

# Nature Trails

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Northern Pygmy Owl

## **Journey With Owls**

**Paul Bannick**

**Conservation Photographer, Seattle, Washington**

**Cosponsored by Lane County Audubon Society**

**Friday, 11 December 2015, 7:30pm, Room 100  
Willamette Hall, University of Oregon Campus**

At the outset I want to extol the power of working together. The collaboration between the Eugene Natural History Society and the Lane County Audubon Society continues to afford the two groups outstanding speakers. In the past few Decembers we have heard talks by nationally recognized avian scientists from Oregon State University, Willamette University, our own Oregon Institute of Marine Biology, and the University of Washington. This year our two Societies have again worked as a team and as a consequence we are able to bring from Seattle, Washington a nationally recognized conservation photographer, Paul Bannick, who will talk about owls and show us some truly mesmerizing photographs of these wondrous birds.

Bannick was number eleven in a family of thirteen children in Bellevue, Washington, a suburb of Seattle. As a child he was drawn to the solitude of the outdoors. In an interview with Mary Ann Gwinn in *The Seattle Times* he said, "My earliest memories as a kid have to do with critters – every memory of myself as a kid is of finding a new animal." As he grew up he watched Bellevue change from a small town to a suburban city – and the change was done poorly. Animals that he saw often in his early years gradually disappeared under the pressure of urbanization. His concern led to a growing sense of empathy, not so much for the individual animals as for the loss of their habitat. He made little books while still in grade school about the animals he found, and at first illustrated his books with drawings. He borrowed his sister's camera, and soon admitted that his photos were better than his drawings at illustrating his books. His empathy grew into a lifelong passion for conservation, and his early experiences with a camera grew into his primary means of communicating this passion.

After he graduated from the University of Washington Bannick became one of the original 75 employees of Aldus Corporation (remember PageMaker and Freehand?). As the software industry matured in the Seattle area he also held management positions at Adobe Systems and Microsoft, and during this time he was volunteering with local conservation organizations. After about ten years in the software business he realized that he wanted to go full-time into the non-profit conservation arena. It took another five years after making the decision to complete the move. Bannick now serves as the Major-Gifts Director for Conservation Northwest, a Bellingham, Washington organization dedicated to protecting and connecting wild areas from the Pacific Coast to the Canadian Rockies. He points out that conservation work can be emotionally wearing because the forces aligned on the development side

are powerful and relentless. In an interview in July 2013 on KUOW, the University of Washington's NPR station, Bannick said, "It is difficult working with conservation every day, because you are always in a position of trying to protect, and feeling the species you protecting being whittled away." But on the other hand, the work can be emotionally rewarding. "We are the stewards of more than just our backyard," Bannick says. "When you are actually building resiliency into the system, it's like you're creating something eternal – and that has a degree of hope."

Bannick has honed his photographic talent through years of hard work. He has photos in bird guides put out by the National Audubon Society, the Smithsonian, Stokes, The National Wildlife Federation, and in the Handbook of the Birds of the World. Besides bird guides his work has been featured in publications such as *Sunset*, *Birds and Blooms*, and *The New York Times*. He has two cover stories in *Pacific Northwest*. His photograph of a snowy owl, "Arctic Emissary," won the International Conservation Photography's Canon Award in 2012. Art Wolfe chose Bannick's submission out of the thousands of entries from all over the world as the photo that best exemplifies the mission of the ICP awards. In 2011 he won the professional division in the Birds and Their Habitat category in Audubon Magazine's annual photography contest. His photography book *The Owl and The Woodpecker*, published in 2008, remains one of the best selling bird books in North America. You may have heard Bannick on National Public Radio, because he has been on many NPR stations and programs, including *Travels with Rick Steves* (you can hear Steves interviewing Bannick about his book by going to <http://www.paulbannick.com/shop/owl-and-woodpecker/>, clicking on the top link under Radio Interviews, and jumping to about 14 minutes into the program.) and you may have seen him on NBC Nightly News. The University of Washington's Burke Museum developed a traveling exhibit based on photos and text from *The Owl and The Woodpecker*. The exhibit makes use of Bannick's photos to highlight the diversity among these families and to demonstrate the intricate interconnections they share with their avian neighbors and with their environment. In the past five years he has spent a lot of time in the arctic and the boreal forests of Alaska and western Canada as well as the forests of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. His photographs from these wild lands form the basis of his forthcoming book, due out next year.

