

Nature Trails

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American Crow attacking John Marzluff. He is wearing the mask worn by the researcher who captured this crow earlier.

**Dr. John Marzluff, Professor of Wildlife Sciences,
University of Washington**

“In the Company of Crow and Ravens”

**Friday, 11 December 2009, 7:30pm, Room 100,
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

**Professor Marzluff’s lecture is co-sponsored by the
Lane County Audubon Society**

Ornithologist John Marzluff is the real deal. He is becoming increasingly popular, as witnessed by his being interviewed on National Public Radio this summer (if you want to hear this interview, Google ‘John Marzluff NPR’, then click on ‘Listen to the story’), and the fact that his book *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*, co-authored by Tony Angell, won the 2006 Washington State Book Award for general nonfiction. But a solid body of scientific accomplishment, which I’ll touch on below, backs up this fame. I can’t remember now whether I had finished *In the Company of Crows and Ravens* or was still reading it when I was talking to Kris about how good it was and wondered aloud if he would be willing to come down from Seattle and speak to the ENHS. Adopting the strategy of long-time ENHS member and past president Ted Eaton, who always said, “never say no for someone else,” the Board said to go ahead and ask him. When I sent the first email I was fully prepared for a no: full schedule, too far to travel for a public lecture... that sort of thing. But he said he’d be happy to speak to us. Wow. So we have in store for us a wonderful evening, on 11 December.

John Marzluff is Professor of Wildlife Science in The College of the Environment at the University of Washington. He has authored over one hundred scientific articles on various aspects of bird behavior and wildlife management. He has edited the books *Avian Ecology and Conservation in an Urbanizing World*; *Radiotelemetry and Animal Populations*; and *Urban Ecology: An International Perspective on the Interaction Between Humans and Nature*. He is a member of the board of editors for the journals *Bird Behavior*; *Acta Ornithologica*; *Landscape Ecology*; and *Ecological Applications*. He is a leader of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery team for the critically endangered Mariana Crow and has advised the National Academy of Sciences on its recovery.

Marzluff’s father was in the Navy, so the family moved a lot. John was born in California, but most of his formative years were in Kansas. His high-school biology teacher in Lawrence, who

took his classes on many field trips, turned him on to wildlife science. He chose the University of Montana for his undergraduate studies because of its reputation in wildlife biology. From Montana he went to Northern Arizona University for his graduate work, because of its strong focus on animal behavior.

It was at NAU that he became interested in corvids, especially how they communicate, their social organization, and their foraging behavior. He studied Pinyon Jays for his PhD thesis project (another of his books is entitled *The Pinyon Jay*). Late in his thesis work a crow came to a nest he was monitoring and ate most of the chicks (an astonishingly original excuse; “My dog ate my homework” cannot compare). As an aside, he says that if one does avian field research, roughly half of one’s study subjects get eaten before the study is complete. He was really angry at this crow and chased it away, instead of letting happen what



would happen, which is how he operates now. But afterwards he began asking questions: how did it find that nest? Would it come back and finish the job? And so began his interest in crows.

While in the final stages of his PhD, NAU hosted a symposium on social behavior of animals (the book *The Ecology of Social Behavior* came from it). Burnd Heinrich from the University of Vermont spoke on raven behavior. John became interested in this topic and ended up spending three years with Heinrich, studying crows and ravens in New England – looking at communication within these species.

From Vermont Marzluff went to Idaho to study the effects of military training on raptor behavior (a tank training range in southwest Idaho overlaps the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area). His work area broadened, and one of his studies involved travel from Boise to Forks, Washington, to study the effects of birds of prey on the Marbled Murrelet. Through this effort his connection with the University of Washington began, and in 1997, after six years in Idaho, he became a faculty member in the University of Washington’s School of Forest Resources, his present location. State, federal, and private forest

managers jointly support his recent research on corvid predation of the Marbled Murrelet. Involving all these major players maximizes the likelihood that the research findings will be implemented, to the future benefit of the Marbled Murrelet. By involving all stakeholders in a contentious issue, like how timber harvest may potentially influence an endangered species, his team hopes to avoid polarizations and mistrust that were common in the similar effort to understand how timber harvest influences Spotted Owls.

