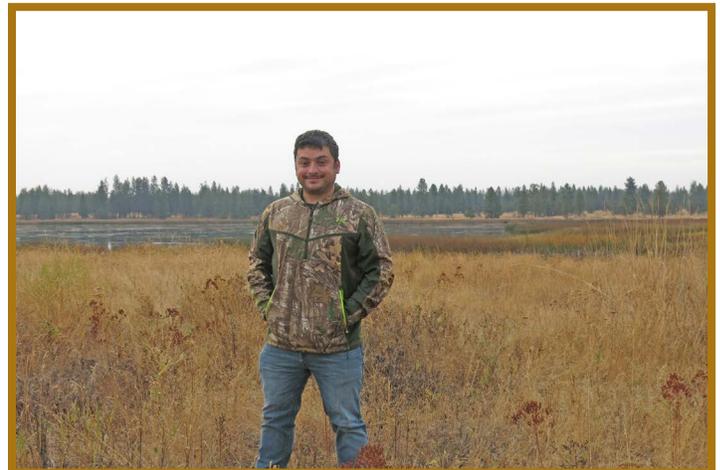
Master Hunter Andrew White got his 40 hours of volunteer service by removing several acres of deer fence and posts along 30-Acres Trail. This took a great deal of effort. Much of the fence was lying down and embedded with reed canary grass. All fence was neatly rolled and fence posts removed.



Master Hunter Andrew White removing deer fence near the Auto Tour Route. (S. Rancourt)

Washington Waterfowl Association Spokane Chapter / Hunters for Conservation

We have been very fortunate to have the assistance of Washington Waterfowl Association over the past several years in sponsoring our Youth Waterfowl Hunt. The group assists with advertising for the event and helping youth hunters on the State Youth Waterfowl hunt day in early fall. In addition, Washington Waterfowl Association members participated in last fall's community planting event.



Ramon Guel, President of the Washington Waterfowl Association (S. Rancourt)

Other restoration projects involved our riparian nursery. Before the current Covid situation, several new partners were recruited for riparian restoration projects for the spring, including potting 1,000s of native seedlings. Unfortunately, Covid put the nix on things, but these new partners hopefully will assist with 2021 projects. By late March, refuge staff went to a full-time telework schedule unless we were in the field. You can imagine that staff got outside whenever possible to help cope with the pandemic situation, and we jumped at the opportunity to pot seedlings to get back out to Turnbull. Refuge staff potted hundreds of native seedlings for future projects. Katii Abell also assisted with potting willow cuttings to break up her day in the office when we returned to a part-time teleworking schedule. Long term refuge volunteers, Joyce Alonso and Sally English, came out periodically to weed the nursery, which was no easy task. Eagle Scout candidate, Bradley Golden, was recruited to replot over 100 potted plants that have been completely taken over by yellow clover. He will complete that project this October.



Well, fall is in full swing; the aspen and other deciduous shrub and tree species are turning color. Waterfowl migration is occurring, with good numbers of mallards, wigeon, and pintail observed using the more permanent wetlands on the refuge. The unusually long dry summer, that we just could not seem to shake, has resulted in a significant draw-down of refuge wetlands. Only the deepest and more permanent wetlands are holding water and migrating birds.

With teleworking part-time and the closure of the Visitor Center, I don't get out on the refuge as often or get to see the reports from our refuge visitors; but we have some news to report. Besides the good numbers of migrating waterfowl, hosts of other migrants have been coming through since late July. Fall warblers, including Wilson's, McGillivray's, Townsends's and yellow-rumps, were common. Most have moved through, but yellow-rumps are still around enjoying the beautiful weather. The pines are full of Western bluebirds, nuthatches, juncos and chickadees. I have also seen good numbers of house finches and American goldfinches.

Elk have been heard bugling and the public use area has its fair share of moose. The landscaping outside the office has taken a bit of a beating by a cow and her calf this year.

Our one pair of trumpeter swans that decided to nest in Cheever Lake have fledged two cygnets. Other swans have been sighted on various refuge wetlands, and they should start to group up and be joined soon by migrating tundras.

