

NatureTrails

Published by the Eugene Natural History Society

Volume Forty-four, Number Three, March 2009



**Emily Steel, Restoration Ecologist, Parks
and Open Space Division, City of Eugene**

"Green Gold: West Eugene's grassland communities"

**Friday, 20 March 2009, 7:30PM, Room 100,
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

This month's speaker, restoration ecologist Ms. Emily Steel, met with Kris and me at an undisclosed location (where beer is served) for a delightful ninety-minute conversation. Right off the bat she allowed as how the question "what is a restoration ecologist?" is not an easy one. Her answer, which emerged over the course of the conversation, bore strong resemblance to Webster's definition of restoration: a putting or bringing back to a former, normal, unimpaired state or condition. A restoration ecologist works to bring a degraded ecosystem back to a previous, less-disturbed and more intact condition. But Emily went on to point out the obvious conundrum in her field: for a natural ecosystem, what is 'normal'? What is 'former'? Given enough time, all ecosystems change. What should be her target? How much human influence should she strive to erase in her projects? Back to what we think the sites might have been like before European Americans showed up, when native peoples were using fire to modify their landscape? How can she account for the reality of today, and prepare for the coming climate changes in the future?

Her conclusion seemed to be that the projects she is part of need to remove enough human influence and restore enough of the natural components so that the sites can perpetuate themselves without our help.

Emily Steel is a city girl. She grew up in the Chicago area, in Evanston, Illinois. Her parents were not outdoor folk. She said her early life was pretty urban, except for summers. While in grade school her younger brother and she got to go to summer camp in Michigan. Their first overnight tenting experiences were exciting adventures for kids whose usual outdoor forays were in parks or backyards.



For her undergraduate education Emily chose Tufts University, trading the Chicago environs for greater Boston, but she maintained a connection with the outdoors: she was a counselor at that Michigan camp for four summers while going to Tufts. Tufts was a fantastic experience, she said. She ended up with a degree in geology – a far cry from international relations, which was what she thought she was interested in before she got there.

Emily's first job, still in the Boston area, was with an environmental consulting firm. Her initial assignment involving testing contaminated sites, which she hated because it didn't fit with her idea of geology. But then she got to work on wetland delineation and characterization.

Five years later she had become so interested in wetlands that she decided pursue a graduate degree, and headed for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her urban roots made the decision to go to UW a tough one: Madison is only 250,000; how could a town that small be interesting? She loved it. She took her degree in the Institute for Environmental Studies,

a loose confederation with over a hundred affiliated faculty. The Institute's interdisciplinary approach, combining social and scientific aspects of environmental and ecological research, was just the applied approach she was after.

While doing her graduate work Emily engaged in parallel activities: she worked for the Riverland Conservancy – a land trust similar in approach to our McKenzie River Trust. It had a 1,800-acre preserve, with remnant prairies and fields to be restored. She also coordinated the faculty in the Madison Ecology Group.

After four years in the upper Midwest, in 2004 Emily took her new MS degree west to Colorado, to a position with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (she had taken ornithology courses at UW for fun, and they now served her well – there’s a lesson there for all of us). There she looked at bird uses of restored wetlands, in sites all over the state: along the front range, in the high desert of the San Luis Valley, and the playas and short-grass prairie in the eastern part of that beautiful state. Unfortunately, the program’s major financial supporter, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, switched its focus to other habitats and species, and as in Oregon and everywhere else in the country, funding dried up like those playas. Support for her position ran out after two plus years, to their loss and our gain.

Following her stint with RMBO she came to Oregon in 2006, accepting the position of Restoration Ecologist in the Parks and Open Space Division of the City of Eugene.

As you have no doubt gathered, Emily’s path to her now intimate connection with natural history has been somewhat unusual. She didn’t get that early start that many of our speakers have related, but she got there. She has maintained good focus; each of her positions has set her up for the next step in her career. Building on her foundation of experiential and traditional education she has achieved in a short time a level of expertise that will enable her to be a force for good. Emily is a petite bundle of energy doing her part to stem the tide of human-caused degradation of our environment.

One of the projects Emily will talk to us about, the West Eugene Wetlands Project, involves close cooperation between the City, The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. She pointed out that this is not atypical; many sites that need restoring have more than one interested group involved, and more can be accomplished together than any one group can do on its own. Although tangential to the science involved, this recognition of the crucial role collaboration plays will be critical to the success of the restorations.

