

Friends of Hart Mountain NAR

Friends Group Newsletter

Spring 2004

NEWS FROM HART MOUNTAIN NATIONAL ANTELOPE REFUGE

Friends of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge First Annual Meeting

When: June 26, 2004
4:00pm

Where: Hart Mountain Refuge
Headquarters

Everyone is invited to come and meet the new Board of Directors, and officers, for Friends of Hart Mountain NAR for 2004. We will have a report from the Board of Directors meeting and also discuss goals for the Friends Group. After the meeting we are planning a potluck dinner, so please come prepared to join in the meeting and share in the food afterwards.

It won't be a success without you!

If possible please RSVP to
chappel@access4less.net

or

Rachelle_Huddleston-Lorton@fws.gov
or call 541-947-2731

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

The Board of Directors of the Friends group is considering increasing membership fees. As a charter member of the Friends of Hart Mountain, we would like to offer you the opportunity to renew your membership at the current rates. In order to take advantage of this offer please send or bring your renewal by June 30, 2004. The current annual fee is \$5 and Lifetime is \$50. Your membership expiration date is on your membership card, or if you receive this by mail it will be on your address label. You can renew early if you wish. We do appreciate your support this past year and look forward to your continuing support. We hope to see you at the annual meeting!

Commemorative Blanket Available

A National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Commemorative Blanket is available for

purchase. It is a specially designed Pendleton woolen blanket commemorating the 100th anniversary of the refuge system. It is described and can be viewed on the web site indicated below, which has an order form provided. A great gift for Conservationists and supporters! Funds from sales go to further Friends activities in the Mid Columbia region.
<http://www.nwr.mcnary.wa.us/pendletonorderform.html>

THANK-YOU

Campground hostess Liz Cline would like to thank the campers for helping to keep the primitive camping experience a positive one. We are looking forward to another great summer of camping, and when you come don't forget your mosquito repellent!!!

NEW FACES

Temporary Wildlife Biologist **Glenn Lorton** was hired in April to continue work on the Bighorn Sheep study. He will also be working with the Biologist on other projects. Glenn is the husband of Hart Mountain's Biologist Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton.

Jenny Meisel is a Master of Science of Wildlife Science student in the Fisheries and Wildlife program at Oregon State University and works for the USFWS at Hanford Reach National Monument in eastern Washington. Her research will involve surveys to locate areas occupied by pygmy rabbits, along with vegetation and soils studies to characterize pygmy rabbit habitat. The data collected at Hart Mountain will be used to identify areas of suitable habitat for the reintroduction of captive bred pygmy rabbits on the Hanford site and surrounding lands of eastern Washington. The population of pygmy rabbits in eastern Washington is listed as endangered.

Of Storms and Wildflowers

The skies over Hart Mountain are a hundred shades of gray-pewter fades to dove while lavender blends into bright silver and every shade in between traces the contours of thunderheads. Lightening streaks toward Warner peak and thunder rips across the sky. Rain pours down, big fat dragon-drops bouncing off the ground. Everywhere there is water-potholes on the road and tiny rock tinajas are filled, tiny streams form where yesterday there were none, leaves drip, and the pungent scent of wet sagebrush fills the air. A thin dark gray funnel cloud snakes down from a distant thunderhead attesting to the power of this late spring storm. Tansy-leaf suncups and lupine line the edges of the Frenchglen Road in all their gold and purple splendor. Long-plumed avens bloom among the sagebrush, adding a subtle touch of pink to the landscape. Not-so-subtle arrowleaf balsamroot blooms riotously across the slopes of the intermediate hills and death camas is everywhere with its slender green leaves and showy white flowers. In the meadow purple camas is starting to bloom, yarrow leaves abound, and spring has come to Hart Mountain.

21 May 2004

R. Huddleston-Lorton

From the Biologist's Desk: Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton

Christmas Bird Count

Each year, the Audubon Society sponsors a bird count during the Christmas holidays. The data collected are compiled annually and used to evaluate winter bird populations around the world. There are two geographic circles that are counted by the staff at Hart Mountain, one on Hart Mountain and one in the Warner Valley near Adel. This year's Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20 and 21. On December 20th, we recorded 37 species of birds on Hart Mountain. The following day, we recorded 33 species in the Adel area.

