

# 2022 LADD MARSH BIRD FESTIVAL

A SELF-GUIDED EXPERIENCE OF VIEWING STATIONS - SATURDAY, MAY 14, 2022



**W**elcome to the 2022, Ladd Marsh Bird Festival! This guide will help you plan your trip. On festival day, an information booth at the Tule Lake Area also will be available for additional assistance. This guide includes information about six designated Birding Stations and other stops of interest around Ladd Marsh. The Stations will be staffed by local birding experts to assist with viewing and identifying birds. We also invite you to learn about the rich natural history of the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area.

## Finding Ladd Marsh

The Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area is located south of La Grande, Oregon. We recommend that you begin your trip at the Information Trailer at the Tule Lake Area on Peach Lane. From La Grande, take Adams Ave. through downtown and continue south on Hwy 203 toward the town of Union. Approximately 5.7 mi. from the I-84 interchange, turn left (north) onto Peach Lane. The Tule Lake area is approx. 1.4 miles north of Hwy 203. Turn right at the Tule Lake Auto Tour entrance and look for the white travel trailer. Rest rooms, information and maps will be available there.

For detailed locations and directions to the Birding Stations, the Information Trailer and other sites mentioned in this flyer, check the [Ladd Marsh Bird Festival Map](#).

## Indigenous People of the Grande Ronde Valley

The Friends of Ladd Marsh pay our respects to the original inhabitants of this beautiful valley, the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) people. We acknowledge their continuing connection to the land, water, and all that it provides, and celebrate their traditions, languages and stories. We invite you to learn more about their vibrant cultures at <https://ctuir.org/> and <https://nezperce.org>.

## Birding Stations

On Saturday, May 14th, from 6:00am until noon, local birding experts will staff six "birding stations" around the Marsh to help visitors locate and identify birds and other wildlife. Stations will be marked by festival signs and parking will be available at each station. We ask that you protect yourselves and our volunteers by following all Covid safety precautions, including masking around others and avoiding sharing equipment outside of your group. Binoculars and spotting scopes will not be provided.

No restroom facilities are available at the birding stations, however, there are vault toilets without running water available at several locations, including Tule Lake, the Peach Road Fishing Pond, and the Glass Hill Access Area at the White Barn along Foothill Road, just south of the overlook.

Station locations are marked on the [Ladd Marsh Bird Festival Map](#).

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## Station 1 –Foothill Road Overlook

Located along the western edge of the marsh, at the toe of Glass Hill, Station #1 boasts spectacular views east to the snow-covered peaks of the Eagle Cap Wilderness area in the Wallowa Mountains. Foothill Road follows the old Oregon Trail route, avoiding the valley's boggy, wet meadows that were impassible to heavy wagons. The overlook itself is an old landslide. Look west to the hill above you to see the depression left behind when a large section of the hill sloughed off, tumbling down to form the raised overlook. This and several other landslide sites around the perimeter of the valley are thought to date to a wet period during the Pleistocene. Active faults along the valley edges also may have contributed to these events.

The overlook provides excellent viewing of Sandhill cranes. Cranes are territorial nesters, with traditional areas established around the marsh. Pairs mate for life, returning together from their wintering grounds each spring. Radio tracking studies have shown that most of "our" cranes overwinter in the northern and central valleys of California. They complete this trip of over 600-miles in just a couple of days, often timing their journey to take advantage of favorable weather. On their first spring migration northward, one-year-old Sandhill Cranes return with their parents. The adults tolerate them on their territory for a few weeks before encouraging them to become independent, as the adults begin the process of nesting and raising their next brood. Groups of these yearling colts tend to move around the region more broadly until they reach reproductive age and seek to establish their own territory.

The meadows south of the Foothill Road overlook support three nesting territories. By mid-May, most mated pairs will be tending their small, fuzzy yellow "colts". Cranes often have two chicks and guard them carefully. For the first few months, they are extremely vulnerable to predation by coyotes, foxes, and hawks. In a typical year, only 20% of crane chicks survive to adulthood; however, cranes are long-lived birds and may return to Ladd Marsh to nest 20 or more times throughout their lifetime.

Cathy Nowak, a former biologist with Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife on Ladd Marsh, has studied cranes for several years. The Friends of Ladd Marsh have helped support this project financially and we look forward to learning more about these amazing birds.



