Wings in the Night: A Glimpse into the Mysterious World of Bats

Pat Ormsbee
U.S. Forest Service/Bureau of Land Management Region 6 Bat Specialist (Retired)

Friday, 15 May 2015, 7:30pm, Room 100 Willamette Hall, University of Oregon Campus
Pat Ormsbee’s professional dedication to bats began about midway through her career. Before that time she had worn several hats, at least a couple on top of each other. Here’s a partial list of things she did pre-bat: firefighter, wilderness trail crew member, wilderness ranger, packer and manager, river guide in Big Bend National Park, tree climber, biologist, workshop presenter. This person has led an interesting life.

Originally a midwesterner – a “Wonder bread kid” from Illinois, as she called herself – Ormsbee chose her parents well. They told her they had found her under a rock, a story she believed until she was eight. Her parents’ taste for the outdoors led to the family taking several trips out West during summers of her formative years, backpacking and fishing in wilderness areas and providing the basis for her lifelong infatuation with wilderness.

After a couple of years at a midwestern community college Ormsbee moved to Corvallis and enrolled in the Forest Natural Resource Management Program at Oregon State University. For the Program’s six-month internship Ormsbee worked in an eco-tourism program in Tsavo East National Park in Kenya. This was in 1978, and it took two weeks for a letter to make it from the US to Kenya, so a month for a two-sided communication. She said she has never felt as culturally isolated before or since.

Also during her undergraduate days the U.S. Forest Service hired her as a firefighter in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. She was part of the first wave of women hired by the federal government as directed under changes to the Equal Rights Amendment. She was on an all-woman fire crew, except for the crew boss of course. In her words, “We weren’t liked very well, but at the end of the season our crew boss deemed us the hardest working, best crew he had ever had.”

After getting her B.S. at OSU Ormsbee continued with the USFS in their Wilderness Management program. She spent fourteen years in the Hells Canyon and Eagle Cap Wilderness Areas, working as a wilderness ranger and a packer, often spending weeks alone in the wilderness either hiking or with her pack train. Ultimately she became Manager of the Hells Canyon Wilderness. She has logged thousands of miles with a backpack, and more on horseback.

As the years passed, Ormsbee’s interest in the animal life in these areas kept increasing, to the point that she began wishing she could switch the emphasis of her career. This yen coincided with a desire on the part of her superiors for her to move from the Technical to the Professional Series – sort of an alternate advancement ladder within the agency. To make this switch required more academic credit, and Ormsbee was able to achieve part of this requirement by writing up some of the fieldwork she had carried out. One such project she was involved with, called “Animal Inn,” focused on educating the public on the value of retaining snags as wildlife habitat across national forests. Where snags were deficit on national forest lands, she and a crewmate installed bird boxes and platforms at three heights in living trees. They became adept at climbing since the highest boxes were 60 feet up and not only did they go up there to hang the bird boxes, they went back twice a year to collect data. They created a video that got national exposure and was used to educate managers and the public on the value of snags and downwood. Her papers based on this and other of her projects got her academic credit from Portland State University, and she was successfully converted to the Professional Series.

But then her academic journey took another turn. Ormsbee was assigned to work on a scientific team to complete an evaluation of the significance of late-successional/old-growth forests as wildlife habitat in western Oregon and Washington. This assessment was the scientific foundation for the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP). The senior scientists she worked with encouraged her to go back to school so that she could better represent sound science within the management branch of the USFS. Since the USFS was footing the bill she asked what they wanted her to study, and it came down to a choice between arthropods and bats.

