



## Southeastern Oregon SPRINGTIME AT MALHEUR

13–16 May 2014

*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 moved to Central Oregon that August, but the magic of Malheur had taken hold. Since that fateful summer, I have succumbed repeatedly, in all seasons, to the region's ineffable magnetism. After 16 years and dozens of trips to this Great Basin oasis, I can unequivocally rank this one of our premiere tour destinations. Let us share with you the "Magic of Malheur", and prepare yourself for an adventure you will remember forever.*

*Your host and guide,  
Stephen Shunk*



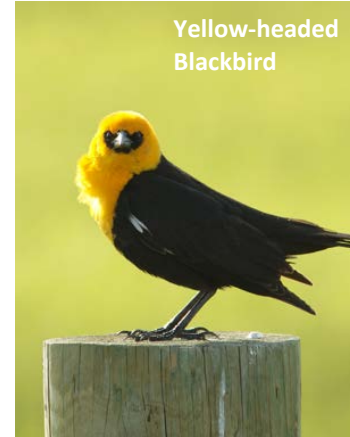
Birding the High Desert Wetlands

### TOUR SUMMARY

This 4-day Malheur escape will give you a great sampling of birds and habitats, with well over 100 bird species possible and a bold taste of the spectacular scenery that helps define the Malheur region. Our explorations will take us from the Silvies River flood plain to the Blitzen River Valley, all the time surrounded by the Great Basin sagebrush desert.

Malheur Lake lies at the heart of the region and defines one of North America's largest freshwater wetlands. The Silvies River drains the Blue Mountains from the north, converting the expansive agricultural lands into a broad marshland teeming with bird life. From the south flows the Blitzen River, fed by the snowfields of Steens Mountain, and feeding thousands more acres of marsh along the Blitzen Valley. More than 15 species of waterfowl nest in the region, including the majestic Trumpeter Swan and impressive concentrations of Redhead and Cinnamon Teal. Among the 10 nesting shorebirds are Wilson's Phalarope, Long-billed Curlew, and Black-necked Stilt. Hundreds of Sandhill Cranes nest here annually along with five grebe species, three different terns and many thousands of Franklin's Gulls and White-faced Ibis.

Marsh-nesting songbirds usher quite the symphony in spring. Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds dominate the chorus while the elusive Sora and Virginia Rail echo from deep within the bulrush and cattail wetlands. The willow-lined waterways and pond edges are thick with Yellow Warblers and Willow Flycatchers. A couple of Malheur's most sought-after passerines nest near the western edge of their breeding range here: Bobolink and Eastern Kingbird. Other regular riparian nesters include Bullock's Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-headed Grosbeak and Lazuli Bunting.



Outside the marsh zone, Malheur's sage-covered uplands provide expansive dry-land habitat hosting an impressive array of birds. At least 15 species of sparrows utilize the region in migration, with seven of them remaining to breed. Great Basin nesters like the Sagebrush and Brewer's sparrows join grassland birds like the Lark and Vesper sparrows, providing a superb opportunity for study. The abundant Sage Thrasher is joined by Say's Phoebe and Loggerhead Shrike on the edges of the valley floor, with Ash-throated Flycatcher and Black-throated Gray Warbler on the juniper-covered slopes above. Common raptors of the open country include Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle, while the canyons and rimrock host Chukar, Common Poorwill, and Rock and Canyon wrens.

Our daily itinerary will depend on the movement of water through the Silvies flood plain and Blitzen Valley, as well as our success at finding certain species, but our general plan is fairly simple. We will meet at noon on Tuesday, May 15, in Bend, Oregon, and will head straight for Malheur, giving us plenty of afternoon and evening birding time in the Silvies flood plain before dinner. Wednesday will take us south through the Silvies flood plain to Malheur headquarters, sometimes a 2–3-hour trip, depending on the birds. We will explore the northern half of Malheur Refuge, as well as the Diamond Valley, before heading around the east side of Malheur Lake through “Raptor Alley” and across the northern shore of the lake before returning to town. On Thursday, we will explore the southern half of the refuge, from Krumbo Reservoir to Frenchglen, and out to Page Springs. Depending on snow levels on Steens Mountain, we may get a short distance up the western slope, or we may explore the desert habitats south of Frenchglen, followed by dinner at the Frenchglen Hotel. Friday morning will be reserved for another stop at Malheur headquarters before heading west through the Double “O” region and back to Highway 20.



Malheur Refuge Headquarters

NOTE: Those of you who are not joining Steve on the Owyhee River for the next 5 days will return to Bend with another Paradise Birding guide. Those who are continuing with Steve to the Owyhee will head southeast, with a short run down the east side of Steens Mountain before heading east across the desert to Rome, Oregon.

