



Nature Trails

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Dick Lamster and birdhouse number 16

"Thinking inside the box: Bird nests"

**Dick Lamster, Past-President, Lane County Audubon
Society**

**Friday, 12 December, 7:30PM Room 100, Willamette
Hall, UO Campus**

Our December speaker, Dick Lamster, hails from South Dakota. Born and raised in Pierre, he was introduced to the outdoors at an early age by his father, who was a game warden. Attuned to the natural world through his early experiences, surprisingly it was not until his last couple of years in the Army that he became seriously interested in birds. He started building and monitoring birdhouses in the mid 1980's on his property in the Pleasant Hill area. Now the overseer of 45 birdhouses, it is that subject which he will talk to us about on Friday the 12th.

An excellent athlete in high school – all-state in football as well as a sprinter and jumper in track – Dick attended South Dakota State University on an athletic scholarship and graduated with a BS in biology, with emphasis in secondary education, health, and physical education. He thought he wanted to be a high-school coach, but during his on-site teacher training, he discovered he didn't like it.

Dick finished at SDSU at the height of the Viet Nam War. He had seen it coming and so had taken ROTC. He went into the U.S. Army as a Second Lieutenant and served four and a half years in the Medical Service Corps. His first tour was with the 82nd Airborne in North Carolina as the commanding officer of "B Company, 307th Medical Battalion, where he found out a little bit about what it was like to fly: he served with the 82nd airborne division, and, upon learning that it increased his pay by about 25%, started jumping out of airplanes. During the 12 months he spent in Viet Nam he was promoted to Captain and served as Chief of Supply and Services for a hospital located not far from the Demilitarized Zone. His last two years of service were done in somewhat more pleasant surroundings: California. It was during this time that he found out birds were fun to watch.

His tour of duty complete, Dick came to Eugene and enrolled in the University of Oregon, getting his MS in Recreation Administration and Park Management.

He then took a position with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A Park Ranger for one year, next a Park Manager for 5 years, he then served as Chief of the Natural Resource Management Branch for 22 years. The land surrounding the reservoirs in Oregon amounts to 80,000 acres. Dick was in charge of all of it. One of his accomplishments was to eliminate herbicide use on these lands. Prior to his coming aboard they were using atrazine, 2,4-D, and 2,4,5-T for weed control along ditches and shorelines. Together with his immediate superior, Dick established standards of control and directed his staff to come up with non-chemical methods to meet them. Alternatives such as fire, mowing, and hand weeding proved sufficient to meet the standards. Another advance he made was the elimination of off-road vehicles from the reservoirs, which further reduced erosion and allowed the formation of wildlife refuges.

Dick also has a Master's in Public Administration, from the University of Michigan. He was awarded one of the ten scholarships the Corps of Engineers awards annually to its employees – to his surprise, since almost all these scholarships go to engineers.

During his professional career Dick has given or led over 200 talks, walks, and workshops on natural history. Most of these have centered on birds and habitat. He has also published in local, regional and national publications, has contributed to two college text books, and

authored three park environmental interpretation brochures, the latest being "Common Birds of Elijah Bristow State Park" in 2006. In 2002, after 28 years with the Corps, Dick retired. Asked if he ever looked back with nostalgia at his professional life he replied instantly and with some force: "Not for a minute!" He is into so many interesting things that his time and mind are both well occupied. To illustrate his level of activity, Dick has been President of the Lane County Audubon Society off-and-on for 16 years (his wife Maeve Sowles has been President for the last seven years), President of



Mt. Pisgah Arboretum for four and a half years, and President of Oregon Track Club Masters for the last two years. He has served on the Audubon Board of Directors for 26 years, the Arboretum Board for 10 years, and Oregon Track Club Masters Board for 6 years.

One of Dick’s interests is white-water rafting. He was a guide for a local rafting company for ten years, while still at the Corps of Engineers – guiding on weekends and during vacations. Having done almost every river in Oregon at least once, his favorite is the Owyhee. He and Maeve have done the Grand Canyon twice, rowing the entire 220 miles both times. He found he was able to tie three of his loves together: rafting, hiking, and bird watching. He

started leading hiking trips on rafting rest days, introducing rafters to the habitat around the various rivers, and to the birdlife therein.