Ormsbee has a friend in the Big Bend area of Texas who had two pet Egyptian fruit bats, so she had seen firsthand what intelligent and unique animals bats are. Her decision was an easy one. She finished with an M.S. in Wildlife Management from OSU. Her Master’s thesis (Selection of day roosts by female long-legged myotis (Myotis volans) in forests of the central Oregon Cascades) was one of the first radiotelemetry studies conducted on bats in the Pacific Northwest. And so, by default, in 1996 Ormsbee began the role of a bat specialist for USFS. The accomplishment of which she is proudest in her bat period is the establishment of the Bat Grid Inventory and Monitoring Program. Ormsbee began putting this together in 2002. It was sponsored and financed by several agencies and organizations, including USFS, BLM, the Department of Defense,
and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Bat Conservation International. Ormsbee trained professional and citizen scientists to capture and collect data on bats using a standardized protocol for long-term monitoring of the sixteen bat species native to the Pacific Northwest. Data collected over eight years provide a detailed picture of the distribution and health of these reclusive animals (One interesting aside to this is why the DoD? Ormsbee mentioned that there is a DoD Legacy Program (who knew?), which has money to look at environmental conservation efforts – essentially mitigation to offset the harm they do in other ecosystems). A summary of this project is in a paper co-authored by Ormsbee: “Assessing the Status and Trend of Bat Populations Across Broad Geographic Regions with Dynamic Distribution Models,” Ecological Applications 22(4): 1098-1113, 2012.

This quote was part of the publicity for Ormsbee’s Science Pub talk in 2013, here in Eugene: “Feeling misunderstood, feared, and demonized? You’re not alone. Bats have long been relegated in western culture to a position of distaste, persecution, and false accusations of hair entanglement. An unfortunate stereotype for an animal that in reality is shy, fascinating, and eats a lot of pesky insects. Join us as Pat Ormsbee sheds light on the dark and mysterious world of bats. What’s it like to echolocate, be the only mammal with true flight, and be able to eat 30 – 50% of your own body weight in a night and still keep your battish figure? In addition to gems on the ecology and life history of bats, Pat will share conservation threats impacting bats.” She told me this is what we can expect to hear, too, so make sure you’re there on Friday, 15 May, at 7:30pm in room 100 Willamette Hall for Pat Ormsbee’s ENHS talk “Wings in the Night: A Glimpse into the Mysterious World of Bats.” There will be cookies. John Carter

Birder’s Notebook  by Reida Kimmel

It’s hard not to glory in every moment of the day this spring. It feels as if there had never been a winter, and as far as I’m concerned, there wasn’t. One blasted pleasant day after another, driving me outdoors to do battle with yard and garden chores neglected for years. No time to sit by the fire knitting or perusing seed catalogues. I measured rain in tenths of inches, sadly wondering if our well would make it through another dry year. Still, even at this joyous season I am haunted by the sad tale of the Cassin’s auklets. It reminds me that though much may seem quite normal, climate change is the new ugly reality in our lives. We must do the best we can to help mitigate its effects, but some things are just beyond our control. All along the entire West Coast, from October through the winter months, there was a massive die off of Cassin’s auklets. Somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 birds perished. Hundreds of small bodies appeared along Oregon’s beaches in December, but the cause was not just a few harsh winter storms. The “wreck,” as birders call a catastrophe like this, was more complex. There could have been many causes, but investigators ruled out the possibility that oil contamination or disease was involved. Most of the dead were young of the year, and their bellies were empty. They starved! How could this happen?

Cassin’s auklets are starling-sized birds, their stubby bodies dark above and light below. They fly swiftly and forage by “flying” underwater. Ptychoramphus aleuticus is ranked as a species of ‘Least Concern’, ranging from the Aleutians to northern Baja California. A subspecies, P. a. australis, inhabits waters along the southern Baja Peninsula. Vancouver Island’s Cape Scott hosts the largest population of breeding birds, perhaps 550,000 pairs. They nest in burrows, raising a single chick, except in very good years when, uniquely, they may breed again, and rear a second chick. The parents take turns, one brooding while the other goes off to forage, leaving and returning after dark to avoid gulls and other predators. The babes are fed a rich diet of krill and small crustaceans. Cassin’s auklets are well studied, and researchers knew that more than average numbers of chicks fledged in the summer of 2014. And then the ocean became unusually warm. Zooplankton and small fish thrive in cold water. When the water warms they go elsewhere or die. Just as this year’s warm water has caused the West Coast sardine population to crash, the lack of cold-loving forage species caused the most vulnerable of the Cassin’s auklets, the young of the year, to starve to death. The surviving adults, we hope, had the strength and bodily resources to follow their food north to colder waters. The Eastern Pacific will not be warm forever. There will be a return of the cold ocean currents whose upwellings support the whole rich food chain that supports fish, seabirds, marine mammals and us.