Bighorn Sheep Capture and Study

In January 2004, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife initiated a bighorn sheep project on Hart Mountain to evaluate (1) causes of adult mortality, (2) habitat use, (3) change in juniper expanse, and (4) to develop a sight ability model to be used in estimating population size. The project began on January 5th with the capture of 40 bighorn sheep. The sheep were captured using a net gun fired from a helicopter. The sheep were then blindfolded, hobbled, and transported via helicopter to a processing area. Blood was drawn from each sheep for disease profiling, ultrasounds performed on females to determine pregnancy, and each sheep was fitted with a radio collar. The collared sheep have been monitored weekly; locations and habitat type recorded, and mortalities have been recorded and investigated. In July, we will initiate the sight ability component of this project.

Sage Grouse Lek Surveys

Each year, Refuge staff conduct sage grouse lek surveys from March 15th through the end of April. These surveys involve counting male sage grouse at traditional breeding grounds known as leks. At these leks, males congregate to strut and dance and the females come to choose their mates and breed. There are 27 primary leks on Hart Mountain; each of these may have one or more satellites for a total of 50 leks on the Refuge. Each of these leks was surveyed at least once during the 7 week survey period. Many of them were surveyed weekly to determine peak male attendance. Knowing

peak male attendance allows the FWS to estimate population size and trends over time. Peak male attendance at leks was up this year with a total of 1599 males counted in 2004 compared to 1038 roosters counted in 2003. One reason for this increase may be that in 2004 we made a huge effort to hit as many leks as possible, using all Refuge staff, volunteers, and people from the Lakeview FWS office.

Sage Grouse Mortality and Habitat Use Study

In March 2004, 25 female sage grouse were captured using spotlights and handheld nets. Each grouse was weighed and measured, blood taken for analysis, banded with a ODFW leg band, and fitted with a radio collar. The purpose of this study is to monitor sage grouse hen mortality and nest success with respect to nest site locations relative to prescribed fire treatment areas. To date, 5 hens have been killed by predators (most likely coyotes) and one nest has also been predated (most likely by ravens). Monitoring of sage grouse is on-going daily. Nesting should be completed within the next two to three weeks.

Pronghorn Fawn Mortality Monitoring

Each year since 1996, Refuge staff have captured pronghorn fawns shortly after birth and fitted them with ear tag-mounted radio transmitters. The intent is to monitor and determine causes of mortality. On May 17th, Refuge staff, ODFW, and volunteers began capturing pronghorn fawns. Each fawn was weighed, sexed, had blood drawn for physiological analysis, and fitted with a radio transmitter. Immediately after capture marked fawns were observed to confirm acceptance by does. Fawn radio frequencies are being monitored twice daily from the day the fawn was radio-marked until mid-June and daily through mid-July. This year 22 fawns were captured. To date there have been four mortalities: two from coyotes, two from undetermined causes.

Pronghorn Hoof and Mouth Disease Study

In addition to the annual pronghorn fawn mortality monitoring, 10 pronghorn fawns were captured by staff from Colorado State University (CSU) and transported to a facility at CSU for use in a study of hoof and mouth disease in pronghorn antelope. The Refuge is

cooperating with this study by providing pronghorn for researchers. Results of this study are expected to help managers understand the risks of hoof and mouth disease in pronghorn herds. Capture techniques were the same as in the pronghorn fawn mortality monitoring project.

Volunteers

A huge thank you to all the folks who came out and volunteered for the Refuge this Winter and Spring! George and Nadine Reynolds, Craig Miller, Ken Guza, PJ Klavan, Marisa Chappel, and the Hooper Family from Crescent City, CA came out and helped count birds in December for the Christmas Bird Count. George Reynolds and Morrie Chappel were tireless during the lek surveys, getting up early every morning to count sage grouse. Lori Chappel, Bill Mull, Ned and Barbara Davis, Ron, Dick, and Jim Poole, Aubrey Campbell, Greg Bishop, Dana Huddleston, Karina Alfaro, Glenn Lorton, Janice Mize, Ken Guza, also helped with the lek study. George and Nadine Reynolds, Pete Reynolds, Ralph and Liz Cline, Ned and Barbara Davis, Morrie and Lori Chappel, Chris Pellissier, and Jenny Meisel helped during the fawn capture. We would also like to thank Paul Olivas, Rusty Stever, Tony Shanks and Kurt Jensen of Jensen Precast in Reno, NV for their help with the fawn capture.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are opportunities on Hart Mountain year-round to participate in conservation, research, and habitat management projects. Please call Refuge Biologist Rachelle Huddleston-Lorton or Refuge Manager Kelly Hogan at (541) 947-2731. You may also reach them by email at:

Rachelle_Huddleston-Lorton@fws.gov
or
Kelly_Hogan@fws.gov

Our mailing address is:
Friends of Hart Mountain NAR
P.O. Box 21
Plush, OR 97637