Another focus of Marzluff's current research is on bird and small mammal populations along the gradient of urbanization from Seattle to the Olympic and Cascade Mountains. He and his colleagues look at how human settlement patterns affect structure and function of bird communities, with the goal of generating meaningful policy to better conserve birds where humans live.

Another fascinating research topic in Marzluff's group is how corvids can recognize individual humans. You may have heard him interviewed on NPR this summer, talking about this work, about how eerie it is to be scolded by crows that either you have captured or that have learned from other crows that you are a bad person. On a recent campus walk he was scolded by 47 of the 53 crows he encountered; other walkers were left alone.

In his ENHS talk John will touch on how crows and ravens have inspired humans over the course of our history (he points out that Van Gogh, Shakespeare, the Hopi and Koyukon People, Mark Twain, and the rock band *Counting Crows* have drawn inspiration from crows or ravens) and on how we affect these adaptable birds. He will describe some of his research illustrating the evolution, ecology, and amazing behavior of crows and ravens, and discuss the hypothesis that human and crow cultures have each influenced the other. He will touch on the many roles these animals play: irritating and competitive pests, targets, creators, symbols, diviners, and inspirations; discuss the role of crows and ravens as nest predators; and finish up with details about the conservation needs of the endangered crows of Hawaii and the Mariana Islands. Expect to see marvelous photographs and video clips.

Both the Lane County Audubon Society and ENHS urge you to take advantage of this opportunity. Please come, and invite your friends

and neighbors, to hear Professor John Marzluff present "In the Company of Crows and Ravens", at 7:30pm on Friday, 11 December 2009, in Room 100 Willamette Hall, University of Oregon Campus. John Carter

Educational Experiences By Tom Titus

The problem, then, is how to bring about a striving for harmony with land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness. This is the problem of "conservation education."

—Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Late one winter I was blowing off some cabin fever exploring the Coast Range west of Monmouth. A small seep ran through a culvert beneath the road, just another of myriad unnamed waterways trickling from some insignificant pore in the mountains, the sweaty runoff from a winter of saturating rains. Spring was coming although the only noticeable difference in the weather was that the rain was a few degrees warmer. Salmonberry and skunk cabbage were unfurling new shoots that would become a womb of deep green underbrush. Forcing my way through thick salmonberry canes on the downhill side of the road, I found a piece of bark resting at the edge of the water. The bark covered over the sweet spot between stream and not stream, the place where running water became wet forest floor, another of Nature's transitory states that defy our boundary-laden consciousness. I lifted it carefully. Beneath were two salamanders, each about three inches in length, yellow brown on top, greenish yellow underneath, salt and pepper spots, prominent dark eyes protruding from the top of the head. They were southern torrent salamanders, and they were cute as a button.

Although I grew up in outdoors, I'd never stopped to look for a salamander. The previous fall quarter at the university, we had used preserved specimens to learn the names and field characters for all Oregon amphibian species. The exercise certainly served a purpose, but the "animals" were just faded, rubbery caricatures of things with which I'd had no previous experience. Their reality was as formalin-preserved sticks in clear jars of ethanol on black Formica counters

under fluorescent lights. Certainly I had no favorites.

Since that encounter with torrent salamanders in the Coast Range, I must have caught about a jillion salamanders, from worm-like *Oedipina* in the cloud forests of Costa Rica to slippery dusky salamanders in the mountains of North Carolina. I love salamanders. But these days I mostly love showing other people how to love salamanders. In June I take my herpetology class salamander hunting at Hidden Lake in the Oregon Cascades. The field trip always starts with the same story, about a man named Jim Kezer who loved salamanders long before I did and who loved Hidden Lake and who loved the Eugene Natural History Society. How Jim took me on my first serious salamander adventure to Costa Rica a long time ago, and how years later I reconnected with him in his living room where Society board meetings were always held. I had asked Jim for advice on field trips for a herpetology course I was about to teach for the first time, and he replied without hesitation "You absolutely have to take them to Hidden Lake." I tell my students that when Jim finally left us for good, we spread his ashes around the lake, and now he lives there in a very physical way. But he is there also spiritually by virtue of the fact that we were there to look at salamanders because of him. I hope my students get it. One always hopes for the best in these things.