Now spring is really here, and it’s impossible to be gloomy. On a north-facing slope 1000 feet above sea level, our climate is considerably cooler than the Valley’s, but this year even our garden was early. So too were the wildflowers. With the exception of snow queen (Synthyris reniformis), always the first to flower, but never before the end of January, the woodland flowers started to bloom seven to ten days earlier than usual. The sun lovers, houndstongue, Iris tenax and Thermopsis, were especially precocious.
On the twelfth of March the flowering currants bloomed in our yard and in the woods. The next day we were beset with returning rufous hummingbirds, hungry for nectar and sugar water, and fighting mad. When two violet green swallows visited us on Easter Sunday and a two noisy barn swallows dropped by to check out the real estate a week later, we assumed the spring migrations were happening at record early dates. That impression was reinforced when we rode past the huge snag on the hilltop above our land and saw that the martins were back and very busy setting up housekeeping in the old giant’s many cavities. Still four swallows do not make a flock, and, as always, the violet greens retired to Maeve and Dick’s place up the road. Every day some two or four barn swallows dropped by and then de-camped. We waited and waited, feeling depressed. I should have believed my calendar records. Today, April eighteenth, the mob arrived. When that real return happens, I write “Swallows!” on my calendar, not “swallow”, and four of the last 8 years that I was able to make a record, that return has occurred on April 17, 18, or 19. The outlier dates were April 14 and April 8. Swallows are famous for returning on time at San Juan de Capistrano, and I guess here at Poppin’s farm too!

How do birds know how to time their migrations? From my records, it may just be that swallows come when they come, devil take the consequences. The violet greens always show up about a week before the barn swallows. In 2006 there was winter weather, snow, and hail on April 15, 16, and 17. The barn swallows arrived on the 19th, just as the weather grew warm. In 2008, it rained, hailed and snowed for three days, two days after the swallows came back. 2012 had a lot of cold nasty weather in March and April, but the swallows were early, flying in on the fourteenth. The weather did not warm up until several days after they arrived. Swallows need lots of insects, especially when they are consuming energy building their nests and breeding. If the weather is not warm for several days there are no hatches to feed the flock, but somehow the barn swallows manage, even in inclement conditions.

We know that birds have excellent senses of smell. I speculate that rufous hummingbirds may detect hints of floral scents carried on soft humid spring air currents. They really cannot afford to make mistakes because their tiny bodies require a lot of food – sugars and insect proteins – to sustain body heat and life. Even in the dead of winter there are hatches of minute insects on sunny days hovering close to the branches of fir trees. Perhaps those, and the feeders tended by kindly bird lovers, sustain the Anna’s hummingbirds that are so common in the Valley and certainly not unheard of here. But the rufous wait for the lavish fare mid-spring, and we are delighted to welcome them home.

Eve’s Mile  by Tom A. Titus

On a gray morning in late March eighteen Eugene Natural History Society folks met in a gravel lot next to Highway 101. The steely water of Tenmile Creek flowed under an arched bridge and across the sand into the Pacific Ocean, completing a short journey from the conifer ridges rising in the east. A breeze flowed toward us from a line of dark clouds on the southwest horizon. The rain would come. Our mission that morning was straightforward: we would walk one mile of beach from Tenmile Creek northward to Bray’s Point and remove every piece of human-made junk that we could find.

Our cleanup was longtime ENHS member Evelyn McConnaughy’s legacy to us. Eve had adopted this mile of beach and had for decades assiduously picked up the garbage. Legacy has several meanings, but in this case the best fit is “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past.” Although there is no obvious etymological connection, legacy seems closely related to the musical term legato, “in a smooth, flowing manner, without breaks between notes.” Although Eve had left us, we were here to continue the hands-on environmental activism that we had received from her in a smooth, flowing manner, without breaks. We were here because as long as there are willing hands that knew Eve’s hands and who know other hands, this beach will be cleaned.

