

Shoreline

Local Students Map Refuge Weeds

Armed with GPS (Global Positioning System) units, the Environmental Science students from Meridian's Mountain View High School fanned out across the hills

west of the refuge Visitor Center in late November to find and map rush skeletonweed.

Skeletonweed is a noxious weed native to Asia Minor and the Mediterranean.

Its tap root can reach as deep as eight feet, which helps it out-compete native plants for water and nutrients. As it replaces native plants, the quality of wildlife habitat goes down.

Skeletonweed was first discovered in Idaho in the 1960s. Since then it has infested over 3 million acres in the state and, unfortunately, was recently discovered at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge. The mapping project is the first step toward controlling skeletonweed on the refuge. Using their GPS data, the Mountain View students will make weed maps to help

refuge staff plan their attack on this new infestation. The students will also research environmentally-friendly removal techniques and create flyers to teach the public about this and other noxious weeds.

The students will return to the refuge for another battle in the spring, this time to help remove the weeds. It

is hoped that future classes will return to the same sites to monitor progress and remove any remaining plants. The Mountain View weed mapping project is supported by a "Nature of Learning" grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.



Teacher Gina Lockwood helps a student map weeds with the GPS unit.

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Rush skeletonweed is named for its leafless, multi-branched stems. Quite a survivor, it can re-grow from a root as deep as four feet underground.

"This partnership allows us to improve wildlife habitat while also teaching the public about the effects of weeds on wildlife and wildlife habitat."

*Elaine Johnson
Refuge Manager*



Rush Skeletonweed (University of Idaho)

May I Swab Your Duck's Rear?

Refuge staff have recently been making this unusual request of waterfowl hunters. Fortunately, most hunters give their permission once they control their laughter.



Flocking ducks

Why the strange request? Deer Flat is part of a nationwide effort to monitor for avian influenza (AKA bird flu). Bird flu is actually

quite common; thousands of varieties have been isolated. However one variety, the highly pathogenic H5N1, is currently of great concern. H5N1 was first detected in 1997 in Hong Kong, and first spread to humans in 2003. Since then, over 200 people have contracted the virus, and more than half have died.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners are currently monitoring throughout North America for H5N1. The virus was detected in birds in Europe and Africa in 2006,

and may have been spread by migrating wild birds. Although the virus has not yet been found in the Western Hemisphere, birds from Asia and Europe do occasionally migrate to the U.S. and could potentially bring H5N1 here. Eurasian Wigeons, for example, are not uncommon Treasure Valley visitors.

Fortunately, in Asia the virus mostly affects domestic, not wild, birds. Also, it still only rarely infects people. Nevertheless, the current monitoring effort should help us control the spread of the disease if it does arrive in the U.S.

The refuge has so far collected over 100 samples,



A refuge hunter's ducks being swabbed for bird flu.

both during September duck banding and from hunters, but we will continue to sample through January. So...if you get a strange request about your duck while hunting at the refuge, please have your laugh and then watch us do our thing!

Refuge Now Easier to Find!

If you've tried to reach the refuge in the last year, you might have found yourself following a detour. Fortunately, the recent completion of two major Nampa construction projects should make your next refuge trip much easier!

If you travel to the refuge on I-84, the new Karcher Interchange should simplify your trip. To find the refuge visitor center, take the new Exit 33A. After exiting the freeway, head west on Highway 55, which is Karcher Road. Follow Karcher Road to Lake Avenue. Turn left onto Lake Avenue and follow it to the left at the earthen dam. Make a hard right turn onto the dam, following signs to the

Visitor Center.

If you live south of the interstate in Boise or Meridian, you might consider taking Amity Road over the soon-to-be-completed Kings Corner Overpass. Follow Amity into Nampa and continue on the road after it becomes Lake Lowell Avenue. After crossing Midway Road, the road curves to the left and ends at a stop sign. Turn left and then almost immediately make a hard right onto the dam.

The refuge Visitor Center is open 8 to 4 weekdays and 10 to 4 Saturdays.