Bannick clearly has mastered the technical and compositional facets of his craft. He is also aware,

however, of the importance of patience and the occasional stroke of good luck. Once he was trying for a photo of a barred owl in Seattle's Discovery Park. "I have my flash and my big lens and my tripod and all this gear, and I've been tromping through the park since early morning. Nothing! So I'm taking off my gear and getting ready to go, and – *smack!*



– it smacks me in the head!" That's right, the owl had swooped down and thumped him in the head. He quickly set up again and got this shot.

In describing his photographic mission Bannick says, "My objective is to take photos that capture behavior people would otherwise not see, and to create a sense of intimacy. Because we cannot value what we don't love and if we can't have the intimacy, we don't feel the love." He concentrates on owls because they are indicators. The health of a particular owl species indicates the health of the ecosystem in which it resides. On Friday, 11 December, at 7:30pm in room 100 Willamette Hall on the U of O campus, Paul Bannick will show us, and tell us about, owls of North America and what they tell us about the land. You would be very hard pressed to find better photographs of owls. Treat yourself and come to Bannick's talk, "Journey With Owls." John Carter

### Songstress by Reida Kimmel

Everyone knows that in the spring and summer when they are courting and defending nests, male songbirds sing to attract females and to defend their territories. The drabber female demurely chooses the fittest male, selecting him for his vibrant plumage and elegant song. Not that she is mute. She can and does call, to connect with others of the flock and especially to warn of dangers. But she is not musical. Darwin, among many other observers, noted this behavior long ago. We've all seen it in our own gardens and on our walks. But Darwin and we were listening to Northern hemisphere, Eurasian birds, not to birds living in the tropics or Australasia where females have long been known to sing.

During the course of the last decade, biologists have re-examined the calls and songs of passerine birds worldwide. In 2006 biologists at the University of Antwerp traced the evolution of song in female European birds, finding that those females that do sing, and there were more than previously imagined, sing solo or in duet with their partner. The songs can be as complex as the males', and serve to deter competitors from her territory or mate. Then in March 2014, Nature Communications published a paper by Karen Odum, K. E. Omland, Katherina Riebel, M. L. Hall and N. C. Langmere that really overturned all assumptions about bird song, and made some startling conclusions about the evolution of perching birds. Riebel states that in seventy-one percent of songbird species the females sing. Song is most developed and complex in the Passeriformes and its quality may be a strong indicator of the singer's fitness. The majority of the species with singing females live in the tropics, or the desert belts of Australia and Africa. Here instead of migrating

seasonally, the birds breed at any time when there are adequate resources to feed a family. Singing, especially duets, will help bring both sexes into mating condition and strengthen the pairs' bonds.

Odum and Omland study orioles. In Baltimore, the orchard oriole and the Baltimore oriole conform to the accepted norm. The colorful males sing. The females' colors are subdued and they do not sing. Both the widespread tropical Venezuelan troupial and



the Puerto Rican oriole are in the same genus as our familiar orioles. But in these species both sexes are colorful and both sexes sing, including duets. Why are such close relatives so different? Migration may be the answer. Northern breeders need to set up the pair bond, create the nest, and get the eggs laid, hatched, and fledged in a short time span. Colorful plumage and taking time out to sing are both energetically expensive. The male has retained those flamboyant features necessary to attract a mate and defend the territory. The female declines to expend energy on producing brightly pigmented feathers and

singing. Resources must be expended parsimoniously to accomplish life's most important task quickly. One challenge the Maryland orioles do not have to face, and probably the reason why migration north to breed evolved, is that food is never in short supply in summer. The parents and young can feast. In contrast, the tropics and arid regions of the Southern Hemisphere are subject to feast or famine food cycles. There it is not always possible to feed a brood. Colorful plumage and song in both sexes help to keep the pair bond much longer lasting than in migratory species. Through color and sound the birds can keep track of their mates' location and foraging successes.

