

Friends of Hart Mountain NAR

Friends Group Newsletter

Fall 2003

NEWS FROM HART MOUNTAIN NATIONAL ANTELOPE REFUGE

In the Beginning....

With the support of Refuge Manager Kelly Hogan, the *Friends of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge* was established in May 2003. We started with four members but quickly began to grow and currently have 76 members. The Friends Group was developed to support the mandate of the refuge to protect and enhance wildlife and their habitats through education, research, habitat preservation and restoration. These first few months have been busy with the paperwork necessary to become an independent non-profit organization. We have developed by-laws, filed corporation papers with the State, filed for non-profit tax exempt status with the IRS and completed an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With this work successfully completed we are well on our way and look forward to working toward meeting our goals. Thank you all for your interest and support in Hart Mountain NAR and we look forward to what we can accomplish together.

George Reynolds, President
Morrie Chappel, Vice President
Anne Woods, Treasurer
Lori Chappel, Secretary

Volunteers Remove Fences

Volunteers and staff at Hart Mountain NAR continued working this summer on the project of removing all unnecessary barbed wire fencing from the refuge. The fences were originally erected to contain livestock which was permitted to graze on the refuge. Approximately 10 years ago, however, such grazing became prohibited. The refuge was left with fences that inhibited the free movement of the antelope and other animals on the refuge. When the project began, there were approximately 216 miles of fence within the boundary of the refuge. During the past several years, volunteers and staff have removed almost 159 miles of fence, leaving approximately 57 miles of fence to remove. During this last summer we had four volunteer service groups help with fence removal. Together they removed a

total of 12.29 miles of fence; the work is hard, but extremely satisfying; some would even say fun! The process involves cutting the barbed wire at intervals, removing stays, rolling up the wire, and removing the posts. The refuge provides tools and assistance. We would like to thank the Sierra Club, Wilderness Volunteers, Mazamas (Portland) and Oregon Natural Desert Association for their help with this worthwhile service project this summer and in many past years. If you know of a group that is interested in joining this effort, please contact the refuge at (541) 947-2731.

Other Service Projects

We want to thank the Oregon Hunters Association for their volunteer work this spring. About 60 members camped at the CCC Camp and worked on several projects including: cutting juniper trees, planting willows and building fence at the refuge headquarters.

We also want to thank Ned Davis (our first Friends Group member) and the Motley Crew from Glide, Oregon for their work on trail maintenance along the trail to DeGarmo Canyon Falls, and their help in removing Mediterranean Sage, a noxious weed. Ned, Chief Whitetail, and the Crew were here for clean up weekend representing the Order of the Antelope.

Sage Grouse Study

There has been an ongoing project at Hart Mountain NAR (as well as Sheldon NAR and Beatys Butte on BLM land) to collect data to determine factors affecting the survival of sage hen chicks in the northern Great Basin. The research objectives include evaluating hen nutrition and quality of pre-laying, nesting, and brood-rearing habitat. 2003 was the final year of this four-year data collection period. Hens were captured during the spring and marked with radio transmitters, and blood samples were taken to assess each hen's physiological condition. The hens were then monitored to locate nest sites. Once

nests hatched, the chicks were captured, radio-marked and monitored daily for 28 days. During the monitoring period, habitat data (cover and food availability) was also collected at pre-laying locations, nest sites and brood locations. Overall, approximately 500 hens and chicks have been monitored and vegetation data has been collected at over 2000 sites. Now begins the data analysis and completion of the final report which may take another two years. The goal is to link the key habitat components to chick survival, which then could be effectively managed to benefit sage grouse. There are several sources for funding and support for this project including: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Division of Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, Nevada Chukar Foundation, and the Beatys Butte Grazing Association. If you would like additional information please contact Mike Gregg at 541-947-3315.

Hot Springs Campground

We would like to thank our campground hosts, Liz & Ralph Cline for taking care of our visitors this summer. A total of 1,564 vehicles registered during June, July, August and September, from twelve states and two foreign countries. These campers enjoyed a wide variety of outdoor activities.

Caspian Tern Study

Hart Mountain NAR provided housing for two research assistants studying Caspian tern nest success on Crump Lake in the Warner Valley. Nest success of Caspian terns has been very poor in recent years and biologists want to know what factors effect chick survival. Availability of nesting substrate is thought to be a limiting factor for Caspian terns. An estimated 45 terns fledged from nests at the Crump Lake study site in 2003. This level of productivity, however, is only considered

fair compared to other well-studied colonies in the Pacific Region.