We followed the north side of Tenmile Creek to the high tide line, a tangled mess of drift logs and dry hollow canes from invasive Japanese knotweed now choking the creek just upstream. We focused on the largest pieces of garbage—dismantled chunks of Styrofoam from coolers and packing crates and disposable water bottles. Plastics have been called a slow motion toxic spill. All those megatons of polymers made from hydrocarbons can only be reused or ultimately poked into holes in the earth to settle in for the long haul. This is a legacy, too. Perhaps the final incineration of all this garbage will come when Earth can no longer resist the gravitational pull of the Sun and is swallowed.

Those of us wanting to cover longer distances strode northward along the blond sand toward Bray’s Point. The rain began in earnest, driven by a stiff breeze out of the southwest. Fortunately it was hitting us from behind. I began imagining all of the trash in all of the Pacific, the largest ocean in the world. I considered our small crew, this small stretch of beach, and our puny garbage bags. Futility rolled in.
with the surf, and I felt myself slipping over that gray horizon into despair. I pretended that I was the only one who felt this way and held hopelessness at arms length by reaching for a piece of flat orange plastic caught between two drift logs. I wondered how many small bits this large piece might eventually have become that would potentially have been eaten by rockfish or salmon or seabirds.

Time ran short and our group returned south before reaching Bray’s Point. Because we had already picked over the tidewrack high on the beach, I shifted over to the flat strand near the surf, following a thin wavering line of small bits of wood, seaweed, and of course plastic. The plastic bits were about the size of my thumbnail, colorful confetti incongruous against the smooth, shiny sand. By running my hand lightly across the wet surface, I could corral many of the tiny pieces at once. Scooping them up with a little sand, I chucked them into my black bag.

My mind began another walkabout, maybe more like a swim, out to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. In the North Pacific Gyre, wind and currents have increased the concentration of pelagic plastics and other debris. Estimates of the magnitude of the Garbage Patch vary wildly, but all agree that it’s large, ranging from the size of Texas to twice the size of the continental United States. The Garbage Patch is not a raft of floating debris that can be seen from the surface. Rather, it is composed of a high concentration of waterborne bits like the ones I was scraping off the beach.

The language describing the Garbage Patch troubles me. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website seems bent on dismissing any sensationalism around this suspended plastic mess (http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/patch.html). They point out that part of the uncertainty over the size of the Patch is because the density of pelagic plastics that would distinguish Garbage Patch from Not Garbage Patch has not been established. They say the impact on wildlife is unknown. This is semantic nonsense, language that continues the myth that biology must be corralled into black or white, zero or one, this or that. At times I wonder whose side NOAA is on.

Phrases like “we don’t know” and “estimates are imprecise” are the language of mollification. Instead watch the short film “MIDWAY, A Message from the Gyre,” a documentary by Chris Jordan (https://vimeo.com/25563376) showing soaring gannets interspersed with clips of decomposing avian corpses, feathers and bones encircling piles of plastic crap ingested by each bird over its short life. Yes, we do know. We know it regardless of whether that knowledge is too horrifying to face.

At each stop along the strand that is Eve’s mile I was able to scoop together roughly the same amount of plastic ingested by one or two of those unfortunate seabirds. The wind and rain continued, and we were now taking it directly in the face. For a moment the images of dead birds and the immensity of the plastics problem rolled over me, a sneaker wave of despair. But despair simply won’t do. At Eve’s memorial service, I remember one person who had asked Eve how she managed to remain so cheerful when the news was always so bad. She broke open her winning smile and said “because there is always so much to do.” Eve taught us to stop overthinking things. She explained with her actions that action matters. Being an environmental activist does not require that we chain ourselves to a bulldozer. We simply need to engage in correct action, perhaps many small actions. Together. We need to show up and pick up litter on a beach. We need to believe that for our efforts the beach will be a better place and that those who thanked us that day were genuine in their appreciation. Despair simply won’t do. This is Eve’s legacy.

