

Nature Trails

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Our speaker and several of his subjects, on Cape Crozier, Ross Island, Antarctica.

Among Penguins: A Bird Man in Antarctica

Noah Strycker

Author and Birder at Large

**Friday, 15 April 2011, 7:30pm, Room 100
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

Noah Strycker's email handle is telling: birdboy. He's a young man – three years ago he was finishing his B.S., in Fisheries and Wildlife Science, at Oregon State University – but his lists of experiences, awards, and publications belie that fact. He has just returned from a three-month internship in Costa Rica. Also under his belt are sojourns on Southeast Farallon Island (off the San Francisco coast), and in Australia, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, Panama, Fiji, New Zealand, and, of course, Antarctica. All these travels have one thing in common: birds.

Strycker's talk to us could be likened to a home game. He grew up in Creswell and graduated from South Eugene High School, where he excelled academically (National Merit Scholar) and athletically (MVP on the men's tennis team three years running). His infatuation with birds began early. One of his elementary-school teachers would stop class "whenever a cool bird showed up" at the feeder outside the classroom window. This got him started looking for birds in the forested area around his home. When he built some birdhouses and put them up around his house, he got bluebirds! When he was 13 his dad took him to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. At one point on their visit they happened to be in the right place at the right time and he got to see two owls fighting over one snake. The addiction was now complete: he was hooked.

While still in high school Strycker had an article published in *Birding*, the national magazine of the American Birding Association, and when a senior was named 2004 Young Birder of the Year by the American Birding Association. His life list now exceeds 2000, close to two bird species for every week he's been alive.

Strycker might have been a Duck (much more appropriate for his avocation and vocation than Beaver) if the Admissions Office at the University of Oregon had been as farsighted as its sister office at Oregon State University. He decided, after completing his applications, to take a year off after graduating from SEHS. He informed both schools of his plans; the U of O told him he'd have to reapply after returning, but OSU said fine, see you in a year. Off he went, first to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge for three months working for the Army Corps of Engineers. Then his newfound relationship with

the editor at *Birding* netted him a short but productive trip to Taiwan. Next came two months of painting classes at LCC, and finally, three months in Panama, working for Douglas Robinson (our lecturer last December), his future advisor at OSU. Not bad for "a year off." He finished his B.S. at OSU in 2008, graduating magna cum laude. I counted six awards and eleven scholarships in his CV during his undergraduate years. These were not trivial. He got the Udall Scholarship twice, held the OSU Presidential Scholarship from 2004 to 2008, and received the American Ornithologists' Union Student Scholarship from 2004 to 2007.

Strycker contributed a regular column to *WildBird* from 2005 to 2010 (that's 31 contributions), and has published in several other magazines and compilations, including *Living Bird*, the magazine of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

He has a good thing going. His writing talent is supporting his adventures: essentially he makes enough from writing up his last one to fund his next one. I asked him how long he'd keep this up and he was a wee bit evasive, saying it is working well and

he is having a good time, so why not keep at it?

Strycker is nothing if not energetic. While in Australia for the second time – a five-month internship at the Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary in Northwest Australia, studying the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren – he used some of his spare time to train for the Adelaide Marathon, which he completed last August. Now, back

home and between adventures, he's planning to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. He'll start at the south end on 17 May (look for him around town, with a pack on his back, getting ready), soon after he regales us with a talk on his greatest and most favorite adventure: his stay among penguins in Antarctica.

If you saw the feature on Strycker in the Register-Guard a few Sundays ago you'll remember seeing several stark but stunning photographs; those were his. You may also remember that he was there for several months, that he was conducting research, and that he endured being exposed to extreme conditions more than once. But he loved it, and Oregon State University Press has just published the book he wrote about it. At the next Eugene Natural History Society meeting we will be treated to many of his wonderful pictures, hear some of his stories, and learn about the research he did there. Don't miss Noah Strycker's talk, "Among Penguins: A Bird Man in Antarctica,"



on Friday, 15 April 2011, at 7:30 pm in Room 100 Willamette Hall on the U of O campus. Incidentally, the title of his talk is also the title of his book. If you have a copy, bring it along – I bet he'll sign it for you.

John Carter

Watching Rocks Dry by Whitey Lueck

There are some things in life that really don't matter much. And there are other things that truly merit close attention and consideration. At the moment, I am attending to one of the latter.

Last night was clear here on the central Oregon coast and a substantial dew developed in open areas such as meadows. But under the forest canopy of Sitka spruces – where my tent is, just south of Strawberry Hill – everything was dry because the spruces collected the dew before it could reach my tent.