Dick got his birdhouse start working with Al Prigge, who had set up a bird-box trail around Eugene of over 300 houses. Al recruited locals to check on these houses, and Dick ended up responsible for a dozen or so. On Friday, 12 December 2008, Dick will tell us about what he has learned from his many years of building and monitoring birdhouses. The title of his talk is: “Thinking inside the box: bird nests.”

To illustrate the attention to detail Dick and Maeve demonstrate in their birdhouse watching, here is their summary for 2008:

LAMSTER/SOWLES 2008 BIRD HOUSE USE REPORT
For the birdhouses at 30495 Fox Hollow

Bird houses available for nesting: 45
 Number of houses that produced eggs: 29
 Percent houses that produced eggs: 64%
 Number of nests that produced eggs: 35
 (16 houses had none, but 6 had double nesting)
 Percent nests with eggs vs. houses: 78%

Codes: BCC: black-capped chickadee
 TS: tree swallow
 WBB: western blue bird
 HW: house wren

CBC: chestnut-backed chickadee
 VGS: violet-green swallow

	BCC	CBC	TS	VGS	WBB	Total
a. Nests that produced eggs	3	1	9	21	1	35
b. Number of fledged birds	21	6	32	41	0	100
c. Average fledged birds per nest ("b" divided by "a")	7	6	3.5	2.0	0	2.9
d. Number of unhatched eggs	0	0	1	14	0	15
e. Number of dead chicks	1	0	3	12	0	16
f. Number of nests affected by predators (plus 4 houses filled with sticks)	0	0	1	7	1	9
g. Number of eggs & chicks killed by HW	0	0	5	22	3	30

Comments:

1. This year was similar to last year with 100 birds fledged, down just 2 from last year. This is still below average when 40 or more houses were available. Record is 181.
2. The number of nests affected by house wrens (our only nest box predator) was up from last year, 2 to 9. 30 eggs and chicks were killed by HW’s, which is quite high.

3. The six -year trend of more VGS than TS fledging continues, although the number of TS fledglings increased by 5 over last year and VGS were down by 10.
4. We had one WBB nest but it failed. We think a hawk took the female and the male could not entice another female into the area.
5. BCC continue to be the leaders in number of eggs laid and chicks fledged. Three nests fledged 21, for an average of 7 young, well above the swallow average of around 3.5.
6. We are noticing fewer birds returning from migration over the past 5 years or so. Our food supply seems stable or better each year. The weather was cold, snowy and wet in April and May. Birds arrived late and nested late, by as much as 2 to 3 weeks.
7. The weather in July & August was cooler than normal and we had very few late summer nest box deaths, which are usually caused by dehydration.

FOREVER YOUNG – BUDS AND SEEDS

I have been thinking and writing about buds recently (see my note in the Eugene Weekly). Dormant winter buds are one of the important differences between plants and animals. The obvious difference is that animals can move around and plants can't. Plants have different ways of growing to compensate for being sessile – attached to the substrate. In our climate, getting through the winter presents a challenge to all beings. Some plants simply live as annuals, using their seeds to weather hard times. Many insects and other invertebrates are similar, overwintering as eggs or resistant pupae. When it comes to dealing with winter cold, long-lived animals either keep themselves warm with an insulating covering or seek out protected spots to hibernate, while perennial plants withdraw to underground bulbs and rhizomes or develop winter buds to protect their sensitive growing tissue.

It is the winter buds of trees and shrubs that have my special attention at this time of the year because they are in my face as I tramp through the woods. The sensitive tissues of the plant that keep it alive and growing, the leaves, are dropped in the fall. (I am not talking about evergreens here; that is another story for another time.) Flowers are ephemeral and long gone, having done their job of making seeds. What is needed for next year's leaves and flowers are wrapped up inside the winter buds.