Why not plan a visit!



Care about wildlife? Concerned about the refuge?

Then find your niche as a refuge volunteer!

The refuge needs your skills and enthusiasm to:

Staff the Visitor Center	Remove invasive weeds
Help with wildlife surveys	Help educate visitors
Count refuge visitors	Help with special events
Survey plants	Collect litter

Interested in volunteering?

Come to the Volunteer Orientation January 18th at 7 PM or
Call 467-9278

E-mail deerflat@fws.gov or

Visit <http://www.fws.gov/deerflat/currvol.htm>

Refuge Vandalism

In September, vandals did over \$1,000 in damage to the outhouse at Gotts Point.



Vandalism of signs and facilities is not uncommon at the refuge.

“Unfortunately it’s not unusual to have damage to the door and broken windows,” according to refuge law enforcement officer Todd Fenzl. “However, I was surprised when I opened the door and saw that they had destroyed the toilet.”

Vandalism at the refuge is not uncommon,

including graffiti, paint-balled signs, and damaged facilities. Refuge Manager Elaine Johnson noted: “it’s unfortunate that we are forced to spend limited time and money repairing vandalism instead of on wildlife-related projects like habitat restoration.”

Due to safety concerns about leaving the area open without a usable bathroom, the road to Gotts Point was closed several weeks before its usual seasonal closure between October 1 and April 15. Vandalism in June 2000 caused a similar early closure at Gotts Point.

Fire Rehabilitation

Efforts to rehabilitate the burned area near Gotts Point are underway. A lightning-caused fire in August burned nearly 100 acres of sagebrush and some riparian vegetation along the edge of the lake.

After a fire, cheatgrass and other invasive plants germinate quickly, making it difficult for native plants to become reestablished. Cheatgrass is of

lower value as wildlife habitat and burns easily, increasing the risk of future fires.

To prevent a permanent loss of valuable habitat, sprouting cheatgrass was sprayed

with an herbicide in November. The area will be reseeded with native plants in December or early January using a rangeland drill borrowed from the Bureau of Land Management. A rangeland drill plants seeds on rough ground and at varying depths, greatly increasing their chance of sprouting.

After the seeding, a layer of straw mulch will be applied in some areas to hold in soil moisture and return organic matter to the ecosystem. In addition, straw bales will be placed in some of the drainages to reduce erosion from the denuded hillsides. This will reduce sedimentation and preserve lake water quality.

To allow the plants to become established, the rehabilitated area will be closed to the public for several years. Non-burned areas are still open for recreational activities.

“Hopefully we will have a wet winter and spring to help the seeds germinate.”

*Elaine Johnson
Refuge Manager*



25 volunteers spent over 30 hours cleaning litter from the burn to prepare it for the rangeland drill.



Litter Crusader

Kris Horton started volunteering at the refuge in early 2005, wanting to help coordinate volunteer litter-removal programs. She worked with refuge staff to start the Refuge Helpers program. Refuge Helpers is like adopt-a-highway programs, where groups adopt a particular section of the refuge and clean it regularly. To kick off the new program, Kris also helped plan the first Litter Lift, held on Earth Day in April 2005. She continues to help coordinate Litter Lifts, which have become a semi-annual event.

In addition to her litter-

removal activities, Kris participates in the refuge Weed Warriors program and other volunteer activities. She has also been actively involved with the recently-formed refuge friends group. She completed the IRS paperwork to get the group's non-profit status, and is currently serving as the group's Treasurer and Secretary.

Kris says that starting the Refuge Helpers program is her most satisfying accomplishment while volunteering at the refuge. "Litter clean-up is my passion, because it's the single easiest thing people can do to help protect the environment."



Many thanks to all refuge volunteers!

Weed Warrior

Jayson Murgoitio started volunteering at the refuge in early 2006. After seeing natural areas in other states destroyed by litter, misuse, and noxious weeds, he wanted to help preserve the refuge back home in Idaho.