The most fascinating part of this 2014 study to me was its discussion of the origins of song and songbirds. Songbirds belong to the clade of perching birds, the *Passeri*, sometimes called the *Occines*, of which there are approximately 4000 extant species. There are two other lineages of perching birds not

included in the study. The *Tyranni* are most diverse in the Neo Tropics. The third lineage, the *Acanthisitti* in New Zealand, has only two species. It is known that songbirds evolved sixty million years ago in the part of Gondwana that later became Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and Antarctica. Later the passerine species spread around the world. Reibel and her colleagues used handbooks and guides to the bird species of the world and analyzed 1,141 species in thirty-two families, finding female singers in nearly three quarters of the surveyed species. From phylogenetic mapping information they conclude there is a very high probability that all females sang in the earliest songbird species. Lack of song, not song, is therefore the derived condition. In the warm humid world of the Eocene, migration to cooler northern climates was not a plausible strategy. All this makes me wonder. Did the songbirds' ancestors the dinosaurs sing?

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## Enough by Tom A. Titus

Are you ready for a real Pacific Northwest winter? I certainly am. The heat and drought from last summer and early fall have left me parched. The land remained thirsty even in November. The water for our cabin in the Coast Range is a spring that was dribbling a low flow reminiscent of summer. The duff seemed to be withered. There were fewer chanterelles than I've ever seen, fewer mushrooms in general, as though the mycelia had died back from the desiccated humus. The prospect of cold heavy rains is exciting. Those slashing storms could bring life-giving water to a landscape unaccustomed to such dryness. With luck, snow will accumulate in the mountains and melt through spring, keeping salmon streams cool and full.

On Thanksgiving weekend we plunge headlong into the season of wet darkness. The long holiday of gratitude paradoxically includes the consumer frenzy of Black Friday. This weekend I found myself captivated by the meaning of "enough." It's a simple word, derived from the Old English "genog," which as a noun means sufficient in quantity or number or sufficient for the purpose. Yet the simplicity of the word belies an underlying complexity. While the definition may be clear, the line of demarcation between enough and not enough isn't. This may be why many of us have difficulty deciding what a sufficiency of anything actually looks like.

We simply can't get enough of some things. This winter I don't think any amount rain will be enough. Seeing enough birds on the Christmas Bird Count is difficult to imagine. Will humans ever develop

enough environmental consciousness? Can there ever be enough peace in the world? With respect to our internal ecosystems, can we ever experience enough love, joy, or gratitude? The list seems endless.

Like rain and birds, I can't get enough of people doing good things, especially in our community of naturalists. You should know that one of our recent speakers reached out to encourage and exhort an ENHS member being treated for cancer. You should also know that a prominent local ornithologist stepped up to support a young birder who had just lost his father. Can we ever get enough of this goodness? These are stormy, tumultuous times, and the chasm of our need for virtue seems bottomless. We are a close-knit community of people living in the community of nature. There is good in our society that ripples outward and inspires gratitude.

But the concept of enough has other permutations. I'm thinking of material acquisition, of course. When is enough really enough? I wish I knew. Because this idea of sufficiency is arriving front and center as critical in our thinking on how to ameliorate a host of human shortcomings, from unrestrained exploitation of world resources to depression to xenophobic scarcity mentality. An inflated sense of the material wealth necessary to meet our needs is quite literally killing the biosphere. For us as natural historians and members of a society devoted to environmental education, we should care deeply about the meaning of enough.

This brings us to the crux of our decision making to determine what sufficiency actually means. All of us must decide for ourselves. And that demarcation

between sufficient and insufficient will be very different for different people. An extreme example would be a western capitalist compared with an African subsistence hunter. One person is steeped in the edicts of the growth economy, whereas the other must be able to carry all of his belongings to the next camp. The contextual differences in their lives, both ideological and practical, will lead them to very different ideas of how much stuff is really necessary for happiness.

I don't have answers, only a lot of questions. So walk this trail with me if you are game. For starters I offer this: the level of acquisition that constitutes sufficiency seems to be internally regulated. A first step, therefore, might be turning inward and honestly asking ourselves how much we really need. This introspection, this attentiveness, might also require that we truthfully assess the external reasons that shape our internal definition of sufficiency. Are the drivers an outcome of our desire to be moral citizens of the biosphere? Or are they the standard measures of success in pursuit of the American Dream, the car, the clothes, the house, the vacations?