Winter buds actually begin developing early in the summer. At the same time the leaves are gathering energy to put on new

wood and nourish flowering and fruiting, they are storing up an investment in the next season in the buds. The developing bud is enwrapped in bud scales. These are tough, durable modifications of leaves. The bud scales keep predators from getting at the tender kernel inside and prevent that kernel from drying out or being attacked by pathogens. The winter buds form at the tip of a shoot and in the angle between the leaf stalk and stem.

It is that tender kernel that is so green plant: it contains the primary meristem of the plant: stem tissue and undifferentiated cells, which are forever young. When you cut open a bud with a razor blade, you see little knobs and stalks that will develop into leaves and flowers. These are called primordia. One bump is a primordium. Primordia develop from the meristem. Primordia are not embryonic tissue. Embryonic tissue is found in seeds of plants, having developed from a fertilized egg. A seed is an embryo arrested at an early stage and wrapped up in the seed coat. Embryonic tissue in a seed is analogous to embryonic stem tissue in animals. The egg of a bird is like a seed, except that eggs are designed to protect a continually developing embryo within. Eggs do not sit dormant and then start growing when watered.

Although mature animals have stem tissue in any organ that keeps replacing cells, like skin and the gut lining, animals do not have anything like a meristem. The meristem can produce all parts of a plant; it has the same growth potential as embryonic stem tissue. Meristems are not found just in buds; woody

plants have a sheet-like meristem enveloping their shoots, which produces the annual layers of wood. When the meristems die, the plant dies. But if the meristem is preserved in an individual it can grow indefinitely. That's why there are plants that are thousands of years old. Take a moment to let your sense of wonder about meristems envelop you. David Wagner

WINTER'S HOPE

Still the constantly murmuring
Lips of your mind and
Listen to the Shadow
Stealing quickly,
Quietly in from the East.
Crooked vine maple fingers
Greedily gather the last colors
Into Her cold arms.

A twig snaps in the
Almost Dark
As the old doe,
Newly pregnant,
Rises from her bed
Beneath a rotten stump.
She stretches aging joints,
Shakes off bits of
Wood and afternoon rain.

Two pink fingerlings
Float in warm darkness,
Half legs and tiny eyes
Unseeing and unseen.
Her surging blood
Bathes them in
Yesterday's apple.

Red, rain-softened fruit
Finally relinquished its
Tenuous grasp on Autumn,
Falling into wet grass,
Gazing skyward into the empty
Tree womb of naked branches,
Waiting on Light with
Silent,
Uncertain,
Hope.

Tom Titus

FOG

It has been so weirdly dry and warm this fall. Those of you who, like me, are fascinated by weather may be aware that once again Eugene is averaging only two thirds of its normal rainfall. Spring was dry, summer more so. The fall rains have been infrequent and grudging. Yet as I walk about the farm and the nearby hills, everything seems wintry. The trees are all bare except for the golden tan cottonwoods, towering above the blackberry and filbert thickets in the clearcuts. But the afternoon air is warm, too warm for a jacket, and something is very peculiar for the last weekend in November. On the path above the pond there are two migrating newts, a male and a female. Which way are they going? It is very late for them to be migrating from water to the forest duff for the winter. It is phenomenally too early for them to be heading to the pond to breed. The huge beautiful paper wasp nest has fallen off the filbert bush at the top of the hill. We went past the nest almost daily all summer and never even noticed it until the leaves fell. Now the filbert is decked out for spring. Its catkins are yellow and plump. There are even a few female buds swelling. What season is this? Where is winter?

In the morning and late afternoons the fogs come in, turning our world dark, wet and cold for a few hours. The fir trees drip quantities of water on our hats. Lichens and mosses glisten. The long hanging ramalina lichens sway, gently jeweled with fog droplets. The fog muffles sounds, and even the most familiar places seem a bit mysterious. At our altitude, in really cold weather we will experience frozen fog. Ice accumulates on all the trees shrubs and lichens. After a few days the delicate frost accumulation resembles a snow scene, but unlike snow, the frost never gets heavy enough to break branches.

