

Oregon Country Fair Wildlife Stewardship Report: 2012-2013

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Structure and Purpose of Report: On the following page we provide an executive summary of our last two years of effort, 2012 & 2013, while we've worked on the Quarter Master (QM) crew. The rest of the report explains why the Oregon Country Fair (OCF) has an on-call wildlife team, discusses our methods, and provides an expanded results section.

Team Capacity: Our main focus is to lead the stewardship response, monitoring, and communication approach described in this report. We've arranged for other fair family with biological training to help us provide a prompt response when wildlife are encountered during the main camp period—and these folks can also help us conduct multi-season wildlife surveys, educate the public during the Fair, and provide support for land-management decisions. The wildlife team capacity is the result of a combination of our staff roles, trade passes, worker day passes, and diverse support by management, our QM coordinators, and other fair members.

Thank You Fair Family: The OCF's unique culture, event, and site have created an inspiring stewardship opportunity we are proud to be a part of. We truly appreciate the encouragement and on-going support from the OCF organization, and all the Nest Neighbors who have worked with us in their camps, booths, and other work spaces. We thank the fair family for welcoming us.



Photo provided by Bethany and Robin Clemen.

Figure 1. This hatchling Western Pond Turtle, a rare species of conservation concern, was found in a high traffic area in 2012 by volunteers who contacted Quarter Master and left the animal there. The wildlife team responded by ensuring pictures were taken, the species was properly identified, the specific location where it was found (40 meters NW of Auntie Em Bridge on Nansleez Rd) was documented, and that the animal was safely released in appropriate habitat. This represents the first time this species has been confirmed on-site, and may indicate that prior restoration work on Indian Creek has enhanced its breeding habitat.

Glenn Johnson has conducted research and managed projects related to bird and wildlife conservation since 1995, and completed an M.S. degree in Wildlife Science at the University of Arizona. He has volunteered at the Fair in various roles since 1986. **Aaron Holmes** has worked within the non-profit sector conducting bird research and monitoring, primarily in Oregon, since 1994 and completed his Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology at the Oregon State University. Aaron previously volunteered in Community Village with Klamath Bird Observatory.

2012-2013 Executive Summary: Beginning in early June we volunteer on the Oregon Country Fair site to: 1) proactively identify bird nests or other wildlife situations that might be impacted by the upcoming higher levels of human activity, 2) respond to reports of birds or other wildlife submitted to Quartermaster or Fair Central, 3) collaborate with fair family that work or camp in the vicinity (“Nest Neighbors”) to devise a locally tailored plan to reduce potential impacts, and 4) monitor situations and document outcomes.

From the first weekend in June through Monday after the Fair event, we maintained a regular presence on-site and volunteered over 80 hours each, for a combined total of 168 work-hours in 2012 and 175 hours in 2013. We also enlisted the help of several others that volunteered a total of 74 hours in 2012 and 94 hours in 2013. In these two years we documented a combined total of 91 situations involving potential impacts or conflicts between wildlife and human activities. We were able to respond to 82 of these situations, and 56 of these required multiple follow-up visits to monitor nests, work with Nest Neighbors, maintain signs or barriers, and assess the outcomes.

Of the 91 situations, 64 involved native birds with active nests or dependent young, 3 were adult birds, and we also were called 7 times in cases that turned out to be old/inactive bird nests. We were able to assess outcomes at 61 of the situations that involved young birds or nests. At 30 sites where nests or young birds were clearly in danger of being abandoned due to human activities, stewardship actions by us and/or the Nest Neighbors appeared to directly contribute to positive biological outcomes (nest continually attended by adults, or young successfully fledged). Eighteen other nests were also successful, but these were situated in relatively safe places or times. Conversely, human activities had a clear negative impact on 4 nests that failed—all involved removal of dead wood or brush where the volunteers did not realize there was a nest, or realized too late. We also documented 9 other nests that failed by apparently natural causes (e.g., predation).

In 3 separate instances, domestic chickens were anonymously dropped off during main camp, including two roosters over two subsequent weeks, followed by an instance when 5 chicks were left during the night. After many hours of effort from QM, White Bird and others, the 4 chicks that survived and the two roosters were adopted by Andy Strickland, OCF Site Caretaker and owner of the property north of the site. There were also 7 incidents involving cats, including 3 pet cats which volunteers brought on-site to camp with them for extended periods while working during main camp. We eventually worked with the owner of the most egregious pet cat to move it off-site (after preventing it from killing three different birds). The remaining wildlife situations involved 4 different small native mammals, 2 adult birds, and a hatchling Western Pond Turtle. We had to bring young animals to wildlife rehabilitation specialists in three of the 82 cases we responded to.