After getting out of my sleeping bag, and then out of my tent, I stepped to the edge of the nearby sandy bluff and said g'morning to Te Moana Nui A Kiwa–The Great Sea of Kiwa to Polynesians...what we call the Pacific Ocean – and then packed up and headed through the woods toward Gwynn Knoll and Bob Creek. As soon as I came out of the forest, everything was wet with dew, so I kept to the highway shoulder instead of wandering through the meadows south of Bob Creek. Soon, I passed Bray Point, where the incoming tide was crashing and booming against the cliff bases far below me.

Shortly thereafter, I descended a grassy bluff that led to the north end of Searose Beach, where I decided to have breakfast in a little cobble-filled cove. When I arrived, all the rounded rocks on the upper beach here were very slippery with dew, as they were still in the shadow of the small hill to the southeast. But as my oatmeal cooked, the sun rose over the hill and began to warm both me and the rocks.

Along this part of the coast, cobbles or beach rocks are relatively homogeneous in color due to the area's geology. The vast majority of them are a slate-gray color when dry – these are derived from the central coast's volcanic basalt cliffs and headlands. Here and there, though, there are cobbles that are a light brown color, and others that are almost black, with many white linear crystals embedded in them. The brown ones are from much softer sedimentary rock, and the blackish ones are from a volcanic rock other than basalt.

After the sun's arrival in the cove, the entire cobbled area between me and the sun shimmered shiny and black for a few minutes, then slowly changed as the rocks began to heat up in the sunshine and evaporate the dew. At first, there were just a few pockets of dull gray rocks amid the sea of still-shiny black ones. After a little while, most of the cobbles turned gray – at least on their tops and their south-facing sides – but their shady north sides remained wet and dark.

Meanwhile, I ate my first course (the oatmeal) and began to prepare the second: a scrambled egg provided for me by Oleander, one of three hens who live with me back on the other side of the Coast Range in the Willamette Valley. The appearance of the cobbles continued to change, with more and more dull gray and less and less shiny black.

By the time I moved on to my third course – a sliced quarter-bagel toasted in butter in the frying pan, then topped with blackberry jam – almost all of the cobbles had lost their mantle of dew. And now, as I enjoy my last course here in the glorious sunshine – a pot of Double Bergamot Earl Grey tea – the only shiny, dark cobbles that remain are a few dozen along a little rivulet a hundred feet away.

Watching rocks dry is of course something anyone can do. It takes no special skill – just time and an uncluttered mind...two commodities that for many people these days are often in short supply.

Wild Horses

By Reida Kimmel

I have a treasure in my jewelry box, a molar, the baby tooth that, long ago, my beloved horse PD shed into his feed tub. It is remarkably beautiful. The crowns of a horse molar are very high in proportion to the rest of the tooth, and the shape is complex. Strong but delicate leaf-like ridges rise from the base. The points are very sharp, and a substance called cement covers the enamel of the surfaces. Once the adult teeth are in place, they continue to grow for the

rest of the horse's life, but wear smooth over the years in spite of the protection of the cement. An old horse's teeth are not beautiful, but they remain perfectly functional until the horse is thirty or more years old. My tooth is not just a sentimental souvenir, however; it tells me some important stories. The Eocene and Oligocene ancestors of modern horses subsisted on a diet of soft leafy vegetation. They did not need specialized teeth. By the late Miocene, members of the genus *Merychippus* had evolved more complex high-crowned teeth and the cement

covering that enabled them to become specialized grass eaters. Grass is silica laden. Without very powerful grinding teeth and the protection that the cement offered for the pits and valleys between the sharp cutting ridges on each tooth, any animal eating grass would have worn its teeth to stubs in a few years. The usual story of horse evolution focuses on the loss of toes over the eons, the descendants of Eocene 'dawn horses' losing the pads on their feet, developing strong hooves, and losing all but the middle toe on each foot. We are told, correctly, that this evolution supremely adapted ancestral species of the horse family to life on the plains, where speed was the best defense against predators. Without the mechanism to cut and process grass, however, horse ancestors could not have inhabited the grassland ecosystem.