Entrance to Foothill Road Overlook—Station 1

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## Station 2—Host Site

Station #2 is an old homestead site, and gets its name from the electrical hook-up that is sometimes used to host summer volunteers with their own RV housing. This location boasts mature elm and maple trees which become very active with foraging flocks and nesting passerines in early morning hours. By mid-May, visitors usually can enjoy watching Western Kingbirds, Bullock's Orioles, and Western Tanagers at this site. Red-tailed Hawks often occupy a historic, large nest, and Great Horned Owls roost in the mature trees around the old homestead area. Sandhill Cranes occasionally are seen in the grassy area north of the parking area.

Bird Festival visitors can walk north from the parking area and then east toward Station #3 at Hot Lake (approx. 1.5 mi.). There is no shuttle service back, however, so visitors either return the way they came, or walk back along the road a half mile to reach their vehicle.



Entrance to Host Site—Station 2



Entrance to Hot Lake —Station 3

## Station 3—Hot Lake

This station is situated across the road from the Grande Hot Springs RV Resort. There is limited off-road parking so most visitors park along the Hot Lake Lane. Walk up onto the dike alongside the pond about a tenth of a mile to the Station. A wide variety of waterfowl can be seen here, along with several elusive species including Virginia and Sora Rails and American Bittern.

This station also provides an opportunity for birders to walk north and west along an elevated dike through a series of ponds bordered by riparian vegetation. The trees and shrubs provide habitat for seasonal nesting species, like Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow Warblers.

During Bird Festival weekend, visitors can walk through from Station #3 to Station #2. It is a level walk of about 1.5 miles, although the path is uneven and sometimes muddy.

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## Station 4—Distribution Pond

This deeper water pond often hosts different assemblages of ducks than other areas of the marsh. The Distribution Pond fills with reclaimed water from the La Grande wastewater treatment plant. After primary treatment at the plant, water is piped out to Ladd Marsh, where it is first kept in shallow ponds west of Peach Road for at least two days. Exposure to ultraviolet light helps kill bacteria and other microorganisms. The water then receives a brief chlorination treatment before being pumped into the Distribution Pond. From here, it is distributed to a series of ponds and canals in the Tule Lake area to the north. Lush growth of cattails and rushes helps remove organic pollutants before it reaches the Grande Ronde River. Watch for Bufflehead, Ring-neck Duck, Redhead Duck, Common Goldeneye, and Black-crowned Night-Heron.

## Station 5—Schoolhouse Pond

A short distance north of the Tule Lake Area on Peach Lane, the Willowdale Schoolhouse still stands. Devoid of paint and quickly being overtaken by fast-growing willows, this building once provided an educational space for local farm children. Imagine attending school here as a youngster over a century ago!

Just north of the schoolhouse, watch for a Ladd Marsh sign and turn-out with a small parking area. A short walk east over the dike will bring you to Schoolhouse Pond with its stunning backdrop of mountains, including Mt. Fanny with its radio-towers, and the ancient volcano of Mt. Harris framing the north end of the ridgeline.

Schoolhouse Pond is easily viewed with binoculars or a spotting scope set up on the dyke overlooking the pond. A bench is available to rest your feet and enjoy the view. With varying water depths, muddy edges and lush wetland vegetation, Schoolhouse Pond provides habitat for diverse wetland birds. Geese, grebes, and diving and dabbling ducks are all common here. When water levels drop later in the summer, shallow water and mudflats offer excellent opportunities for viewing wading birds, such as Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets. Black Terns feed over this pond occasionally, and Willow Flycatchers may be spotted in the large willows.

A walking loop of approximately 1.9 miles that circumnavigates the Schoolhouse Pond area provides access to several other ponds, canals, and mature willows in which American White Pelicans, American Bittern, and Great Horned Owl or other raptors might be seen.

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Old Willowdale Schoolhouse near Station 5



Schoolhouse Pond —Station 5

## Station 6—Pierce Road

Station #6 is located on the east side of Pierce Road, about midway between Hwy 230 and the Oregon Fish & Wildlife, Ladd Marsh Headquarters. Watch for a turn-out just north of a small fork of Ladd Creek that crosses under the road in a culvert. During spring flooding, these open fields are often filled with a variety of waterfowl and wading birds. The creek side vegetation also provides excellent opportunities for viewing Willow Flycatchers and various warblers.



Looking east over the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area

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## Other Stops of Interest

### Tule Lake Area and Auto Tour

The Tule Lake Auto Tour turns off Peach Road, midway between Wilkinson Road to the north and Hwy 203 to the south. A Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area sign and check-in station along Peach Road marks the entrance. This area is open to the public on weekends and Wednesdays, from Aug. 1 until Jan. 31 and daily from March 1 through July 31. An information trailer will be available here on festival weekend.

