



# MALHEUR & STEENS

## EARLY WINTER WEEKEND

November 21–24, 2013

*In the early spring of 1997, I first ventured into Oregon's Great Basin. I was so taken by the area's vastness, its wildness, and its beauty, that I moved there one month later. I spent my first spring and summer in Oregon living and working at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. I experienced the abundance of spring migration and the magic of the nesting season while exploring every corner of the refuge and the surrounding Harney Basin. I relocated to Sisters, Oregon, that August, but the magic of Malheur had taken hold. Since that fateful summer, I have returned repeatedly, in all seasons, to experience the region's ineffable magnetism. After ten years making dozens of trips to this Great Basin oasis, we invite you to share the "Magic of Malheur" at the onset of winter.*

*Your host and lead guide,  
Stephen Shunk*

### TOUR SUMMARY

Our early-winter explorations in the Malheur region will take us east from Bend to the expansive Harney Basin, where we will explore the Silvies River flood plain, the Blitzen River Valley, and the open slopes of Steens Mountain. One of the primary objectives of this tour is to study raptors, and especially the peak abundance of Rough-legged Hawks. We could easily observe dozens of "Rough-legs", with an average of over 30 birds tallied on the Malheur Christmas Bird Count since 1950—and this is only in a 15-mile-diameter circle! We could easily see dozens more than this, plus plenty of Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, and resident Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle, and a smattering of accipiters and Bald Eagles around for good measure.

While we are enjoying the abundance of winter raptors, we will also search open waters for Tundra Swan, Cackling Goose, Hooded Merganser, and other waterfowl, as well as the resident Trumpeter Swans. Snow levels allowing, we will drive up Steens Mountain in search of Snow Bunting and Black-Rosy-Finch, and we will scour the dry lake beds below for flocks of pipits and Horned Larks, which may contain a Lapland Longspur or two. Wintering songbirds in the region will also include Northern Shrike, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, and Varied Thrush, with an excellent chance for Bohemian Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, and maybe even a Harris's Sparrow. We will also search Burns and Hines for wintering Northern Goshawk that prey each winter on the abundance of California Quail. Other birds in town may include Evening Grosbeak, Western Scrub-Jay, or a wintering Williamson's Sapsucker.

We will not end the trip with a big bird list, but we will all be better birders by the end of the weekend! There is no place like Malheur to study Rough-legged Hawks, and surprises are the rule at Malheur, in all seasons.

### TRAVEL ITINERARY

We will depart from the Bend area (central Oregon) at noon on Thursday, November 21, and we will return to Bend by 4 p.m. Sunday.



Yes, these are all  
Rough-legged  
Hawks!

If you are flying to the region, you may need to arrive at the Redmond airport on Wednesday evening and depart on Monday morning in order to get a workable flight schedule. If you decide to stay the extra night(s) in Redmond, we can recommend local lodging options, and we will gladly pick you up and drop you at your motel. If you are driving to Bend, we will make our rendezvous plans closer to the trip date. If you have any challenges meeting this schedule, please contact us at your convenience.



Early winter at Steens Mountain

Our daily travel will follow the general itinerary below, but specific birding locations will depend on a number of factors, including local bird movements, local weather, and our success at finding certain species. If you have additional questions about the route, please contact us.

**Thursday, September 21**—Depart Bend area by noon; evening birding around Silvies flood plain;

**Friday, September 22**—Morning stop at Malheur HQ, remainder of day around Malheur refuge;

**Saturday, September 23**—Morning drive to Frenchglen, birding on Steens Mountain;

**Sunday, September 24**—Birding around Burns and Hines and on the return route to Bend.

#### DAILY ACTIVITIES

This will be a very relaxed weekend of birding, with a relatively easy bird list and plenty of time to cover the various habitats of the region. The amount of time we spend outside the vehicle will depend on the weather, and we should be prepared for wintry conditions. Nonetheless, winter in the High Desert is typically dry and clear, so we can expect optimal winter birding. We will generally rise with the sun each morning, although the short days will allow us time for a casual dinner and plenty of rest each night.

This tour is designed for moderately active people in good health. Every day will involve some hiking, but most walks will be short and at a “birdwatcher's pace”. We will either travel in a comfortable 8-passenger sport-utility vehicle or a large 12-passenger van, depending on the group size, allowing each birder to have his or her own window. This is a non-smoking tour. We will be staying in non-smoking rooms and will eat in non-smoking areas.

#### CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Cool to cold temperatures and very low humidity predominate in early winter in Eastern Oregon, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience snow, light rain, and extended periods of sun, all in one day. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for at least an hour at a time. Please pack conservatively, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and favorite field guide. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we usually have at least one spotting scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning.

### LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will stay all three nights at the Best Western motel in Hines. If you are traveling with a birding partner or are willing to room with another solo birder, we will do our best to book you into a double room. However, this may not be possible, depending on the gender mix of the group. If we are not able to match you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the *single-occupancy* rate.

Your tour fee also includes all meals from lunch on Thursday through lunch on Sunday. We will eat most meals in restaurants that appeal to a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or even in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your restrictions.

In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide snacks & beverages in the field. One of our goals is to keep you happily fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of your birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks for your dietary restrictions and preferences. We cannot honor every food and drink request, but the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you.



Trumpeter Swan



American Tree Sparrow

### TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes: all meals, snacks, and beverages from Thursday lunch through Sunday lunch; three nights lodging; transportation from Central Oregon; permit and license fees; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guides.

The fee does not include guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

2013 EARLY WINTER MALHEUR WEEKEND:	\$1,140 <i>single</i> /\$990 <i>double</i>
Deposit	\$95
Balance after deposit, due September 21:	\$1,035 <i>single</i> /\$895 <i>double</i>

To hold your spot, please send your \$95 deposit with the registration forms printable from this link: [www.paradisebirding.com/2013regforms.pdf](http://www.paradisebirding.com/2013regforms.pdf), to the address below, with the balance due 60 days prior to departure date. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to sharing the magic of Malheur with you this November!

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Sunrise Over Riddle Mountain