Although we know that we have cougars on the refuge, they are seldom seen until recently. We have placed 5 remote cameras on the refuge to monitor browsing activity in aspen stands. Two of the cameras caught images of a cougar in the southwest corner of the refuge.

Although the refuge is dry, the weather has been perfect for a hike the last few weeks. There is still lots



to see and hear. If you do see something of interest, please send us a note at Turnbull@fws.gov.

Porcupine Stroll

by Carlene Hardt

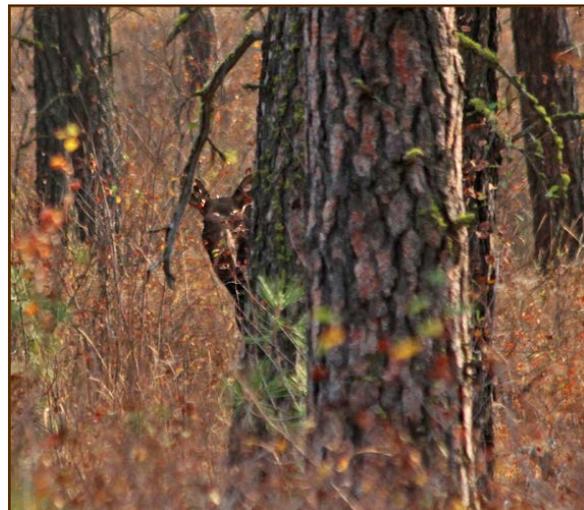
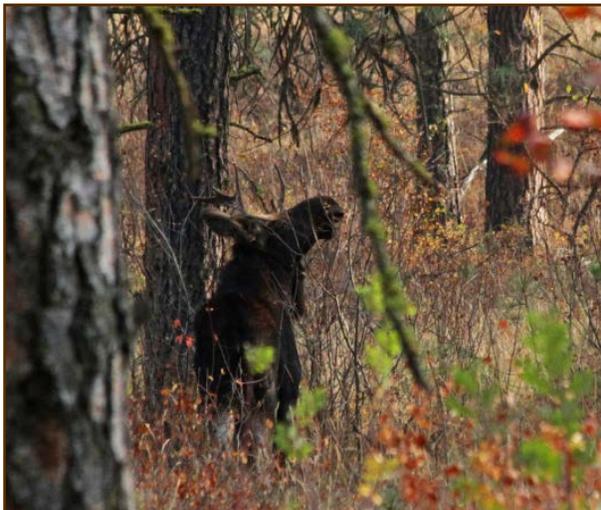
My daughter, Joy, and I had an opportunity to take a walk out at Turnbull on October 5th. It had been awhile since I was out there and I noticed how quiet it was. As we were walking the loop, an excited couple told us that there were porcupines in a tree on the east side of Middle Pine Lake so we scurried over to check it out!

We were delighted to see that on ONE branch of a tall pine tree there were THREE big porcupines resting or sleeping! This could be a family because one was bigger and had longer (orange!) teeth; and they are typically solitary. Looks like these nocturnal creatures were very relaxed on the thick branch. They moved very little as we watched and one snoozed the entire time. Kinda cute from afar, don't you think? :)

On Thursday, as we walked to Cheever Lake, we spotted two moose! They were a bit far away, but we didn't want to sneak up on two full grown moose, so we stayed on the path and took a few pictures to prove that we saw them!



All photos by Carlene Hardt



Friends of Turnbull NWR
P.O. Box 294
Cheney, WA 99004

The Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, a nonprofit organization, supports the mandate of the refuge to protect and enhance wildlife and their habitats through education, research, habitat preservation and restoration.

Got email? Add it to your membership form for quick activity updates!

Membership Application

YES! I want to support the Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and its programs with my membership.

Name _____
Address _____
City, State, and Zip _____
Daytime Phone _____
E-mail _____

Annual Membership: (Circle one)

Individual \$15
Family \$25
Business/Group \$35
Patron \$100
Benefactor \$500
Donation \$ _____
Endowment Fund Donation \$ _____
Amount Enclosed _____

New _____ Renewal _____

I would like to volunteer _____
Nature Store _____
Committee _____
Environmental Education _____
Where needed _____

My check is enclosed payable to
Friends of Turnbull N.W.R.
P.O. Box 294
Cheney WA 99004