In 2012-2013 we hosted an educational display in Wally’s Way next to Galleria Philanthropia, where we provided an OCF-site bird list, photos of wildlife taken on-site, and information to fairgoers who have questions. We’re now collaborating on an interactive “StewardShip” educational venue for the opening of Crafts Lot that will promote the OCF’s sustainability and stewardship programs. We also plan to keep leading bird walks on the site, including during the Fair in partnership with Klamath Bird Observatory, and in May with Lane County Audubon.

Introduction

In spring of 2010, we met with Oregon Country Fair (OCF) management to discuss wildlife stewardship at the Fair site. We were invited to work on site during the Main Camp period (June to mid-July) and integrate our wildlife-related skills into the existing stewardship paradigm at OCF. Throughout the Main Camp period of 2010, 2011, 2012 & 2013, we've worked with many others to develop and generally coordinate an OCF response to bird nests and other wildlife discovered on site. This report explains why and how we became involved, summarizes results from 2012 & 2013 when we began working on the Quarter Master crew, and generally provides an overview of our effort.

Why it's important to address "Wildlife Stewardship" at OCF

Fair culture encourages its members to take extra effort to minimize impacts to wildlife—including a tradition of preserving the native vegetation which birds and others depend on for habitat. Our OCF code of conduct generally requests that we “help protect the wild plants and animals whose space we share”. While the OCF environmental policies in the membership Guidelines and Land Use Management Planning (LUMP) Manual do an excellent job of promoting *habitat* for wildlife, they do not explicitly address how fair family should *respond* to live animals actually *encountered* at the site. Throughout main camp, the human presence and impact on the site builds to a crescendo during the Fair event (second weekend of July), when more than 10,000 volunteers work and live on a few hundred acres—and of course many more thousands of public fair-goers are also welcomed each day. Some level of interaction or impact to local wildlife is inevitable. Numerous bird species nesting on-site during June and July travel thousands of miles from their wintering grounds to nest in our part of the world. For them, the loss of a nest may prevent a bird from reproducing for the entire year. It is of little consequence how well woody vegetation is managed if direct impacts to nesting birds prevent them from successfully using the habitat to raise their young.

People sometimes feel that animals should be removed out of harm's way when humans want to use an area. Although well intentioned, it is highly inadvisable—and in most cases illegal—to move animals or turn them over to wildlife rehabilitation specialists simply because they are “in the way”, even if they are perceived to be in potential danger. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act in particular protects native birds and specifically prohibits moving nests or handling young birds unless they are clearly “sick, injured, or orphaned”. For more information, see <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/about/faqs/birds/feathers.htm>.

If a bird is nesting, the best option is to let it finish and not disturb it. Unfortunately, with so many people active on the site during main camp, nesting birds and other wildlife can unintentionally be disturbed or abandoned, and fair family are usually not aware of it. When people do notice orphaned animals, a licensed wildlife rehabilitator may be able to raise and release them. However, it is preferable from both an ecological and legal standpoint to implement proactive measures that generally try to prevent impacts and let birds remain in their habitat whenever possible.

Development of a Fair Solution

We began informally working with individual vendors and staff throughout the Fair event week in both 2008 and 2009, developing situation-specific solutions that minimized the probability of nest abandonment. The initial ideas were developed as we worked in an educational capacity with the Klamath Bird Observatory (www.KlamathBird.org) in Community Village. We developed a risk-assessment approach that relies on careful, professional-quality interpretation of bird-behavior, based on our familiarity with standards in ornithological studies and observation techniques. We started collaborating with White Bird Medical, Back-up Managers, VegManECs, the Site Manager and Crew, and two wildlife rehabilitators who have cared for orphaned animals from the site. This led to our meeting in spring 2010 with the Operations and Site Managers, who invited us to work directly with all teams operating throughout the Main Camp period. Our mission: provide an OCF-based response to potential wildlife conflict situations, focused on working with the fair community in a pro-active way to prevent impacts.

Objectives

In 2012 and 2013 we continued to maintain a regular presence on-site during Main Camp to:

- 1) Identify bird nests or other situations which have the potential to develop into conflicts between the well-being of wildlife and intended human uses of the site;
- 2) Take appropriate steps to minimize foreseeable impacts, including pro-actively communicating with those people who may work or camp near wildlife-occupied space;
- 3) Provide an easy way for fair family to report potential wildlife impacts they encounter, so we can promptly respond & gain their trust and assistance in managing situations in their vicinity;
- 4) Monitor the progression of these nests or other situation and document outcomes;
- 5) Be prepared to transport any animal needing care to a licensed wildlife rehabilitation specialist;
- 6) Represent the Fair's stewardship efforts in a positive and professional manner with local rehab specialists and members of the public whenever we find a good opportunity to do so;
- 7) Continue developing partnerships with the different stewardship, communications and safety teams traditionally operating at the site throughout the main camp period.