In conjunction with its exhibit detailing the evolution of horses and grasslands, the Museum of Natural and Cultural History sponsored a lecture by Dr. Eric Scott, Curator of Paleontology at the San Bernardino County Museum. Dr. Scott told us that the fossil evidence is now overwhelmingly clear that all horse evolution from *Hyracotherium* in the Eocene to the fully evolved *Equus caballus* occurred in North America. At times from as early as the Miocene Era, various genera of the complex and diverse 'horse' family assemblage migrated to Eurasia and to South America, but became extinct. Fossils of *Equus* in Pleistocene North America show great diversity of form. Some are short and stocky, others tall with long slender legs. Were they different types of *Equus caballus* or separate species? Not an easy question to answer. What is known is that *Equus caballus* crossed over into northeastern Asia and spread throughout the world. Perhaps there are no longer pure wild descendants of *Equus caballus*. Przewalski's horse is surely the closest to the ancestral horse. Humans shaped the horse we know today by selecting for speed, power and tractability, and for an ideal of beauty, which of course, varied from culture to culture.

It is also true that horses became extinct in North America after the last Ice Age – the DNA data from fossils say some time between 10,500 and 7,600 years ago. The mystery is why. Many have speculated that ancestral Native Americans hunted them to extinction. Dr. Scott pointed to an alien invader that was a more efficient forager, which could have out-competed the native species. What was this alien invader? It was the bison, entering North America in the Pleistocene and covering the

plains in the millions. It's an interesting theory, but why did horses also die out in areas where bison did not live? Why did the descendants of horses that had migrated to Eurasia co-exist so well with European bison?

Speculations and research about evolution are great fun, but we are faced with a reality that demands some serious thinking. Horses are American. They belong here even if they were absent for a few thousand years. But during their absence their niche has been taken by other animals, chief of which are cattle and their human keepers. There are too many feral horses on the semi-arid steppes of Eastern Oregon, in Utah, Nevada and other states. The 37,000 or so wild horses and burros in the West are about forty percent over the carrying capacity of the range. In the past century we have eliminated the only predators that could keep horse numbers in check. Wolves are an endangered species hated and killed by ranchers. Human hunting of wild horses for meat has been illegal for forty years. As fewer persons actually know and work with horses, more persons fantasize and romanticize about them. It is culturally not acceptable any more just to slaughter the excess horse population. Morally it is hard to define what is the excess. The old and crippled, sure. But what about the ugly and the mean tempered? Should we hone the American wild horse into another breed, long necked, with flowing manes and big dreamy eyes set wide in a dainty face?

There are some partial solutions to the population problem. The BLM can retire grazing rights, leaving more range for horses and pronghorns. Water sources, now muddied and degraded by trampling, can be developed by piping water into troughs, and fencing off vulnerable areas. Unfortunately the BLM has recently backed down from one of its unpopular programs. It plans to round up just seven thousand horses annually, three thousand less than it has been capturing. The agency claims it will work to increase adoptions, but many of these horses are not adoptable and live out their lives in pens. The BLM plans to quadruple the number of mares receiving contraceptive hormones. But to my knowledge, these hormones do not last for more than one breeding season. No mention has been made of vasectomizing males and returning them to the wild. Is it too much to hope that wolves could be helped to establish packs to roam these arid lands where the mustangs are so numerous? If cattle were removed from the range, and large predators returned, then nature could reestablish its own harsh balance.

Out and About

“Out & about” is a periodical encouragement to Eugene Natural History Society members to get out and experience our magnificent Oregon



Delphinium at Mt. Pisgah Arboretum.

Get out your calendar and start marking dates for wildflower viewing. Start now in the water garden at the Arboretum, schedule Mary's Peak west of Corvallis for early June, head for Tire Mountain north of West Fir in mid-June, visit Iron Mountain east of Sweet Home in early July, go to Bohemia Mountain and Fairview Peak southeast of Cottage Grove in mid-July and try Blair Lake northeast of Oakridge in late July. If that's not enough, take a long weekend and explore Steens Mountain in August. Join a trip sponsored by the Emerald Chapter of the Native Plant Society for a real wildflower education.

www.npsoregon.org/chapters/em.html

David Stone

Field Trip to Malheur, 2-5 June.

This year the ENHS field trip will be to the Malheur Field Station, where we will enjoy world-class bird watching on the preserve, at the field station and even right outside our dorm. We will gather on Thursday afternoon, 2 June, to carpool for the long drive across the state. Supper will be deli in Bend or bring your own brown bag. When we get to the station we will stay in Dorm E, recently renovated to 10 separate bedrooms with two beds in each room. The dorm can take 20 easily or squeeze in up to 23. We will have three meals provided for Friday and Saturday and two meals for Sunday, [pretty good meals and design your own yummy lunches]. As for costs, the rooms are \$38 per person per night, adding up to \$114 for the three nights, and the meals charges will total \$ 72 per person for the whole trip. Therefore the whole trip will cost \$186 per person, a real bargain considering the amazing fun we'll have!

