

BIRDMAN

Bird guides know best viewing spots

BY TED A. GLOVER

One of the really great ways to experience the beauty and the activities of birds is through the services of a local guide who is familiar with the birds in the area and where they can be located.

On a recent trip to Mexico and Central America, we were able to secure the services of local people through contact on the Internet. A guide met us in the morning and took us around to watch the local birds. By visiting local birding sites, we were able to observe interesting native species such as Yellow-winged Cacique, Sinaloa Wren, Russet-crowned Motmot and the beautiful Elegant Trogon.

These guides not only knew good sites in the local area, but also could give us interesting information about the surrounding countryside and the people who live there. They carry field guides with them as well as viewing scopes, making it unnecessary for us to haul those items ourselves.

In Oregon we had the opportunity to travel with a guide supplied by the Nature Conservancy. This guide put together a trip that started in Portland near the airport. There were 14 of us on the trip, including people from New York, North Carolina and Texas. We visited sites

along the Oregon coast where we saw Red-necked Phalaropes, Wandering Tattlers, and Black Oystercatchers. In the Newport area, we visited Boiler Bay where we witnessed hundreds of migrating Pacific Loons going north toward their Alaskan breeding grounds. At Yaquina Natural Area, we saw thousands of Common Murres along with Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants gathering at the offshore islands to nest.

In eastern Oregon, our guide knew just where to take us one early morning to observe a gathering of about 30 Greater Sage Grouse. Guides know the areas well and also communicate with other local bird enthusiasts to keep up with just where to find special species. We visited a site for nesting Long-eared Owls and another for a nesting Golden Eagle.

There are several ways to find a good local guide. As I mentioned above, the Internet is a source, as well as groups such as the Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society. Take the time to do some research and your trips bird watching will be more fun.

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Photos, clockwise from top left:

Red-necked Phalarope. They nest in the low Arctic, on tundra ponds with marshy shores and bogs. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:RedNeckedPhalaropelceland2006.jpg>

Black Oystercatcher. Large shorebird with bright red bill and pink legs. Forages in the intertidal zone, feeding on marine invertebrates, particularly molluscs. Photo by Barry Reswig, USFWS.

Yellow-winged Cacique. Inhabits the subtropical and tropical dry forest lowlands of Guatemala and Mexico. It is related to the grackle and oriole. Photo by Jon Church. http://www.oaxacawildlife.org/birds/_DSC4986reduced.html.

Greater Sage Grouse. These birds cannot survive in areas where sage brush does not exist. Males often weigh in excess of four to five pounds, and hens weigh in at two to three pounds. Photo by Dave Menke, USFWS.

TICKS

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rather than the presence of the bacteria themselves. During the first four to six weeks after exposure, most people have not developed the antibody response that the test measures. Treatment should not be delayed pending a positive test result if the suspicion of Lyme disease is high (exposure, tick bite, and rash).

Two primary antibody tests are used to diagnose Lyme disease, the ELISA and the western blot. Doctors commonly order an ELISA first to screen for the disease and then confirm the disease with a western blot. However, current ELISA tests are not sensitive enough for screening and may miss over half the true cases. Because of this, the best antibody test to use for diagnosis is the western blot. The readout from the western blot looks like a bar code. The pattern produced by running the test with your blood is compared to a template pattern that represents known cases of Lyme disease. If your blot has bands in the right places, and the right number of bands, it is positive. Some of the bands are more significant than others and your doctor may decide you have Lyme disease even if your western blot does not have enough bands or the right bands to be reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for surveillance purposes. Different laboratories use different methods and criteria, so you can have a positive test result from one lab and a negative test result from another. Lyme disease is known to inhibit the immune system and twenty to thirty percent of patients have false negative antibody tests. Two other tests that may be used to diagnose Lyme disease are PCR and antigen detection tests. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) multiplies a key portion of DNA from the Lyme bacteria so that it can be detected. While PCR is highly accurate when the Lyme DNA is detected, it produces many false negatives, because Lyme bacteria are sparse and may not be in the sample tested. Antigen detection tests look for a unique Lyme protein in fluid (e.g., blood, urine, joint fluid). Sometimes people whose indirect tests are negative are positive on this test.

The Applegate Valley is wonderful habitat for ticks—including Ixodes Pacificus. Ticks have a two-year life cycle and must have three blood meals to survive. Being mindful of their presence can help you avoid becoming their meal source—but at the nymph stage, probably the most common stage for infecting humans, they are about the size of a poppy seed. Ticks climb up to the top of blades of grass and wait for a warm body to pass by. If you are selected—the tick will move around until it's able to get to your skin and seek out a meal site. At the nymph stage in the spring—generally May or June—you probably won't feel the tick as it takes its meal. The adult meal is taken in the fall, usually September or October.

If you find a tick embedded in your skin, the method you use to remove it is critically important. Improper technique in removing the tick will increase the risk of the fluid inside the tick's body

being injected into your blood. There are several myths about tick removal: Many of us who grew up in this valley were taught to unscrew the tick. Hmmm—well, the tick did not screw itself in, so there is no need to screw it out! Do not put a lighter or a cigarette behind ticks. Do not attempt to smother them in Vaseline. Do not irritate them with gasoline or kerosene...these methods all result in the tick regurgitating or depositing its body contents into your blood! In addition to the Lyme spirochete,



Bull's-eye rash

ticks can carry Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Relapsing Fever, Babesiosis, and Colorado Tick Fever.

The safest way to remove a tick is to get next to the skin with a pair of tweezers—or one of the many commercial forms of tick removers—and lift the tick out in the same direction it went in without squeezing the body. Save your tick so it can be identified and tested! Try to keep it alive. Put it in a small bottle, vial or zip-lock baggie with a few blades of grass; mark the date and location where it was found. Take it to Jackson County Vector Control, 555 Mosquito Lane, White City. There you can have it identified and determine whether it is the potentially infected deer tick—or a common dog tick. If it's a deer tick, ask Vector Control employees to send it to a lab to be tested for the Lyme spirochete. It will cost you \$35.95 if it's alive—and \$64.95 if it's dead. If the tick is positive for Lyme, you should see your doctor and request a course of prophylactic antibiotics.

Lyme disease often presents with flu-like symptoms including fever and weakness. If you find yourself with a flu that seems to come and go—and no one you are in contact with has influenza—consider the possibility that you may be in the early stages of Lyme disease. For additional information, visit the California Public Health website, or the CALDA (California Lyme Disease Association) at www.lymedisease.org. The tick and Lyme issues of northern California are the same as those in southern Oregon; however, the medical community in southern Oregon is not nearly as aware of the risk as those in California. This is highlighted by the difference in the information available on the State Health Departments websites.

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NOTE: *The award-winning movie about Lyme disease, "Under our Skin," is available through the Jackson County Library System.*

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