Since mid-summer, Jayson has led the monthly Weed Warriors program, gathering supplies, orienting new volunteers, and then working with the crew to remove that month's targeted noxious weed. Weed Warriors have so far helped remove Scotch thistle, poison hemlock, and puncturevine (AKA, goathead).

In addition to his leadership role in Weed Warriors, Jayson

has also surveyed goose nests on refuge islands, worked Saturdays at the Visitor Center, and picked up litter at September's Litter Lift.

What Jayson likes best about volunteering at Deer Flat is the satisfaction of knowing "that you really do make a difference!" During last spring's goose survey, "I was on an island that was previously overrun with Canada thistle and hadn't been used by nesting waterfowl for quite some time. Refuge volunteers and staff had removed the thistle and as I walked across the island, hundred of birds took off! I think about this every time I lead Weed Warriors."



Seasonal Sights: The Winter Bird

Although occasionally seen in southwest Idaho in spring and fall, winter is really the time to look for dark-eyed juncos. In fact, you don't have to look very far; these small sparrows are one of the most common birds

Juncos eat mostly seeds and usually forage on the ground. Even when they feed at bird feeders, they prefer to feed on seeds that have dropped to the ground rather than taking them from hanging

Watching for Juncos?

Look for the distinctive dark "hood" and the flash of white on the outer tail feathers as they fly.



at winter bird feeders in Idaho!

In winter, juncos usually travel in flocks of between 10 and 30 birds. Each flock uses 10-12 acres and has a definite social hierarchy.

Males winter farther north than females, so the flocks you see may include mostly males or mostly females. Why do the sexes winter in different locations? Scientists speculate that males winter close to their breeding grounds so they can return quickly in spring to establish territories. Because males usually dominate females in winter flocks,

females may travel farther south to winter in order to be able to compete for food.

feeders.

Imagine hopping around barefoot in the winter looking for lunch. How would you stay warm? Watch juncos carefully, and you may see a foraging junco take a break to squat and cover its bare legs and feet with its breast feathers.

Just as we put on layers when the weather starts to cool, juncos and other birds add layers of feathers to fight the chill. But even with the extra feathers, small birds like juncos spend a lot of time shivering to stay warm.

To fuel their internal furnace, small birds like juncos and chickadees have to eat almost constantly to survive the winter. In fact, birds require more food, for their weight, than any other vertebrate except shrews!



Black-capped chickadees often flock with juncos in winter.

Friends' Focus



Recent Programs: October's program was a panel discussion of county government planners. They discussed the future of the refuge and offered suggestions about how the Friends could help preserve the Refuge. Many thanks to Leon Jensen and Bonnie Ford-LeCompte from the Canyon County Development Services Department, Harold Nevill from the county Planning and Zoning Commission, and Matt Beebe from the Canyon County Commission.

In November, Friends gathered for a tasty potluck to celebrate the group's first year. Committee chairs reviewed their accomplishments during the year and President Lee McGlinsky honored many members with silly awards, then participants brainstormed ideas for 2007 in small groups.

In December, Susan Kain, Deer Flat's Outdoor Recreation Planner, presented a slide show about what goes on at the refuge in fall and winter.

Grant Received! Many thanks to Jon Minkoff and Al McGlinsky for their hard work in applying for a \$5,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The group recently learned that they received the grant! The grant money will be applied in several ways to help expand membership and conduct outreach. New computer equipment will be used to produce brochures, teaching materials, and audiovisual presentations. A portable exhibit will be used for outreach at county fairs and other local events to provide information and attract new members. Finally, Cathy Eells is working on starting a bookstore at the refuge Visitor Center. It will sell educational wildlife-related items and profits will support the group's activities and programs.