We need booth sitters during the Wildflower and Music Festival at Mt. Pisgah Arboretum on Sunday, 17 May. No experience necessary. Please let a board member know if you are willing to help out. Sign up at the May meeting.

Reminder. The May meeting is the annual business meeting. The Board will recommend that annual dues be raised to $15 for individuals and $25 for families, and members will be asked to vote on whether to accept this recommendation, and whether to accept the slate of officers and at-large Board members. Questions or concerns should be directed to Tom Titus at titus@uoregon.edu.
Events of Interest in the Community

Lane County Audubon Society
Saturday, 18 April, Third Saturday Bird Walk. Led by Jim Regali. Carpool from the corner of Patterson and 19th at 8am to a destination to be announced.

Tuesday, 28 April, 7:30pm. Africa: Babblers, Barbets, Blue Monkeys, and Beyond. Join us at the Eugene Garden Club at 1645 High Street for a vicarious journey with Bob Fleming through Africa.

Mt. Pisgah Arboretum
Sunday, 10 May, 8-10:30am Spring Bird Walk. Join Nature Guides Chris Roth and Julia Siporin for another monthly bird walk intended for all levels of birding experience. Please bring binoculars. Option to continue the walk until noon for those who are interested. Rain or shine. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. $5, Members free.

Tuesday, 12 May, 10am-noon. Wildflower Walk. Come enjoy peak wildflower displays along the arboretum trails on a spring walk led by Gail Baker, LCC professor emeritus. Camas and Iris should be in full flower and we'll look for fringe-cup, Tellima grandiflora, this year's poster flower for the upcoming Wildflower Festival. We will also see some colorful developing fruits from the early season flowers such as osogbury. Gentle trails will pass through forests, wetlands, meadows, and riverside habitats. Rain or shine. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. $5, Members FREE. Co-sponsored by MPA and NPSO.

Saturday, 16 May, 10am-1pm. Festival Setup Work Party. Wildflower Festival setup day. Help us set up canopies, hang signs and assist with the exhibits and other last minute preparations. Free admission to the festival on Sunday, May 17th for all volunteers who help out for two hours or more.

Sunday, 17 May, 10am-5pm Wildflower & Music Festival. Join us for a celebration of all things wildflower related! The festival is loaded with fun things to do for the whole family. 300-400 Wildflower species will be on display along with live music all day, nature walks, a plant sale, food and craft booths, kids booth activities and the popular Art in Nature trail. Proceeds from the Festival support the Arboretum’s work in habitat restoration and environmental education. Parking is free on festival day, and there is a free shuttle between the North parking lot and the festival entrance. Suggested donation $8 per person. Children under 12 free.

Saturday, 30 May, 9-11am. Baby and Family Walk. Come get outside with your baby (and/or other young children) and meet other parents in the community. This is a great time of year for finding both beautiful wildflowers and aquatic critters that your little ones will be sure to enjoy. Led by the Arboretum's Education Coordinator Jenny Laxton, this walk will be stroller accessible. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. $8 per family, Members FREE.

Saturday, 30 May, 10am-1pm. Invasive Removal Work Party: pulling, cutting, and digging blackberries and other invasives. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. Tools, gloves, and a parking pass will be provided to volunteers (we suggest you bring along a water bottle). Please RSVP w/site@mountpisgaharboretum.org if you plan to attend.

Beyond Toxics
Saturday, 16 May, 5pm. Benefit at Tsunami Bookstore. Charles Goodrich, Director for Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature and the Written Word, will be reading, as will our own Evelyn Hess. $10 donation suggested.

Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah
Monday Morning Regulars. 9am-noon. Contact volunteer@bufordpark.org for more information.

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am-noon. Nursery Work. Meet and work at the Native Plant Nursery at Buford Park. Enter Buford Park from Seavey Loop Road. Turn LEFT after crossing the bridge and drive 1/4 mile to the nursery.

Nearby Nature Go to http://www.nearbynature.org/events for information on NN activities, or call 541-687-9699.