Methods and Integration with OCF programs

What we do: Beginning the second week of June each year, we systematically search booths and other high-traffic areas. We place flagging and signs to alert others to potential impacts when it is appropriate, and we communicate with Nest Neighbors to begin planning early for situations which may present the greatest operational challenges as more people arrive. Nests and other situations are

also reported to us during the pre-Fair period through a booklet placed at the Quarter Master desk, through direct verbal reports or calls to our cell phones, and through a Fair Central pager.

Technique and Philosophy: We employ standard field methods and use an evidence-based approach to assess impacts and outcomes, including documenting parental bird behavior as a metric of tolerance to human activity. We strive for a pro-active nest-detection and communication plan as this seems to avoid many potential human territorial conflict or “space” issues, which can pit the welfare of birds against a Fair routine or plan. We sometimes need to convince people to modify their plan or activity, and we rely on open-communication methods to identify core interests and win/win solutions. We consciously strive to avoid the “polarized” communication dynamics sometimes present when people address natural resource problems and solutions.

Integration with existing OCF programs

Wildlife stewardship at the Fair is a cultural phenomenon as well as an operational and site-conservation issue, and necessarily must involve many individuals working together to achieve the goal of minimizing impacts and raising awareness. A critical component of our success involves good communications and the continued development of effective working relationships with people from throughout the OCF community. We regularly work with booth representatives, Quarter Master, Construction, Management Staff and Back-Up Managers, the Site Manager and Site Crew, Booth Registration, VegManECs, Fair Central, Camp Hosts, Info, etc.

We also have partnerships in various stages of development with different coordinators of public education and engagement (Ambiance, VegManECs, ArcPark, Gallieria Philanthropia, Energy Park, and Community Village). We continue to co-lead the fair family bird walks on Saturday and Sunday mornings of the fair event, sponsored by Klamath Bird Observatory and the Info House of Community Village since 2004, and since 2011 we’ve led the May bird walk that Lane County Audubon promotes at the site as part of the International Migratory Bird Day festival in the Fern Ridge/Veneta area. These *education-focused* projects are somewhat peripheral to our primary mission, which is more *operations-focused* stewardship work with fair family. As time allows we will continue exploring ways of partnering with other fair family to provide educational activities related to the site’s birds and natural history—for the Fair’s public guests, membership, and the local community. We see real potential at the OCF for further collaborations between biologists, artists, and educators to develop participatory activities that are uniquely engaging and biologically informative. We co-developed a Crafts Lot proposal (“The StewardShip”) which aims to provide an educational venue to showcase the OCF’s diverse site stewardship and sustainability programs. We are also contributing a “wildlife plan” for the LUMP manual, and worked with management to introduce a guideline change to stop fair family from bringing cats to the site. Looking ahead, we envision contributing to the development of OCF projects related to wildlife surveys and monitoring, grant-funding, habitat enhancement or restoration, and/or providing educational opportunities at the site for the local school districts.

Results

Effort: As a team, Glenn and Aaron each volunteered over 80 hours on site during main camp each year, for a combined total of 168 hours in 2012 and 175 hours in 2013. On average we spend 60% of our effort during the first 6 weekends of the main camp period, and 40% of our volunteer hours occur during the week of the fair event. Additionally, several people provided support for our main-camp stewardship work and educational efforts presented during the Fair, for a total of 74 hours in 2012 and 94 hours in 2013. Three biologists helped to check on nests, Stephanie Lawless in 2012 (23 hours, she was able to buy an SO pass) and Tara Chestnut in 2013 (49 hours, she received a trade pass), and both contributed to the educational effort as well; Randy Moore contributed 10 hours in 2013. We partnered with an Ambiance sewing expert, Michelle Liu, to create visual barriers for use near nests in high traffic sites. Our significant others Jennifer Arnold & Sofia Pospisil consistently assist us from 15-40 hours each year. Chris Roth assists with publishing the bird list and staffing the poster/education site, in exchange for a worker-day pass we arrange through the Site Manager.

