

The Site Guide

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon

Location Harney County, southeastern Oregon, Headquarters 32 m. southeast of Burns.

Description 181,000 acres of flat valley lands and brushy uplands at about 4,100 feet elevation in a closed basin watershed; vast shallow marshes and lakes, small ponds, irrigated meadows, with greasewood covered alkali flats, and grass and sagebrush covered uplands. Malheur Lake (the largest) is a bullrush-burreed-cattail marsh interspersed with open water areas. Lake size varies from dry to 60,000 acres, depending on runoff from adjacent mountain watersheds. Harney Lake, the terminus for waters draining

into the basin, is an alkali playa, varying from dry to 30,000 acres. The lake is essentially devoid of vegetation. The Blitzen Valley is a gently sloping area with small ponds and sloughs among irrigated meadows, bordered by sagebrush uplands and precipitous basaltic rims. The Double O Area has ponds and irrigated meadows interspersed among sagebrush and greasewood uplands.

Access Nearest airport Boise (rental cars available). From Burns, east on Route 78 2 m, south on 205 30 m to HQ. From Bend, east on Route 20. From Boise, west on same route, to Burns.

Accommodations Hotels and motels at Burns. Hotel at Frenchglen near south entrance. Reservations suggested. Campgrounds at Malheur Environmental Field Station, 4 m west of HQ, and near Frenchglen at Page Spring. Groceries, gasoline at Princeton and Frenchglen.

Birdwatching The refuge is a vast and productive waterfowl factory and migration



Malheur N.W.R. Refuge headquarters site with display pond. Photo: Ray Glahn.

staging area, populated in early spring and autumn by thousands of swans, geese, ducks, and shorebirds, and in migration by a substantial songbird population. In early spring (March and April) large flocks of Snow Geese visit the refuge, along with Whistling Swans, Canada Geese, Ross' Geese and other waterfowl. In this season Sandhill Cranes display and Canada Geese are nesting (Blitzen Valley) and Sage Grouse perform courtship dances in the Foster Flats area. In May and June breeding is at its peak; nesters include Western and Eared Grebes, several herons and bitterns, Cinnamon Teal, Redhead, Ruddy Duck and other waterfowl including introduced Trumpeter Swan. Shorebird breeders include Am. Avocet, Willet, Long-billed Curlew and Wilson's Phalarope. In autumn, migrant waterfowl return, to remain until freeze-up. Six species of upland game birds are resident: Sage Grouse, Mountain Quail, Hungarian Partridge, Chukar, California Quail, and Ring-necked Pheasant.

Best sites *Headquarters area*, for waterfowl, gulls, terns and shorebirds, migrant and nesting passerines. *Ponds and lakes*, especially Boca Lake, Stinking Lake, Knox and Benson Ponds for nesting waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds, rails, marsh wrens, Marsh Hawk, Trumpeter Swan. *Flooded meadows*: nesting and migrant waterfowl, rails, gulls, terns, shorebirds and waders, Sandhill Crane, Eared and Horned Grebes. *Malheur Lake - Cole Island Dike*: colonies of Com. and Snowy Egrets, White-faced Ibis, Double-crested Cormorant, herons, waterfowl, shorebirds, waders. *Harney Lake* (periphery): nesting and migrant

Snowy Plover, other ground birds. *Upland meadows*: migrant and nesting passerines, including E. Kingbird (willow clumps) raptors, Burrowing Owl, Bobolink. *Rimrocks*: Canyon and Rock Wrens, Chukars. *"P" Ranch tower*: Turkey Vulture.

Rating Spring (April-May) ★★★★★ Summer (June-July) ★★ Fall (August-October) ★★★★★ Winter (November-March) ★.

— Eldon L. McLaury



West side of Malheur L. near Graves Pt. Maretail (Hippurus vulgaris), interspersed with open water and White Water Buttercup (Ranunculus trichophyllus). Background vegetation Hardstem Bulrush (Scirpus acutus). Photo: David B. Marshall.



Malheur Lake Center, Cole I. Dike. Photo: David B. Marshall.



Sandhill Cranes feeding on grain at Grain Camp area. Photo: Ore. State Hwy. Comm.