Upcoming Events:

Tuesday, Jan. 2

General Meeting, 7 P.M.
Elections and 2007 planning

Tuesday, Jan. 16

Board Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 6

General Meeting, 7 P.M.
Wolf Ecology & Management

Tuesday, Feb. 20

Board Meeting

Saturday, Feb. 17

Great Backyard Bird Count with
birding & kids activities
Time TBA

Tuesday, Mar. 6

General Meeting, 7 P.M.
Topic TBA

Tuesday, Mar. 20

Board Meeting

Mission Statement: To promote, protect, and provide resources to preserve and enhance Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Interested in becoming a member, joining a committee, or receiving the new Friends newsletter? Then call Lyndell Jackson at 459-4740 or 880-6127

Winter Activity Schedule

January

Tuesday, Jan. 2

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Friends Group Meeting
Elections and 2007 planning
7 P.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Jan. 3

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

Tuesday, Jan. 9

Wild About Life
Wintering Raptors with live birds
7 P.M., Visitor Center

Tuesday, Jan. 16

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Jan. 17

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

Tuesday, Jan. 18

Volunteer Orientation
7 P.M., Visitor Center

February

Tuesday, Feb. 6

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Friends Group Meeting & Wild About Life
Wolf Ecology & Management
7 P.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Feb. 7

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

Saturday, Feb. 17

Great Backyard Bird Count
Time TBA, Visitor Center

Tuesday, Feb. 20

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Feb. 21

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

March

Tuesday, Mar. 6

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Friends Group Meeting
Topic TBA
7 P.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Mar. 7

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

Tuesday, Mar. 13

Wild About Life
Wildlife-friendly Landscaping
7 P.M., Visitor Center

Saturday, Mar. 17

Weed Warriors
9 A.M., Visitor Center

Tuesday, Mar. 20

Reading at the Refuge
10 A.M., Visitor Center

Wednesday, Mar. 21

Reading at the Refuge
2 P.M., Visitor Center

WILD ABOUT LIFE LECTURE SERIES

This new monthly lecture series offers something for everyone, with topics ranging from Idaho's winter raptors to wildlife-friendly landscaping and from water quality to fish identification.

Held 7 to 8 PM at the refuge Visitor Center alternately on the first or second Tuesday of each month. **Mark your calendar and tell your friends!**

January 9 Idaho's Wintering Raptors

Learn how to ID local raptors and meet live birds!

February 6 Wolf Ecology & Management

Learn about wolves through the seasons and management concerns.

March 13 Native Plants and Water-conserving Gardening

Get a head start on your spring gardening projects!

**WILD ABOUT LIFE
CO-SPONSORS:**





Environmental Education

Classroom Programs

Bring the refuge to your classroom! Refuge staff will visit your school to present a standards-based, interactive environmental education program. Choose from the programs listed below or request one tailored to meet your needs!

- Alien Invaders
- Animal Camouflage
- Animal Toolkits
- Bird Beaks
- Ecosystems Alive
- FISH!
- Jaws and Levers
- Lessons from the Lorax
- Scat and Tracks
- Touch Trunk
- Wetlands' Wonders
- What Did the Owl Eat?

Field Trips

Visit Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge at Lake Lowell for a standards-based environmental education activity or hands-on exploration of sagebrush upland, riparian, and lake habitats!

One Class?

Schedule a hike on the Nature Trail and/or an environmental education activity. All visits include time in the Visitor Center and a brief orientation to the refuge.

More than one class?

Large groups will be split into smaller groups and rotated through 3 or 4 stations. Stations include the Visitor Center, Nature Trail, and one or more outdoor environmental education activities. Each station lasts 20-25 minutes. The Visitor Center station includes an 11-minute refuge orientation video.

Pass it on!

Do you know someone who might be interested in a FREE, fun environmental education program? Then please pass on a copy of Shoreline or help them contact us at the refuge. Thanks for helping us spread the word about our programs!

For more information about other environmental education opportunities, including Scout programs, service learning, and community programs, please contact us at (208) 467-9278 or deerflat@fws.gov

All programs and field trips are free!

Want to know more?

Visit the refuge web site at <http://www.fws.gov/deerflat/education.htm> for more information, including details about classroom programs and field trip FAQs.

Schedule a classroom program or field trip!

Phone: (208) 467-9278 E-mail: deerflat@fws.gov