How do we attach meaning to our experiences in Nature? We could sit down in a lab and sort a jar full of preserved salamanders from Hidden Lake into species-appropriate piles. Or we could follow the washboard gravel road into the parking area, disappear into old growth Douglas fir, pick through piles of wet, decayed wood for *Ensatina* with its ridiculous golden armpits or the Oregon slender salamander with its tiny legs and its back covered with brick-red herringbone. We could do all this after the first September rains, when the huckleberries are ripe and the blood red, sweet-tart juice stains our fingers and tongues. We might sit quietly by the lake and remember Jim. Then on the way home we could stop for pie and coffee and be happy for all that our earthly existence has given us. There are many ways to know our place. Maybe therein lies the heart of our response to Aldo Leopold; that developing a sense of "landfullness" requires us to provide people with meaningful experiences in nature. We must

recognize that there are many ways to and levels of that experience, and a diversity of avenues by which people derive that meaning must be available. I love watching my students transform themselves from disparate groups of twos and threes to a fully functioning tribe over a long weekend in the field. To some, this is the capstone of the experience. Others simply love stalking collared lizards on the rocks above Alvord Desert or standing in awe of a western rattlesnake stretched across a desert road. None of us are the Deciders in this regard. Perhaps then, the most important thing that we can accomplish is to provide an open-ended venue from which people can derive their own meaningful involvement with Nature. As a Society committed to conservation education, there may be nothing more important that we could accomplish.

Christmas Tree 2005 by John Carter

This tale has for its ultimate origin a collection of attitudes that reach back at least one generation, to a frugality hammered sharp and strong on the anvil of the great depression. Both my brother and I soaked up those waste-not-want-not lessons from our folks and aunts and uncles and grandparents so deeply they can never be unlearned. So when I told Bill in 2000, the first Christmas after we moved to Eugene, that we had bought a Christmas tree he said "Don't you ever do that again; I have an unlimited supply out back under the power lines and you must - MUST - come here and get one from now on."

We followed his order the year my daughter Beth and her family came to visit, and it was a memorable outing. Bill fired up the little tractor and we started off to the back of their 40 acres, fording the creek, heading back behind the high ground with the mature timber to the spot where the high-voltage lines skirt the back fence. He has to keep the trees trimmed under the lines, so it's a natural place to get the holiday tree. Ma nature keeps planting them, he has to keep them in check, so taking a few for the traditional decoration is a guilt-free act. After we crawled under the electric fence and meandered up the hill we had about twenty trees to choose from. Bill's family picked theirs, and I let Kris, Beth, son-in-law Paul, and grandsons Danny and Chris choose ours. We hauled them down the hill, threw them over the fence, and loaded them into the scoop in

the front of the tractor. If memory serves, Danny and Chris got to help drive the tractor back, across the creek and through the pasture, while the rest of us had a pleasant stroll punctuated by the excitement of trying to get across the creek without getting wet feet. Taking the pristine tree out of the tractor scoop, putting it on top of the rig and tying it down was so easy it barely generated a permanent memory.