I have read of deserts on the west coast of Africa whose plants are sustained by fog alone. Our Coastal forests are moist and verdant even in the summer because of frequent fogs. Now I am beginning to

appreciate just how much our ecosystem in the Eugene area needs fog. Given how infrequent our fall rains have been, the mosses and lichens would be too dry to carry out their normal summer-dormant, winter-growing life cycle were it not for the fogs we have been having. The fallen leaves

would not be composting to provide nutrients for next year's growth. The newts would not have moist duff to hide in for the winter. Fog is one of nature's great but unappreciated blessings – just so you don't have to drive in it! Reida Kimmel

Ed. note: The needles on coastal redwoods are shaped such that fog condenses on them and drips off their tips. While it rarely rains in summer where they are found, it's foggy then. They get about as much moisture from fog as they do from winter rains. When I ran the Humboldt Redwoods Marathon a couple of years ago it was foggy and I could hear the big drops hitting the ground around those huge trees.

Another ed. note: Maybe you didn't see the note in last month's issue. Or maybe you have been too busy, or forgot about it. It's not too late; I'm still interested in getting stories from you about how you became interested in natural history.

Events of Interest in the Community

Audubon Society

Tuesday, 27 January, 7:30pm. The Owl and the Woodpecker: encounters with North America's most iconic birds. by Paul Bannick. At Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St.

Mount Pisgah Arboretum

34901 Frank Parrish Rd., Eugene, 97405. Located off I-5 Exit 189, 15 minutes southeast of Eugene.

Call Clare at 747-1504 or email mtpisgip@efn.org for more information or to sign up for any of the Arboretum activities.

Sunday, 4 January, 12:30-3:30pm. Winter Warmup Singles Volunteer Work Party.

Wildflower Garden Spruce-Up at the Arboretum! Help plant, weed, and work in the Garden while meeting other outdoor-loving singles. Meet in front of the Arboretum Visitor Center. Bring a water bottle, outdoor clothes, and a smile. RSVP by emailing Tom at pisgah4@epud.net.

Sunday, 11 January, 10am-4pm. Finding and Harvesting Edible Mushrooms Workshop.

Join mushroom enthusiast Josiah Legler and learn where and when to look for edible mushrooms, sustainable harvesting methods, field guide use, permitting and more. We'll meet at MPA, then carpool to a mushrooming location 45 minutes away. This class will prepare you to find and harvest mushrooms on your own, but we won't harvest what we find on class day. \$20/\$18 MPA members.

Saturday, 17 January, noon-4pm. Lichen Dyeing Workshop. Create color with lichen, with botanist Cheshire Mayrsohn! Seek out and identify lichens, learn about the mordants that make dye "stick" to yarn and cloth, then create rich, colorful dyes and dyed samples. \$40/\$35 MPA members.

Saturday, 24 January, 10am-1pm. Silk Painting Workshop. Beginners and those who "can't draw" are encouraged to attend! All materials provided. \$30/\$25 MPA members.

We welcome new members to fill out the form below and receive *Nature Trails* through December of next year. Membership payments allow us to give modest honoraria to our speakers, as well as to pay for the publication and mailing of *Nature Trails*.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail checks to: **Eugene Natural History Society, P.O. Box 3082, Eugene, OR 97403**

Name_____

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ANNUAL DUES:	Contributing	20.00
	Family	15.00
	Individual	10.00
	Life Membership	100.00

Do you have any special experience in natural history?_____

Would you like to organize/lead field trips?_____

Teach informal classes?_____

Work on committees?_____

What natural history topics interest you for future talks?_____

ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics, Remainder of 2008-2009

12 December 2008 - Dick Lamster, past president, Lane County Audubon Society

"Thinking inside the box: bird nests."

16 January 2009 - Joe Moll, Executive Director, McKenzie River Trust

"Why is there a river in my forest?"

20 February 2009 - Bitty Roy, Professor of Biology, University of Oregon

"Biodiversity Hotspots Around the World"

20 March 2009 - Emily Steel, Restoration Ecologist, City of Eugene

"Green Gold: West Eugene's grassland communities"

17 April 2009 - Steve Sillett, Associate Professor, Humboldt State University

"Ecology and Physiology of the World's Tallest Trees"

15 May 2009 - Bruce Mate, Director, Marine Mammal Institute, Newport, Oregon

"The Biggest and the Deepest: Tracking Whales"

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