

The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

August 31 marked the beginning of a new era in conservation activity for Rogue Valley Audubon, as our energetic, expanded Conservation Committee held its first meeting. The committee members are John Bullock, Bill Hering, Robert Mumby, Carol Palmer, Pepper Trail, Jeff Tufts, and Sooney Viani, with chapter President Alex Maksymowicz present as an ex officio member.

In addition to our long-time and continuing concerns with regional and national bird conservation issues, the new committee will focus on local conservation. At our meeting, we identified the top priority local issues as the Denman Wildlife Area and management of the Bear Creek Greenway (and associated areas such as Ashland Pond), particularly in relation to blackberry control and other wildlife habitat concerns.

Most of the discussion focused on two broad issues: the Denman Wildlife Area and the Bear Creek Greenway/Ashland Pond/blackberry control issue.

Denman Wildlife Area

Robert Mumby, Sooney Viani, and Carol Palmer are the leads on this. Many RVAS members have expressed concern with access at Denman, and with activities that are incompatible with birding and management of non-game species. Denman is managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), which generally emphasizes hunting over other uses of its lands, in part because much of their funding comes from hunting and fishing licenses. It was agreed that RVAS needs to be more connected with local ODFW staff to emphasize the importance of Denman as habitat for non-game as well as game birds. By fostering these relationships, we hope to gain a "place at the table" when management decisions are made.

Major points raised in discussion:

- Denman is heavily used by birders
- Bird species of concern (limited distribution in the Rogue Valley) at Denman include: breeding ducks, rails, bitterns, and Grasshopper Sparrow.
- Can we set up a system so birders can sign up whenever they use Denman? Either at ODFW HQ on Gregory Road, or perhaps on the RVAS website (with updates to ODFW).
- Can we set up a system to provide birders' lists to ODFW, perhaps from eBird.
- How do we make our concerns known to ODFW?

- Does ODFW have data on use by hunters? Other groups? (e.g. dog trials)
- How do other groups (e.g. hunters) make their interests known to ODFW relating to Denman?
- Compatibility: we need to educate ODFW that hunting, dog field trials, model airplane flying are not generally compatible (at least as presently conducted) with birding and nature study
- How can RVAS support ODFW and Denman? What do they need?

It was agreed that the first step in engaging with Denman was to schedule a field trip of the area led by ODFW. This has now been scheduled for October 12. The tour group will meet at 9:30 AM at the ODFW headquarters at East Gregory and Agate Roads (Whetstone Pond). Denman Assistant Manager Dan Ethridge will lead the tour. If you would like to participate, please email Sooney Viani at: sooneyviani@gmail.com. We hope for a good turnout. Part of the intention for this tour is to find out how Denman management decisions are made, and how we can be involved. Based on what we learn, the conservation committee will plan next steps. In addition, Denman Manager Clayton Barber is scheduled to give our member's meeting presentation in January, which will be another important learning opportunity, both for him and us.

Bear Creek Greenway

Jeff Tufts and Robert Mumby are already involved with Bear Creek Watershed Council, and will be our leads. It is agreed that this group is the best clearinghouse for information. A major concern is that RVAS be notified of pending management actions in time to provide input. There was much discussion of blackberry control. It was agreed that this is a complicated issue, but that the positive value of blackberries for native wildlife is being lost in public discussions, and that RVAS could contribute by representing this perspective. In particular, "scorched earth" blackberry destruction over wide areas during the nesting season has obvious negative effects on native birds. If management can be done on a rolling basis, and focused during the non-breeding season, some of these impacts could be lessened.

We Need YOU!

There was great energy at the conservation committee meeting. However, more members are definitely welcome. If you have a commitment to local conservation, let us know and join up.

Equally important, we invite RVAS members to write in to the conservation committee – or to the Chat – if you have concerns about a favorite birding area. We depend on you to be our "eyes and ears" so that we stay on top of actions that may threaten local bird populations or habitats. Together, we can be sure that our efforts are directed where they are most needed. My email

address is ptrail@ashlandnet.net, and I will forward any messages received on to the full committee.

Thanks for all your efforts in support of our Rogue Valley birds!