Vehicles may drive eastward for approximately 0.2 miles to a parking area with a vault toilet and interpretive signs describing wildlife in the area. If walking is your preference, a series of looping trails begins here. Heading eastward on the Mallard Trail will take you past several ponds until you reach a long row of mature Peachleaf Willow trees, with possibilities for viewing woodpeckers, owls, and hawks. Once you reach the eastern boundary of the Marsh, the trail branches, and you can turn north or south to loop back to the parking area. Both of these routes provide opportunities for viewing ducks, geese, Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, several species of swallows, Yellowthroats, Great Egrets, Black-crowned Night-heron, and many other birds.

Alternatively, you can head south from the parking area on the Black Bird Trail. This out-and-back route follows a row of mature Cottonwood and Poplar trees, with excellent habitat for perching and nesting raptors.

A third option is to either walk or drive slowly along the Auto Tour road, which heads north and west from the parking area. In 3/4th of a mile, this gravel road will bring you back to Peach Road, a short distance north of the main entrance to the Tule Lake area. Several



Sign at entrance to the Tule Lake Auto Tour

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## Peach Road Fishing Pond

The Peach Road Fishing Pond provides year-round access for anglers and wildlife viewers. The pond is located along Peach Road south of the entrance to the Tule Lake area. A well-developed parking area provides wheelchair accessible parking and pond access. A vault toilet restroom facility also is available at this location. Since this pond is stocked with fish, watch for Great Blue Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret and American Bittern around this pond.

The gated road on the west side of the Fishing Pond parking area leads to the City of La Grande wastewater ponds. The City pond area is closed to public access except during Bird Festival weekend. Visitors may walk or drive west to the ponds.



Peach Road Fishing Pond



Parking at Peach Road Fishing Pond

## Hot Lakes Springs

As you travel along Hwy 203, you can't miss the large, historic buildings and hot-water ponds of the [Lodge at Hot Lake Springs](#). This privately-run facility currently offers lodging, dining, and hot tubs for folks visiting the area. The large brick building was constructed as a spa and private sanitarium in the early 1900's, taking advantage of the warm springs and close proximity to the railroad. After closing, it fell into disrepair and became renowned locally as a "haunted" place.

Around the corner on Hot Lakes Lane, you'll find the [Grande Hot Springs RV Resort](#) that hosts a campground, hot springs-fed swimming pool, yurts, and small cabins for rent. The Resort hosts have been very supportive of past Bird Festivals and your patronage would be appreciated.

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## Oregon Trail

The ecology and human inhabitation of the Grande Ronde Valley was quickly and dramatically altered by the Oregon Trail. Beginning about 1846, a 2,170-mile long wagon route from the Missouri River to western Oregon brought hundreds of settlers from the midwestern and eastern states to the verdant lands of the Pacific Northwest. By 1869, completion of transcontinental rail routes made westward travel easier and the trail became less used. Interstate Hwy 84 still follows portions of the original route through Ladd Canyon south to Farewell Bend.

Located south from Ladd Marsh, "Craig Mountain" frames the end of the Grande Ronde Valley. If you look carefully, a section of original old wagon ruts is still faintly visible along the western edge of the hillside. Try to imagine loaded wagons pulled by horses or oxen descending the steep hillside from Ladd Canyon into the Valley. After a rigorous journey through Idaho and across the Snake River, this beautiful valley must have been a welcome sight. One route brought travelers along the western edge of the valley on what is now Foothill Road, where you'll find Birding Station #1 with its spectacular views of the valley. Oxen Springs, south of the White Barn, provided a reliable water source for livestock of Oregon Trail travelers.



White Barn & Glass Hill Access Area

## White Barn & the Glass Hill Access Area

A turn-off from Foothill Road at the large "White Barn" barn provides parking for the Glass Hill Access Area. The Area is open to the public, daily, from April 1 until Jan. 31. A vault toilet is available. A somewhat steep walk up the trail is rewarded with spectacular views across the Grande Ronde Valley. The trail quickly transitions from riparian vegetation into Ponderosa Pine woodlands, with a wide variety of forest/woodland birds. Some favorites along this trail include Spotted Towhee, Western Tanager, and Ruffed Grouse.

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Bird Festival participants can find answers to questions and more details about the Festival at the Information Trailer. The Trailer is located along the Tule Lake Auto Tour, and will be open from 6:00 am until noon, Saturday, May 14h; see the Yellow Star on the map below. All participants should observe safety protocols to reduce the transmission of the coronavirus, including wearing masks indoors, washing or sanitizing your hands, and physical distancing. Please do not share binoculars, scopes, cameras, or bird books with anyone outside your party. An interactive, Google Map is available here: [Ladd Marsh Bird Festival Map](#).