My only inkling of how to cultivate a concept of enough involved a bag of wild mushrooms. On good mushroom years I've had a tendency to pick too many. My sins were small. The mushrooms were never wasted, and to my knowledge careful picking doesn't deplete the harvest from year to year. But I ended up spending far too much time cleaning mushrooms, then giving the excess away because I had more than I could use. This happened because I was so locked into my foraging mojo that my entire focus was on the growing weight of the mushroom bag in my hand.

But I was missing out on a lot. An autumn forest is a busy place: Pacific wrens are singing, the smell of

healthy decomposition fills the air, and coiled beneath that piece of fallen bark might be a western redback salamander. When filling my mushroom bag is the obsession, I'm no longer engaged in a reciprocal relationship with the forest. I'm only there to take, rarely to give back. This extraction mentality probably has its roots in scarcity thinking, that there will never be enough mushrooms or anything else to go around.

My attitude began to change on a trip early this fall. I walked into a mature second growth forest with sword ferns and deep moss and very little understory. A heavy rain had come ten days earlier. At first I thought there were no chanterelles. Then I realized they were just emerging, dry, firm, and clean, the color of those Creamsickle ice cream bars I loved as a kid. When I had enough for a breakfast of mushrooms and eggs, I slowed down. A lot. There was a forest beyond the toes of my boots waiting to engage my eyes, ears, and nose. I was grateful for the chanterelles that were there and started leaving mushrooms behind. I stopped picking long before I would have on past trips.

The earth will not be saved from the voracious reach of humanity just because I left some chanterelles behind in the mossy duff. But that feeling of restraint based on sufficiency and gratitude is still with me. As darkness ratchets down in this season of giving and receiving, I'd like to continue conjuring the memory of walking in that forest, revisit the feeling that my needs are much smaller than my wants, and find that childlike amazement that Earth continues to meet those needs.

May your holidays be blessed with plenty of birds and rain and kindness, and may all your needs be met.

## Events of Interest in the Community

### Lane County Audubon Society

**Friday, 11 December, 7:30pm. Journey With Owls. Paul Bannick.** This is a joint meeting with the Eugene Natural History Society. See pp. 2,3 of this issue of Nature Trails for details.

**Sunday, 3 January 2016, 8am to dark. Eugene Christmas Bird Count.** This will be the 74th ECBC and the 116th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. The ECBC is open to everyone, and the more counters the merrier, so please join us. Dick Lamster is the Coordinator again this year, supported by the Steering Committee of Allison Mickel, Herb Wisner, Dan Gleason and Barbara Gleason, and 27 great birdwatchers as Team Leaders. If you are just starting to get interested this is a great opportunity to learn about birds and birding from experienced birders. Watch for more information in the December-January issue of The Quail, or contact Dick Lamster at 541-343-8664 or [maeveanddick \(at\) q.com](mailto:maeveanddick(at)q.com).

### Mt. Pisgah Arboretum

**Saturday, 5 December, 10am-1pm. Wildlife Blind Weaving.** Help us complete our new Wildlife Viewing Blind in the Water Garden. This structure is being made out of woven sticks and we need help with the weaving. No experience necessary! Join us for this unique and fun project. 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.

**Saturday, 12 December, 10am-1pm. Wildlife Blind Weaving.** We'll take up where we left off last week. See above.

**Saturday, 19 December, 10am-12pm. Winter Family Walk.** Come celebrate winter with a fun walk and hot chocolate! Learn about what the plants and animals of the Arboretum are up to during the winter months, from slugs and bugs to trees and shrubs. Then warm up before you head back home with a build-your-own hot chocolate bar. Led by the Arboretum's Education Coordinator, Jenny Laxton. Rain or shine. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. Don't forget your parking pass. Members \$5 per family, non-members \$8 per family.