The 2005 harvest was a lot different. Bill, Deb and family were gone on a winter vacation over in Sun River, nobody was visiting us, and Kris was working, so I went myself. The addition of a bull to their herd was a concern, especially because he was often to be found on the other side of the creek. Bill had said he was pretty gentle – his name was Ferdinand – but a bull is a bull. When I got there Reba and Cody were happy to see me, and I was relieved to realize I'd at least have two dogs with me. I thought maybe they could communicate to the bull, if he was back there, that I was family and not to kill me. After putting on my rubber boots, sweatshirt, coat, and mittens, I grabbed the saw and the rope and we headed off: through the well-used pasture, across the creek, around the oak grove (where the beavers have installed ponds in spite of all efforts to the contrary), under the fence and along the edge of the stand of trees Bill planted a few years ago, to the Christmas tree patch. No bull, so at least one thing that could have gone very wrong did not.

Now, my reputation as a Christmas tree chooser is well established among my immediate and even extended family. All who know any of our family history are secure in their belief that any tree I choose must inevitably be the worst possible of all choices. I am expected to come home with something scraggly, sparse, and asymmetrical. Had I only kept a regular Christmas-tree journal I could now publish the definitive treatise on how to pick a tree that will be universally ridiculed. I was determined that this year's selection would break the mold, and so I picked a nice, full tree, tall and wide, with very many branches. I cut it down and started down the hill with it in tow. When at the fence I realized it was too heavy and bulky to pick up (I'd guess it weighed between 80 and 100 pounds). So I had to slide it under the fence. Since my arms were already tired after going no more than 100 yards I tied the rope to the butt-end, wrapped it around my waist, and headed off across the field, the tree grudgingly in

tow. When I got to the creek I was breathing hard and even though it was a cold December day, bathed in sweat. I tried to pick the tree up to carry it across, but it was so wide and dense I couldn't get close enough to the center of gravity. After a brief but intense struggle the next step was clear: the tree had to be dragged through the creek. Ordinarily this wouldn't make much difference, but on this particular day it was to be of chief importance. The temperature had been below freezing during the night and was now just above freezing, so the material you normally find in a pasture frequented by several of the bovine persuasion was of a gelatinous consistency, perfect for adhering to the myriad, freshly wetted needles of my Douglas fir tree. As I labored up the hill toward the gate the piles became so numerous it was impossible to avoid them, or the mud that stretched for many yards in front of the gate. When I dropped it behind my aged Explorer the tree was a few pounds heavier than before, and not nearly as green. Getting it onto the roof of the Explorer was all I could do. I had to burrow through the branches to grab the trunk, and wrestle with it every foot of the way, essentially rolling it up the side of the vehicle. When it was safely balanced up there I took stock: my sweatshirt, and as far as I could tell my hair, my face and my glasses were all covered with fir needles, mud, and cow manure, as were the top and sides of the rig. After a cursory brush-off I roped it down and hit the road for home.

The trip from Lebanon to Eugene normally takes about an hour, but with the temperature right at freezing the mist was coating everything with ice and my speed had to be lowered several notches. Taking the Interstate was out of the question because I didn't want to drive 55 while everybody else was doing 75 – with the tree on the top, doing 75 might have led to a snapped rope. An airborne, 100-pound, cow-dung-covered Christmas tree on an icy Interstate highway could warrant a new category in the Defense Department's list of Weapons of Mass Destruction. So I took the back roads at a stately pace, picked up 99E at Halsey and came home through Junction City. After enduring innumerable stares from passing drivers, stares of disbelief at the massive, green-brown, blackberry-vine-covered tree on top of my sadly besmirched rig, I made it to the safety of our driveway.

As I began releasing the tree from its bondage the aroma was, shall we say, attention getting. The phrase "barnyard nose" may imply a certain desirable earthiness in a red wine but it should never have to be used to describe the smell of a Christmas tree. And so, regardless of the temperature hovering at the freezing mark, there was nothing for it but to give the tree a good bath. After dragging it around back and struggling to get it upright and balanced against another tree I uncoiled the nearest hose – which had already been drained for the winter – and spent at least fifteen minutes getting rid of all the brown I could see. This had to be followed by once again

carefully draining the hose and the faucet.

Of course now the temperature stubbornly refused to rise above the freezing mark, so most of the water that didn't drip off immediately still resided in solid form on those myriad needles, waiting to melt and drip on the carpet.