Emily will talk to us about the wet and upland prairies and oak savanna habitats of the West Eugene Wetlands, just at the edge of town. These ecosystems have evolved over thousands of years, through geologic events, biological interactions, stochasticity, and anthropogenic manipulation. And all of that was before conversion to urban and agricultural uses! Today, sadly, our native Willamette Valley prairies remain on less than one percent of their historic distribution. Despite these losses, there are still gems right here in our own backyard, and we have the potential to restore them. Emily will go into what the best estimates are of what a restoration project should look like when it is completed: what plants should be in it, and where, and what animals will come back to it once it becomes self-sustaining. Please join us for an enjoyable and informative evening, at 7:30pm on 20 March 2009 in Room 100, Willamette Hall, University of Oregon, to hear Emily Steel’s lecture “Green Gold: West Eugene’s grassland communities.” John Carter

ANOTHER WORLD, by Reida Kimmel

We have just returned from our very first trip to Golden and Silver Falls, located about twenty-five miles northeast of Coos Bay, and reached by a narrow road that follows the Millicoma River and Glenn Creek to Golden and Silver Falls Natural Area. The weather was not favorable, rain followed by snow, followed by hail, and the walking path was very wet. Luckily the trails to each

of the falls are nearly level and were not at all slippery. For falls that are so close, each is very distinctive. Enormous fragrant myrtle trees line the shores of Glenn Creek as one walks down the short trail to Golden Falls, which thunders abruptly down an ochre sandstone face, falling two hundred feet to the creek below. Silver Falls is lower, only one hundred and sixty feet high, but here two powerful streams of water crash onto huge broken basalt boulders. To view the base of Silver Falls one need only walk up

the left-hand side of Silver Creek, on a quarter-mile long trail lined with alders and firs. But to go to the top of both falls, one must take the main trail on the other side of Silver Creek. This walk is only moderately difficult, and the trail to the top and back is only about two miles long, but our glasses were so wet that we were having a hard time seeing, and the dogs were getting even crankier than we were. We opted to go back to the cozy cabin our family of six had rented on the banks of Glenn Creek.

Luckily I had several other walks in better weather that weekend, exploring the plants and beauty of the creek below the falls. Our cabin was the last house on the road and it was very peaceful to follow the creek as it alternately meandered and rushed towards the sea. I have never seen such magnificent myrtles. Tall and lush, they dominated the plant community along the river. Occasionally, equally magnificent red cedars and alders appeared in the groves as well. The creek runs through a steep and very narrow canyon. On either side of the road basalt cliffs rise vertically to snow and tree covered summits. Many of the cliff faces are wonderfully worn and sculpted, an army of giants looking down into the valley. In spite of all the rain, and the barren scars of recent logging, the water was remarkably clear. The creek flowed through golden sandy pools and bubbled and crashed over basalt ledges. How wonderful it would be to fish and swim here! Thick stands of thimbleberry and salmonberry bushes promised treats to come. There were even

flowers in the snow. Milkmaids (*Dentaria californica*) grew in lush mats under the myrtles and in some places were in full bloom. The myrtle trees too were nearly in flower. It was hard to believe I was only a few miles from my home. It was a different world.

Indoors there was another treasure, a book, Lionel Youst's "Above the Falls: An Oral and Folk History of Upper Glenn Creek, Coos County, Oregon." Chuck read aloud to us, of a beautiful valley above the falls, settled by pioneers at the end of the nineteenth century. Today that valley is completely uninhabited and inaccessible. The author grew up in the valley above the falls and has assembled the reminiscences of others of his generation. The hard-working, resourceful homesteaders lived by farming and logging, but also by hunting, fishing and gathering wild plants. The trail that we did not take, so narrow and steep that William Sullivan declares it unsafe for children, was once a road for automobiles and log trucks. It was no less steep then, and some of the stories of accidents and hair-raising rides down the hill in brakeless trucks make hilarious reading. The depression made the homesteaders increasingly reliant on logging to pay the taxes. Eventually Weyerhaeuser bought up most of the land, and a forest nearly primeval was all logged by 1950. The company logged again in the early 1990s. Now there is nothing left of this special place but huge tree plantations and memories of a lost world