Notes from the Biologist: Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton

I arrived on Hart Mountain on July 13, 2003 to work as the refuge biologist. I have been visiting Hart Mountain and the surrounding area since 1990 and worked on Hart Mountain in 1994 as a volunteer research assistant. So the territory, habitats, and wildlife are familiar and dear to me. I had been on the Mountain for three days when the annual pronghorn and bighorn sheep surveys came up. Yippee! I spent two days in a helicopter flying over the area to count pronghorn and bighorn sheep – what a way to see the country! The results of those surveys are below as well as the November mule deer census, which is conducted on the ground. Many thanks to our volunteers who came out and helped us with the mule deer census.

Pronghorn Antelope Survey

Pronghorn are surveyed each year around July to determine population numbers as well as sex ratios (how many males to females and fawns to females). Craig Foster (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)) and Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton (Refuge Biologist) were flown by Jeff Lindscott of JL Aviation over the refuge to count pronghorn. During six and a half hours flying, we counted 476 bucks, 1310 does, and 660 fawns. In addition to pronghorn we counted 67 feral horses, 5 coyotes, and many sage grouse.

Bighorn Sheep Survey

Bighorn sheep are surveyed twice each year, once in the spring and again during the summer. The observers were Kelly Hogan (Refuge Manager), Craig Foster (ODFW) and Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton (Refuge Biologist). The day after the pronghorn count, we flew the escarpment to count bighorn sheep. We counted 55 rams, 173 ewes, and 77 lambs.

Mule Deer Survey

The annual mule deer census was conducted on November 13-14th this year.

Many thanks to our volunteers who helped make it a success. The mule deer census is conducted on the ground by driving and walking survey routes that were established back in the early 1990's. By consistently surveying these same routes we can compare the numbers of mule deer counted over the years. The fall 2003 composition survey resulted in 349 deer observed on 4 routes. The ratios were 72 fawns:100 does and 29 bucks:100 does. The Poker Jim route was not surveyed at the time of printing.

Sage Grouse Lek Survey

Sage grouse convene in the spring on breeding grounds called leks. Male sage grouse (roosters) strut and call to attract females. Counting sage grouse on leks can provide an index of population status and size. In 2003, all known leks were surveyed on Hart Mountain. A total of 1,038 roosters were counted in 2003, a 43% increase from 2002 and a 193% increase from 2000. If we assume a rooster to hen ratio of 40 roosters: 100 hens we estimate that approximately 2,600 grouse were on Hart Mountain during 2003.

Antelope Fawn Capture

In 1996, the pronghorn fawn to doe ratio during the summer survey was 0.8 fawns per 100 does. Pronghorn does always have twins so this means that less than 1 fawn out of 200 had survived since their birth in the spring. Concerns over fawn survival prompted the US Fish and Wildlife Service to initiate a long-term fawn survival study. During the past 5 years the FWS has been conducting this study. Fawns are captured each spring and fitted with radio collars which allow biologists to follow their movements and evaluate survival. During spring 2003, 28 fawns were captured and fitted with radio collars. In July, 21 of those fawns were still alive. The primary cause of death was predation, with 5 of 7 fawns killed by predators, one died of starvation after being abandoned by its mother and the other of undetermined causes.

The 2003 Christmas Bird Count is coming up in December and all our Friends are invited to participate. We will be counting birds on Hart Mountain December 20, 2003, meeting at Refuge Headquarters at 7:00 A.M. On December 21st, we will count birds in Warner Valley (meeting place and time to be announced). The Audubon Society sponsors the Christmas Bird Count each year and requests a \$5.00 donation to help cover count related expenses such as data analysis and printing. People making the \$5.00 donation will receive a copy of the Audubon Society's American Birds: Summary of the Christmas Bird Count. Please join us for this fun and important bird count. Please call Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton, Refuge Biologist, at (541) 947-2731 or send her an email at Rachelle_Huddleston-Lorton@fws.gov to sign up. Hope to see you all there!

The Evolution of Falling Water

The cliffs are stained with the long passage of water through the channel. Willows, birch, alder, wild rose, and current thrive in the canyon bottom, each the recipient of this life-giving blessing. Spray from the waterfall drops fairy kisses on my skin, carried on the breeze. Water seeps, drips, runs, and finally rushes down the falls. I inch forward over rocks slick with moss, drawing closer to the falling water. I lean forward and reach out my arms. Looking up through the water raining down on my head, a laugh breaks from my throat – pure, unadulterated joy in this moment surges through me and I am one with the land. Water courses over the fall in a thick stream, breaks apart into long silver shards, which break into clusters of droplets the size of grapes, which breaks apart into individual drops as I watch. The drops smack hard on the rocks in front of me, running off to join the others in a leisurely meander down the creek.

Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton
DeGarmo Canyon
August 2003

You are invited!