Post-script: The tree did get inside, and its only aroma was that wonderful evergreen bouquet. It was by far the bushiest, heaviest tree I've ever brought home for the holidays, and I secretly exulted when Kris's sole negative comment was "It's too wide."

Events of Interest in the Community

Audubon Society

Friday, 11 December, 7:30pm. "In the Company of Crows and Ravens." by John Marzluff. Normally there is no December meeting of the Lane County Audubon Society, but this year is an exception. The LCAS is co-hosting Dr. Marzluff, along with ENHS. See the introduction for further details.

Mount Pisgah Arboretum

No December or early January MPA events listed on the MPA website.

The North American Butterfly Association

Monday, 7 December, 7:00pm refreshments, 7:30pm presentation. Enhancing and Restoring Prairie and Savanna. Jason Blazar, local landscape ecologist, stewardship coordinator for Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah, forest manager for the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division, and Executive Director of the Camas Educational Network, will discuss regional efforts to enhance and restore prairie and savanna landscapes within the central southern Willamette valley. He will utilize three case studies to showcase efforts across the spectrum of land stewardship to improve habitat for butterflies and other creatures on small and large scales; providing benefits for butterflies, plants, and the broader community. EWEB Training Center 500 West 4th, Eugene. Free and All Welcome.

WREN For more information on the following activities call 683-6494.

8 December, 9-10 am. Wetland Wander - Tsanchiifin Walk.

Nearby Nature

Wednesday, 9 December, all day. Join us at Papa's Pizza for a Nearby Nature fundraiser in support of our partnership with the Rachel Carson Center at Churchill High School. All year long, a dedicated group of students and staff will be doing environmental restoration work twice a month in Alton Baker Park's Wildflower Hollow. You can help support this important project: On 9 December, all day long, Papa's Pizza on 11th will donate 50% of the cost of your food order (not for delivery items) to Nearby Nature if you bring in our special coupon. Coupons are available at <http://www.nearbynature.org/membership/benefit-days>. Coupons will not be available at Papa's—bring your coupon with you! BRING FRIENDS! TELL YOUR NEIGHBORS! ORDER PIZZA FOR YOUR STAFF MEETING! THANKS!

Saturday, 12 December, 10 am-noon: Warm in the Wild. Build a simple shelter and learn how to stay warm in the wilderness using common sense and a few simple materials. We meet outside the Alton Baker Park Host Residence, rain or shine. Cost: \$2/person, \$5/family. Pre-registration is suggested: 541-687-9699.

The Native Plant Society

Monday, 14 December, 7:30 pm. Holiday Social and slide show. Bring a snack to share. EWEB Training Room, 500 East 4th Avenue, Eugene. Call 541-746-947

Monday, 11 January, 7:30 pm. Flora of Steens Mountain in Southeastern Oregon. Dave Predeek will show slides of alpine flora growing on this isolated, fault-block mountain in Oregon's high-desert region. EWEB Training Room at 500 East 4th Avenue, Eugene. Call 541-345-5531.

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*.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

Name _____

Phone _____

Address _____

E-mail (optional) _____

City _____ State & Zip _____

ANNUAL DUES:	Contributing	20.00	
	Family	15.00	
	Individual	10.00	
	Life Membership	300.00	

Generosity is Appreciated

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 2009-2010

11 December - John M. Marzluff – Ornithologist: "In the Company of Crows and Ravens"

15 January - Rick Boatner – Wildlife Biologist: " Stop the Invasion: Invasive Wildlife in Oregon"

19 February - Greg Retallack – Geologist: "Past Climate Crises"

19 March - Sue Beilke – Herpetologist: "Native Turtles of Oregon; How these Ancient Species Are Faring in Modern Times"

16 April - Dean Walton -- Ecologist, Science Librarian: "Freshwater Tidal Swamps of the Atlantic Coast"

21 May - Pat Kennedy – Ecologist: "Can Cows and Birds Coexist in NE Oregon?"

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