As for plans for the field trip, Friday we will drive around to some great bird watching spots and search out other denizens of the high desert. Tom will find us lizards a plenty, and June is still not too late for flowers. Early morning and evenings are great for bird watching right around the dorms. In the evenings we will surely be socializing, chatting, sharing pictures and stories, or drowsing, book in hand. On Saturday Tom will take us around Steens Mountain to the lovely desert country south east of the mountain. A hot spring, a desert mountain stream to explore, wildflowers, and breath-taking scenery are among the high points. On Sunday some folks will want to pack their lunch and drive away right after breakfast, maybe taking in the Hart Mountain area on the way home. Others will want to hang out and find some more birds. Sunday is promising to be the most free form of the three days of the field trip.

If you want to go on this trip, please sign the sheet, giving us your name, e-mail address and phone number. As we have already had to make a substantial deposit to the Field Station, we strongly encourage all who sign to pay in full as soon as possible. Field trip participants must pay in full by 30 April or they will lose their place. Refunds can be made in the case of emergencies. The first 20 people who sign and pay will be assured a place. If you sign up further down the list, you will have stand by status and we will be in touch if an opening occurs.

E-mail Reida to sign up or if you have questions or problems about the trip. rkimmel@uoneuro.uoregon.edu or sign up at our April meeting. Make your checks out to Eugene Natural History Society, and give them to Judi Horstmann, Ruth BreMiller, or Reida Kimmel at the meeting. Or mail them to ENHS, P.O. Box 5494, Eugene OR, 97405.

Events of Interest in the Community

Lane County Audubon Society

Saturday, 19 April. Third Saturday Bird Walk. Skinner Butte spring migrants.

Our April bird walk will feature a treasure hunt on Eugene's Skinner Butte Park for spring migrants.

Bird walk leader: TBA. All levels of birders are welcome, from first timer to expert. We will meet at South Eugene High at 19th and Patterson, rain or shine, at 8:00 a.m. and return by noon. A \$3 donation is suggested, as well as a share of gas costs for carpooling. Please note: As a precaution, do not leave valuables in your parked car.

Questions? Contact Maeve at 541.343.8664 or president@laneaudubon.org

Tuesday, 26 April, 7:30 pm. Birding in Ecuador. Ecuador is a small country, encompassing an area about the size of Colorado, and yet it hosts over 1,600 bird species—the fourth largest countrywide bird list in the world. Birding in Ecuador, as in much of the neo-tropics, is more than looking for as many of these species as you can find. It is also about visiting remote locations, meeting local residents, seeing strange animals, plants and insects, and sharing the experiences with friends. Kit Larsen birded Ecuador for a couple of months last fall, some of it while volunteering at an eco-lodge near Zamora in southeast Ecuador, and some of it with professional guides in locations closer to Quito such as Mindo, Yanacocha, Angel Paz's refuge, Coca, and the Napo River in the upper Amazon basin. Kit will recount some of his adventures with photos of birds, butterflies, animals, plants, places and people from the recent trip. 1645 High St., Eugene.

Mount Pisgah Arboretum

34901 Frank Parrish Rd., Eugene, 97405. Located off I-5 Exit 189, 15 minutes southeast of Eugene. Call Peg Douthit-Jackson at 541-747-1504 or email mtpisgjp@efn.org for more information or to sign up for any of the following Arboretum activities.

Sunday, 15 May, 10 am-5 pm. Mount Pisgah Arboretum's 31st Annual Wildflower and Music Festival (co-sponsored by the Native Plant Society of Oregon and Lane Community College). Set this date aside for a day of wildflowers, live music, food, crafts, and fun! More info at the MPA website and in the May issue of Nature Trails.

Nearby Nature

Call 541-687-9699 or email info@nearbynature.org.

Friday, 15 April, 8:30 am-3 pm. Nearby Nature No School Day Program: Creature Feature. Discover who's zooming, digging, and hopping in the park! Use nets and magnifiers to find hidden life in the ponds and meadows. Enjoy fun critter games and create your own creature out of beads. \$30 members/\$35 non-members, ages 6-9, maximum 12 kids. Register at 541-687-9699, ext. 2.

Saturday, 16 April, 1-4 pm. Nearby Nature Restoration Celebration. Join Nearby Nature SOLV for litter pick up in Alton Baker Park. Please come dressed for the weather and bring a re-usable water bottle. Please call ahead at 541-687-9699 or email info@nearbynature.org if you plan to attend. Sponsored in part by REI.

Wednesday, 4 May, 11 am-11:55 pm. Track Town Scholarship Fundraiser. Help raise scholarships for Nearby Nature programs. See <http://www.nearbynature.org/events/wednesday-may-4-track-town-scholarship-fundraisers> (sic) for details.

Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter

Monday, 18 April, 7:30 pm. "Tree Ferns, Orchids & Other Wonders: A Journey to the Cloud Forest of Northwestern Ecuador." Presented by Tobias Policha, a graduate student who is writing a book on the flora of the region. EWEB Training Room at 500 East 4th Avenue, Eugene. Call 541-746-9478.

Saturday, 23 April, 10:30 am. Field Trip: Ecology Stroll. Join local ecologists Peg Boulay and Bruce Newhouse for a visit to the "Mariposa Woodlands" at Spencer Butte Park. See migrating birds, wildflowers, and restoration of pine/oak habitat by the City of Eugene. Meet at the parking lot at 52nd St. and Willamette. Sponsored by the Native Plant Society and the North American Butterfly Association. For more info call 541-343-2364.

Many Rivers Group of the Sierra Club

Saturday, 30 April 2011. Joint outing with ENHS. Eagle's Rest to Goodman Creek. We will experience a variety of habitat types on this easy but moderately briskly paced outing. First we will take a car shuttle to a trailhead convenient to the top of Eagle's Rest, where we will encounter Madrones and Manzanitas, enjoy the southern sun, and the views of the Lost Creek Valley. Then we head downhill to the Goodman Creek trail, pausing for "first lunch" at Ash Swale shelter. We will see woodland wildflowers, skunk cabbage in bloom and other wonders of this wilderness-quality landscape. For "second lunch" we will stop at a lovely little waterfall, and head mostly downhill the rest of the way back to our car shuttle. 7.4 miles, 2022' total elevation change from top of Eagle's Rest to parking lot. Meet at 8:45 am at South Eugene High School parking lot at 19th x Patterson in Eugene for carpool to trailhead. Pre-register by emailing Cathleen.corlett@gmail.com

The Individual in the Genomic Era: Spring Lecture Series hosted by the Graduate Evolutionary Biology and Ecology Students of the University of Oregon

Tuesday, 3 May, 7 pm. The Personal Genome Revolution. Dr Lee Silver, Princeton University. 150 Columbia Hall, U of O Campus. Human genetics has been revolutionized over the last five years with the development of powerful technology for rapidly reading information encoded in the DNA of individual people. This "personal genome" revolution was motivated by biomedical researchers interested in disease understanding and diagnosis. But now the same sophisticated technology used by genome pioneers has become affordable to the average consumer. And it's changing everything we think we know about where we come from and why we look and act the way we do. Professor Silver will explain how you can see the movements of your ancestors across centuries and millennia, even down to the region and ethnicity of particular genes and traits. He will take you on a tour of understanding the genetic basis for your own characteristic attributes of body and mind. Finally, he will explain how you can even obtain insight into the characteristics of the children you could conceive with one partner or another.

Tuesday, 23 May, 7 pm. Reconstructing the Great Human Diasporas from Genome Variation Data. Dr Carlos Bustamante, Stanford University. 150 Columbia Hall, U of O Campus.

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

**Eugene Natural History Society
P.O. Box 5494, Eugene OR 97405**

Name _____ <http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs/>
Address _____
E-mail (if you want to receive announcements) _____ Phone _____
City _____ State & Zip _____

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

Make checks payable to: The Eugene Natural History Society

**Annual dues for renewing members
are payable in September.
Memberships run from September
to September.
Generosity is encouraged and
appreciated.**

The following information is voluntary, but appreciated:

Would you like to: lead field trips teach informal classes work on committees?

What would you like to hear a talk on? _____

Do you have special experience in natural history: _____

INTERESTS: Archaeology Astronomy Bird Study Botany Conservation Geology History of Science Herpetology Meteorology Mosses & Lichens Mushrooms Nature Walks Wildflowers Zoology Other _____

Eugene Natural History Society
P.O. Box 5494
Eugene, Oregon 97405

Malheur trip 2008. Join us this year!



ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for the rest of 2010-2011

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|----------------------|------------------|--|
| 15 Apr 2011 | – Noah Strycker | – Among Penguins: A Bird Man in Antarctica |
| 20 May 2011 | – John Fischer | – La Nina, El Nino, and La Nada: The Big Weather Makers in the Northwest |
| 16 Sept. 2011 | – Dave Wagner | – Natural History of India |
| 21 Oct. 2011 | – Tobias Policha | – Tropical Fungus/Orchid Mimicry |
| 18 Nov. 2011 | – Greta Binford | – Evolution of Spider Venom |
| 9 Dec. 2011 | – Jan Hodder | – Sea Birds |

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