Thank you, McConnaughys, by Melody Clarkson

Evelyn McConnaughy, one of our longtime natural history enthusiasts and environmental activists, has suffered recently from a weakening heart condition and is now unable to attend our monthly meetings. Evelyn not only has supported the ENHS through her participation on our Board, but also has contributed greatly to the preservation of our coastal biosphere here in Oregon. With Evelyn's consent, her son, Ted McConnaughy, presented to the Eugene Natural History Society, a book that Bayard, Evelyn's husband, had purchased many years earlier. This wonderful tome titled, *Contributions to the Natural History of the United States of America, Vol. 1*, by Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz, was first published in 1857. It consists of three parts: 1. An essay on classification. 2. North American Testudinata, and 3. Embryology of the turtle. Internet chatter suggests that Agassiz's essay on classification is especially valuable, even for scientists today. Though Agassiz

studied and lectured primarily in Europe, the Encyclopædia Britannica online comments: “He achieved lasting fame through his innovative teaching methods, which altered the character of natural science education in the United States.”

Any ENHS member who would like to borrow this book for her/his own study, or just to soak up a bit of 19th century scientific prose, please contact David Wagner, the temporary holder of this volume. The book will be on display during the May wildflower festival at the arboretum. **Thank you so much, Ted, and all of the McConnaughys, for your thoughtful donation to the Eugene Natural History Society.** An aside: Evelyn welcomes visitors at any time to her residence on Fairmont.

Events of Interest in the Community

Tuesday, 14 April, 7:30pm. “Make Love, Not War: What Chimpanzees Can Tell Us About the Evolution of Human Behavior”, a lecture by Professor Frances White, Department of Anthropology and Institute of Cognitive and Decision Sciences, University of Oregon. Room 182, Lillis Hall, University of Oregon. This is the fourth in a series of lectures celebrating the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species. It will be geared to an informed, lay audience.

Audubon Society

Tuesday, 24 March, 7:30pm. Feathers and Flora. Dan Gleason will present an illustrated program on the many and varied relationships, some of which we don’t ordinarily observe, between birds and plants. Examples: what makes columbine the perfect flower for hummingbirds? How do chili peppers encourage birds, but not mammals, to eat their seeds?

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 mtpisgjp@efn.org for more information or to sign up for any of the following Arboretum activities.

Friday, 20 March, 5:30-7pm. Equinox Nature Readings. Join this gathering of nature and literature lovers in honoring the Vernal Equinox and sharing the beauty of the written word. You are invited to bring your own writings, works by favorite authors and poets, nature artwork, or just come to listen. This beautiful Arboretum tradition is facilitated by Daniel Ray. No RSVP required; meet at the Visitor Center. Suggested donation \$5. **(But don’t forget, you have to get to Willamette Hall by 7:30! Ed.)**

Saturday, 28 March, 1-3pm. Signs of Spring Family Walk. Hike the trails with nature guide Tom Bettman on this family-friendly walk. Explore the first leaves and flowers of the season and other signs of spring awakening, from new growth to the return of wildlife. \$5 adults, \$2 kids, MPA members by donation. No RSVP required.

Saturdays, 21 March, 18 April, 9 May, 6 June, 8-10am. Spring Bird Walks. Bring your binoculars and join birder Davey Wendt. Grab a copy Davey’s list of 50 or more species present in the Arboretum at the first walk, and try to find them all this season! Limit 20; RSVP by calling Clare at (541) 747-1504. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. \$5/MPA members free.

Saturday, 4 April, 5-8pm. Great Light, Great Photos Workshop. Follow-up session Saturday, 11 April, 1-3pm. This hands-on workshop with professional photographer David Stone will teach you how to identify great light by location, time of day, weather conditions and other factors, as well as how to use filters to optimize your photographic art. Explore the Arboretum during the extended field time this workshop includes. Participants should bring their camera and instruction book, spare batteries, tripod, and a roll of slide film or empty memory card. Pre-registration required; call (541) 747-1504. \$25/\$20 members. See more of David’s photos at www.wildlandphoto.net.

Sunday, 5 April, 1-4pm. Spring Wildflower Walk. Immerse yourself in the splendor of Mount Pisgah's native spring wildflowers with botanist Dave Wagner. This three-hour walk will give you ample time to delve into the Arboretum's April delights. No RSVP required. Meet at the Visitor Center. \$5/MPA members by donation.