Total Numbers and Response: We documented a combined total of 91 situations involving potential impacts or conflicts between wildlife and human activities in 2012 (41 cases) and 2013 (50 cases). We were able to respond to 82 of these situations, and 56 of these required multiple follow-up visits to monitor nests, work with Nest Neighbors and maintain signs or barriers, and assess the outcomes.

Native/Nesting Birds: Of the 91 situations, 64 involved native birds with active nests or dependent young, 7 were cases where we were called in to respond to a bird nest but it turned out to be an old/inactive nest, and 3 cases concerned adult birds (with no nest). We were able to assess outcomes at 61 of the situations we responded to that involved young birds or nests. At 30 sites where nests or young birds were clearly in danger of becoming abandoned, stewardship actions by us and/or the Nest Neighbors appeared to directly contribute to positive biological outcomes (nests or young birds continued to be attended by adult birds, or the nest fledged and was successful). That is worth re-emphasizing: In the last two years, the wildlife team documented the fair family making room for native nesting birds in at least 30 “high impact” situations where we were pretty sure the nest could have failed and/or been taken to a rehab facility. Eighteen other monitored nests were also successful, but these were situated in relatively safer places and times. In two cases, one of the “clearly in danger” nests, and one “relatively safe” nest, Nest Neighbors took the initiative on their own to ensure nests with young birds were not impacted, and were reportedly successful with no monitoring or help from us. Conversely, human activities appeared to negatively impact 4 nests that failed. All of the human-caused nest failures in 2012-2013 which we learned of were accidents involving brush or wood removal. Three of these were situations where we had actually previously found a nest within what we thought was a “green zone”, so we only used a small amount of flagging and did not put signs or sufficient barriers in place as we did not expect brush or tree cutting to occur; however later the nest substrates were impacted by volunteers who didn’t know there was a nest there. In the fourth case we didn’t know about the nest before-hand, it was encountered by volunteers who accidentally moved the nest substrate (a debris pile) then contacted

us, and in that case the adult did not continue to attend the nest. We also documented 9 other native bird nests that failed but it seemed that more natural reasons like predation were the cause.

Non-native birds/Chickens: In 3 separate instances domestic chickens were anonymously dropped off during main camp, including two roosters and one case where 5 chicks were abandoned after hours; the 4 chicks that survived, and the two roosters, were eventually adopted by Andy Strickland, OCF Site Caretaker, and now live at the Art Barn property. Members of Quarter Master, White Bird and other staff were on-site spent many hours initially responding and caring for the chickens, and we were called on several times to provide information, proper care or capture techniques.

Cats: There were also 7 incidents involving pet or feral cats that were hunting birds and other wildlife. We eventually managed to relocate the most egregious pet cat, "Bro-Kitty", to an off-site residence, after preventing him from killing birds three times, and developing trust with his owner. We were surprised at the number of pet cats (≥ 3 that we knew of) volunteers brought to camp with them. We were inspired to suggest a 2014 guideline change, which now discourages people from bringing cats, chickens or other animals to the site.

There was a diversity of other incidents we responded to or heard about, which involved adult birds, raccoons, chipmunks, a mouse litter, and the hatchling Western Pond Turtle (pictured on cover page). For example, in 2012 Aaron extracted a Belted Kingfisher that was entwined in fishing line next to the Long Tom River, which was reported by a concerned fair family member who then helped free it. The bird had wing strain but flew off strongly after several hours in a sheltered location. The presence of the turtle indicates that the restoration work conducted by the OCF along Indian Creek may have benefited this locally rare species, and there may be a breeding population on-site. Every year we get calls about small mammals (rabbits, chipmunks, mice) which we usually are able to slightly relocate or just steer people away from, since these creatures will often just move on their own (unlike bird nests). In three of the 82 situations we responded to in 2012-13, young animals required the care of wildlife rehabilitation specialists; these were brought to either Willamette Wildlife in Eugene (a chipmunk and a Yellow-rumped Warbler in 2012) or Chintimini Wildlife in Corvallis (a Cedar Waxwing in 2013).

Conclusion

The Fair organization and community have an on-call team with the technical knowledge to assess and respond appropriately to potential wildlife-human conflict situations. The stewardship approach we've developed in partnership with OCF Management, Quarter Master and many others integrates well with Fair tradition, operational policies, and societal standards. Our work helps achieve several OCF goals and we can facilitate partnerships or community relations with others committed to similar ideals. In the next few years we hope to increase our team's capacity through additional volunteers to help us with the stewardship work during the main camp period, educational support during the fair event or in the off-season, and year-round volunteering to help document the diverse wildlife of the site. We are honored to be a part of the OCF's stewardship and sustainability culture, and we look forward to more collaboration with the fair family.