### DAILY ACTIVITIES

Our daily birding at Malheur will involve a combination of foot- and car-birding. Because of the expansive nature of the region, some birding from the vehicle is unavoidable. However, we will travel in a large passenger van with a maximum of seven participants, giving each participant his or her own window in the van. Whenever we think it will be more productive, we will leave the vehicle behind. We will enjoy several short hikes, and we may frequently pop out of the vehicle to get good scope views of certain birds. The spring birding here is about both abundance and diversity, which makes the experience equally enjoyable for beginners and experts alike. As with most group birding tours, birders with more advanced skills may be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, while less experienced birders can be guaranteed excellent looks at many potential “life-birds”. Your guides are patient, experienced educators, and we will work diligently to help each participant learn bird songs and visual identification, as well as general natural and cultural history of this fascinating region.



Willet ... on Sagebrush

Our Malheur tours are for moderately active people in good health. Every day will involve some hiking, and we may hike up to two miles each day. Most individual walks will be short and at a “birdwatcher's pace”, but some routes may take us up steep hills or over rough terrain. We will repeatedly enter and exit the van from an entrance that is high off the ground, although a step-stool will be provided. These are non-smoking tours. We stay in non-smoking rooms and eat in non-smoking restaurants.

We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars or scope on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photos. That said, you are welcome to haul along any camera gear you can tolerate carrying, and you might at least want a small camera to capture some of the region's scenic vistas.



## CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Warm temperatures and very low humidity predominate in Southeastern Oregon, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We will spend most of our days at about 4,000 feet elevation, and we may experience snow, heavy rain, and extended periods of sun, all in the same day. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for a couple hours at a time. Please pack conservatively, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.

You should have fairly rugged footwear for walking around in the dusty desert terrain, as well as ample sun protection. This trip is usually a bit early for mosquitoes, but warm weather preceding the trip could make them active enough to hinder the birding experience; be prepared with bug-resistant clothing or the repellent of your choice. We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and favorite field guide. If you have a spotting scope, it will definitely come in handy at Malheur, although we will have at least one scope available for the group. In addition, we carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning.



Lazuli Bunting

## LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend all three nights in the same motel, approximately 45 minutes north of Malheur headquarters (not including birding time!). If you are traveling with a birding partner or are willing to room with another solo birder, we will do our best to get you into a double room. If we are not able to match you with a roommate due to the gender mix of the participants, you will be responsible for the single tour fee.

Your tour fee includes all meals from dinner on Tuesday, May 13, through lunch on Friday, May 16. 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 this possibility, you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your dietary restrictions.

We will eat a hot breakfast each morning, and we will enjoy a broad selection of snack and lunch foods throughout the day. Dinners will be eaten together at casual local eateries. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly 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. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you.



Steens Mountain

NOTE: If you are continuing with Steve to the Owyhee rafting trip, your dinner and lodging on Friday night are also included as part of your Malheur trip fee.

### TRAVEL ITINERARY

Your trip fee includes transportation from Central Oregon. We will depart Bend at noon on Tuesday for the three-hour drive to Malheur, and we will return to Bend by 5 p.m. Friday. If you are flying to Redmond (RDM), we will pick you up on our way to Malheur, and we request that you either arrive Monday evening or before noon on Tuesday so that we may be on the road promptly. If you have any challenges meeting this schedule, please contact us as early as possible. If you need assistance planning your trip to Central Oregon, we'll direct you to the best travel resources.



*Tuesday, May 13*—Depart Bend at noon for drive to Malheur; afternoon and evening birding in the Silvies flood plain. *Dinner and night in Hines.*

*Wednesday, May 14*—Birding south to Refuge HQ and throughout the northern half of Blitzen Valley. *Dinner in Diamond, night in Hines.*

*Thursday, May 15*—Birding the southern half of Malheur Refuge and lower Steens Mountain. *Dinner in Frenchglen, night in Hines.*

*Friday, May 16*—Birding the Silvies Flood Plain and OO Region; main tour returns to Bend after lunch (birding en route); others continue to Owyhee Rafting tour.

### TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes: all meals, snacks, and beverages from Tuesday afternoon through Friday afternoon; 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.

2014 TOUR FEE, PER PERSON:

\$1,110 single / \$965 double

DEPOSIT:

\$95/person

BALANCE DUE March 13:

\$1,005 single / \$870 double

To hold your spot, please complete the forms found at our web site and return them with your deposit to the address below, with full balance due 60 days prior to departure date. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to meeting you this spring and sharing the Magic of Malheur!

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