Saturday, 11 April, 10am-noon. Slowpoke Sketch Walk. Science illustrator Katura Reynolds will introduce basic skills for field sketching, then lead you on a walk that is short in distance but fascinating in detail. Bring portable drawing supplies and dress for the weather. Anticipate muddy knees as we peek at tiny treasures along the trail! No RSVP required. Meet at the Visitor Center. \$5/MPA members by donation.

Willamette Resources and Education Network

10 March, 9-10am. Wetland Wander. Meet at the Checkermallow Access Point off of Royal Ave. WREN will provide binoculars. For more information contact Holly McRae at 683-6494.

22 March, 2pm. A Tale of Two Rivers. Eugene Downtown Public Library, 100 W. 10th Ave. WREN partners with the Oregon Chautauqua program from the Oregon Council for the Humanities to present geologist Janet Brown, who will discuss the importance of the Deschutes and the Willamette Rivers in Oregon's history and culture. Brown shows how the geologic formation of these two critical waterways has been influenced by, and in turn sculpted, human interaction. The Willamette, with its water originating primarily from rainfall and surface flow, is typical of Oregon rivers. The Deschutes, "a most peculiar river," as the explorer John C. Fremont noted in 1843, has the majority of its water coming from constant underground flow. Brown has twenty-five years of experience with the U.S. Geologic Survey. The program is free. For more information contact Holly McRae at 683-6494. OCH is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. More information about OCH's programs, including "Women Photographers in Oregon" and "Out of the Ordinary Oregon", which will also be at the Eugene Public Library in March, can be found at www.oregonhum.org.

Saturday, 28 March, Session 1 – 9:30am-noon, Session 2 – 1-3:30 pm. Wetlands & Weaving for Wee Ones. Meet at the West Eugene Wetlands Yurt, 751 S. Danebo Ave.

Children of all ages can participate in this one -day educational premier about gathering and weaving of Native American Baskets from native wetland plants. Ethnobotanist Nan MacDonald will begin each session with a "walk about" in the wetlands to explore, discover, and learn about the wild native trees & plants used for making baskets. Participants will then return to the yurt to make a simple traditional Abenacki Ash & Sweetgrass keepsake. The event will include a presentation representing the cultures of the Abenacki, Mohawk, and Ojibway people. Each session is limited to 20 children and registration is required. Contact Holly McRae at hmcr@wewetlands.org or 683-6494. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Suggested donation: \$2/WREN member and \$4/non-member. This class is part of the West Eugene Wetlands Ethnobotany Project, which aims to connect cultural history with restoration and education. For more on this project see the Institute for Culture and Ecology website: www.ifcae.org/projects/wewera/

Saturday, 4 April, 10-11:30am. Eggs & Nests Family Program. Meet at the West Eugene Wetlands Yurt, 751 S. Danebo Ave. Discover the beauty and wonder of wetland bird nests and eggs! During the program, participants have the opportunity to paint an egg to take home. Suggested Donation: \$2/WREN member and \$4/non-member in Eugene. For more information, contact Holly McRae at hmcr@wewetlands.org or 683-6494.

Tuesday, 14 April, 9-10am. Wetland Wander. Meet at the head of the Tsanchiifin Trail where South Danebo Avenue crosses Amazon Creek. WREN will provide binoculars. For more information contact Holly McRae at 683-6494.

North American Butterfly Association

Monday, 6 April, 7pm, refreshments, 7:30pm presentation. Butterflies and Moths on Nature Conservancy Lands in Oregon. EWEB Training Center, 500 East 4th Street, Eugene.

Jason Nuckols will describe The Nature Conservancy's work in Oregon with emphasis on conservation of the Willamette Valley and butterfly and moth projects across the State.

North American Rock Garden Society, Emerald Chapter

Tuesday, 7 April, 7pm. How to Build a Successful Rock Garden. Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St., Eugene. Loren Russell, who lives and gardens in Corvallis, will discuss siting, selection of rock and soil, techniques of rock handling, and the effective placement of rock to create naturalistic garden features. The meeting is free and open to the public.

We welcome new members! To join ENHS, fill out the form below. You will 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*. Please mail your check to Eugene Natural History Society, at the address below.

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What natural history topics interest you for future talks? _____

EARLY REMINDER: ENHS bike-path cleanup is the morning of Sunday, 19 April, two days after our April meeting. Fun and fellowship guaranteed!

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

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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