Thursday, 28 May, 10-11:30am. Green Start Play Day -- Garden Goodies. Enjoy outside nature play in our Learnscape plus pre-school crafts and stories. Rain or shine! Covered area available for wet weather. Kids 5 and under only, with an adult. Members free, non-members $5/child plus adult free. Meet outside our Yurt in Alton Baker Park. Pre-register: 541-687-9699 or onlneby clicking here; calling 541-687-9699, or emailing parkhost@nearbynature.org.


WREN (Willamette Resources and Educational Network)
Saturday, 16 May, 10am-2pm. Walkin' & Rollin' through the West Eugene Wetlands. Whether you walk, bike, scoot or trike, board, or blade, come celebrate the 25th Anniversary of American Wetlands Month. Enjoy a scenic adventure along the Fern Ridge Bike Path, through the last 0.5% of Oregon's Wetland Prairie. Learn about this unique ecosystem in Eugene's own backyard. Parking: Euphoria Chocolate Co., 4090 Stewart Road; WREN, 751 S. Danebo Ave; Data Logic, 959 Terry Street. For more information call 541.338.7047 or email info@wewetlands.org
The University of Oregon’s Museum of Natural and Cultural History
Exhibit Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 11am-5pm

Current Exhibits
- Explore Oregon: 300 million years of Northwest natural history.
- Site Seeing: Snapshots of Historical Archaeology in Oregon.
- Oregon - Where Past is Present. 15,000 years of Northwest cultural history and 200 million years of geology.
- Highlights of the Jensen Arctic Collection.
- Tradition Keepers – Shayleen Macy. Artist Shayleen Macy is a Wasco/Yakima/Warm Springs member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and a graduate of the University of Oregon's BFA program.

Ideas on Tap. First Wednesday of the Month, 7-9pm at Sam Bond’s Brewing Co., 540 E 8th Ave. Quench your thirst - for beer and for knowledge – at Ideas on Tap. Enjoy local craft beers and thought-provoking discussions about science, ecology, history, and more. Admission is free, food and drink available for purchase.

Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter
Saturday, 9 May, 9am-2pm. Wildflower Tour: Bikes to Blooms. This bike-based wildflower tour will visit sites on the Row River Trail along scenic Dorena Lake. Regional plant experts will lead participants through natural areas with native prairie plants in bloom. Bring a bicycle, helmet, water, and lunch. All sites will be accessible by car, but cycling is encouraged. Pre-registration is required and space is limited. Visit coastfork.org for more information. Volunteers needed: Contact Pam Reber at 541-767-9717 or coordinator@coastfork.org.

Eugene Symphony Guild
Sunday, 7 June, 10am -4pm. Eugene Symphony Guild’s 18th Annual MUSIC IN THE GARDEN. There are six gardens on this self-guided tour, tickets for which may be purchased at local garden suppliers. Call 541-228-1805 for more information.

ENHS welcomes new members! To join, fill out the form below. Membership payments allow us to give modest honoraria to our speakers, as well as to pay for the publication and mailing of Nature Trails. Our web address: http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs

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Make checks payable to:
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Annual dues for renewing members are payable in September. Memberships run from September to September. Generosity is encouraged and appreciated.

Our summer potluck will be in August this year instead of the usual June date. Plan to come to the Kimmel farm on 30 August for an afternoon of conversation, food and frivolity. Check the ENHS website, Facebook page, or contact a Board member for more information.
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ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2014-2015

ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2015-2016
18 Sept. 2015 – David Harrelson – Kalapuya Perspectives on Place
16 Oct. 2015 – Suzanne Simard – Mycorrhizal Communication in Forests
19 Nov. 2015 – Nora Terwilliger – Galapagos Islands
15 Jan. 2016 – Madonna Moss – Anthropology of Pacific Herring
19 Feb. 2016 – Greta Binford – Spiders
18 Mar. 2016 – August Jackson – Pollination Biology
15 Apr. 2016 – Rebecca Vega-Thurber – Coral Reef Decline
20 May 2016 – Mark Blaine – Copper River Salmon
Alternate – Dean Walton – History of Oregon Naturalists