**Sunday, 20 December, 8:30-10am. Winter Bird Walk.** Join Chris Roth and Julia Siporin for another monthly bird walk intended for people with all levels of birding experience. We'll use vocalizations, habitat, and behavior clues for identification of our winter and year-round residents. Come discover the Arboretum's avian diversity. Please bring binoculars. Option to continue the walk until noon for those who are interested. Rain or shine. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. Don't forget your parking pass. \$5, members free.

### **The Cascade Mycological Society**

**Saturday, 5 December, 9am-5pm. Truffle Dog Training Seminar at Peavy Arboretum.** Go to <http://cascademyc.org/2015/11/truffle-dog-training-seminar-at-peavy-arboretum/> for details. This activity is limited and requires advance payment.

### **Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah**

**Monday Morning Regulars, 9am-noon.** Contact [volunteer@bufordpark.org](mailto: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.

### **WREN (Willamette Resources and Educational Network)**

For current WREN events go to <http://wewwild.blogspot.com/>

**Tuesday, 8 December, 9-11am. Wetland Wander at Stewart Pond.** Our fourth and final "seasonal" walk of 2015. Bertelsen Nature Park and Stewart Pond offer the highest diversity of dragonflies and damselflies (odonates) in the West Eugene Wetlands. Western pond turtles are present in the ponds, and river otters have also been observed using this natural area. WREN Naturalist Rick Ahrens will lead this wander. Participants should bring water. Waterproof clothing and footwear is ideal for late autumn outings. WREN will provide binoculars. Directions: From West 11th Ave, North on Bertelsen Rd, right on Stewart Rd, approx. 1/2 mile on left.

### **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.
- Scientific at the Core.

**Ideas on Tap. First Wednesday of the Month, 7-9pm, now at Sprout! Marketplace, 418 A St., Springfield.** 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.

### **Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter**

For information on current activities see <http://emerald.npsoregon.org>.

### **North American Butterfly Association, Eugene-Springfield Chapter**

**Monday, 14 December, 7pm. Butterflies of South Texas: America's Butterfly Hotspot.** The National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas has recorded more than 200 species of butterflies since its opening in 2005. Over 300 butterfly species have been seen in the three-county area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley; of these half can be seen nowhere else in the U.S. The National Butterfly Center is also the largest native plant botanical garden in the United States. Join local naturalist **Rick Ahrens** for a lively and informative presentation on butterflies, birds, and other interesting inhabitants of this border region. At the Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St.

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

**Saturday, 5 December, 1-3pm. Nature Quest: A Warm Winter Wander.** Wander through the tall trees in Hendricks Park, watch a demonstration of friction fire making and warm yourself by the hearth at the Wilkins Shelter as you listen to nature tales. Put invasive English Ivy to good use by making seasonal decorations to deck the halls of your own home. A family-paced nature adventure. Members free, non-members \$5/family, \$2/person. Meet at the Wilkins Shelter in Hendricks Park. To pre-register call 541-687-9699 or click [here](#).



Snowy Owl

**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>**

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail (if you want to receive announcements) \_\_\_\_\_

I (we) prefer electronic copies of NT rather than paper copies. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

If yes, email address (if different from the one above): \_\_\_\_\_

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| <b>ANNUAL DUES:</b> | Family          | \$25.00 |
|                     | Individual      | 15.00   |
|                     | Life Membership | 300.00  |
|                     | Contribution    | _____   |

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

Make checks payable to:  
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Thank you to all who have contributed financially to ENHS. Your generous support over the years has kept the Society in sound fiscal health, allowing us to continue as a strong voice for environmental education in our community.

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#### **ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2015-2016**

|                     |                        |                                  |
|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>11 Dec. 2015</b> | – Paul Bannick         | – Journey With Owls              |
| <b>15 Jan. 2016</b> | – Madonna Moss         | – Archaeology of Pacific Herring |
| <b>19 Feb. 2016</b> | – Greta Binford        | – Spiders                        |
| <b>18 Mar. 2016</b> | – August Jackson       | – Pollination Biology            |
| <b>15 Apr. 2016</b> | – Rebecca Vega-Thurber | – Coral Reef Decline             |
| <b>20 May 2016</b>  | – Mark Blaine          | – Copper River Salmon            |
| Alternate           | – Dean Walton          | – History of Oregon Naturalists  |