

Nature Trails

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Mt. Kanchendzonga, a Himalayan peak, together with close-ups of natural history from the area where Wagner grew up.

A Naturalist Returns to India

Dr. David H. Wagner

Research Botanist

**Friday, 16 September 2011, 7:30pm, Room 100
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

Two months after his birth, in Detroit, Michigan, his Methodist Missionary parents took their infant son, our speaker David Wagner, to India, where he lived until he graduated from high school.

As he described himself in the October 1998 issue of Nature Trails, "I was a nature nerd as soon as I could walk, even before I could read." He got to explore forests and jungles that most of the rest of us have only seen pictures of and read about. His interests were broad at first: "I loved nature. I wanted to know everything about it." But he found that others had been over much of the ground he initially covered. Only when he began a serious study of ferns, while still in high school, did he start finding things not already written about. Thus began his lifelong career as a botanist.

From age five until he finished high school, Wagner went to Woodstock. Not the one in New York, the one in the foothills of the Himalaya, near Mussoorie in northern India. The school was an 80-plus-hour train ride from his parents' home, close to Hyderabad in central India, and he spent nine months a year at the school. His three months a year with his parents were the winters; the school wasn't heated, and at 7000 feet elevation, winters there are cold.

It is little wonder Wagner grew to love mountains, being so close to them. He and his friends thought



nothing of hiking many miles just for fun.

When he was 16, he and three friends took a 4-day holiday, covering 100 miles on foot. Judging from the pictures he showed me, very little of that distance was level.

Although he was too young and poor to climb in the Himalaya he learned all he could about the exploits of

earlier climbers. Woodstock's library had a wealth of mountaineering books, of which he read hundreds.

This love of mountains figured large in his decision to attend the University of Puget Sound, in Tacoma. His parents were satisfied because the school was (loosely) affiliated with the Methodists; the proximity of the Cascade peaks slaked his thirst for mountains; and UPS gave him a scholarship so he could afford it. His BA degree was in biology and chemistry, with a geology minor. Oh, and he had one credit of Figure Skating. That's right.

As soon as he got to Tacoma, Wagner got into climbing. Within months he and some of his new climbing friends had summited Mt. Rainier. He went on to learn technical rock climbing. He showed me some scary pictures with lots of vertical relief. But after he got married and had a child he put away the ropes and carabiners and went off to graduate school.

Wagner earned his Ph.D. in botany at Washington State University, in Pullman, Washington, working under Marion Ownbey. His love of the outdoors and all those years in India making collections influenced his studies: what most sparked his curiosity was field botany. He says his goal "was to learn enough botany so when I walked into the woods I would know everything I saw." Although his dissertation work was on ferns, he became acquainted with and entranced by mosses and liverworts through a course he took at WSU. This introduction led him to what would become his specialty.

Wagner started at the University of Oregon in 1976, and became Director of the Herbarium. When it was taken over by Oregon State University, he began his career as a consulting scientist; his firm is called Northwest Botanical Institute.

Dave has been a loyal member of our Society since he first got to Oregon, in 1976, and in that time has contributed countless hours to us. He's been a member of the Board since 1978, has served three stints as Editor of Nature Trails for a total of 11 years, and has served three 'terms' as President for a total of 11 years. He has been the overseer of the ENHS education booth since the mid-1990s, and he has written many articles for Nature Trails.

Earlier this year Wagner was invited to participate in the Mussoorie International Writer's Festival sponsored by the Winterline Centre for the Arts at Woodstock School, where Dave made a presentation. He and his wife Connie spent several days in the area and visited some of his childhood haunts. He said the biggest change he noticed since he was last there, almost 50 years ago, is the number of vehicles. When he was a student the roads were so rudimentary most travel was on foot. Many of the school buildings, though, were essentially the same as when he left. His talk to us will be a reminiscence: natural history of this unique area as seen through the eyes of Wagner as a boy, and now revisited almost five decades on. Be prepared to be wowed by his wonderful photographs and mightily entertained by his stories. Join us on Friday, 16 September, at 7:30pm in room 100, Willamette Hall, on the University of Oregon Campus.

John Carter

Tansy Time by Reida Kimmel

Real summer has come, more than a month late for western Oregon. Watching our farm and garden respond to the early summer levels of humidity and precipitation characteristic of New England has been exciting and of course, frustrating. I had to plant beans four times and am waiting impatiently for corn, but the salad garden is still churning out lovely lettuces and spinach. None of this is surprising. It's everyone's story. Watching the native plants in our yard has been the real revelation. They like it wet too! The little red elderberry bush in the horse corral is now twelve feet tall. For years we have struggled to keep coast huckleberry plants (*Vaccinium ovatum*) alive. This year all four of our plants have trebled in size. The older sword ferns are chest high and all of the baby ferns we transplanted last year are thriving without supplementary water. Even our poor sad deer ferns are looking prosperous for once. Diminutive incense cedar trees, too abundant for their own good, are successfully competing with the grass and ocean spray in the clearings above our sheep pasture. I was walking up there this morning, popping the first blackberries into my mouth. The tall tangles of bushes are weedy with tansy and thistles. The Canada thistles' lovely scented blossoms are gone, matured into countless downy seeds. As always, I wonder why the goldfinches fly away every year just before the thistle seed, said to be their favorite food, is ready for them?

The goldfinches are a great mystery. The tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) is no mystery at all. It's growing in unusual abundance this year along the old logging roads and in the clearcuts that dominate the hilly countryside for miles south and west of my home. Honeybees are clustering on the blossoms. They do not mind the evil smell of the flowers, but beekeepers do. In the seventies and eighties when he kept bees, Chuck had to harvest our year's supply of honey early, before the tansy bloomed. Tansy nectar makes unimaginably nasty honey: very dark, very bitter. We left that late honey for the bees. I remember on the drive out to Fall Creek there were fields along the road that were seemingly pure stands of tansy. Sad looking cows stood in pastures where nothing remained but dust and the pretty yellow blossoms of tall tansy plants. Tansy ragwort produces toxic alkaloids that if ingested in quantity or over a long period of time, will kill horses and cattle by destroying their liver cells. Neither species will eat the plants fresh, but tansy that is cut, dried, and mixed with grasses in hay, is palatable, and is deadly. Oddly, sheep can eat tansy in small quantities without

harm. We rotate sheep with our horses and have rarely seen tansy in our fields. Interestingly, there is a use for this stinky toxic plant. Tansy can be used to dye cloth. The flowers give a yellow dye, and the leaves produce a shade of green.

Why is this *Senecio jacobaea*, native to Europe and a pest to farmers there as well, experiencing a resurgence this year? The answer to that question is an interesting natural history story. Tansy takes some effort to control. The organic approach is to pull up this short-lived perennial, roots and all. Herbicides are effective, but numerous applications are necessary. Repeated mowing is very earth friendly and effective, but the best control of this noxious plant is biological. Not many years after tansy ragwort's natural predator the cinnabar moth was introduced to the Pacific Northwest, tansy became a far less common weed, not a matter of concern to farmers. *Tyria jacobaeae* is a lovely little moth with a nearly black body, front wings grey black marked with bright red, and hind wings red edged with the same grey black. It emerges from its pupa when the first really warm weather comes. Often we see the first cinnabar moths in late May. Certainly they are flying about all June, laying eggs on the lush green growing tansy plants. The larvae hatch in July and feed voraciously on their host tansy plant. The orange and black caterpillars, often twenty or thirty of them per plant, can strip a tansy utterly bare. They do not seem to be very mobile, however. We often see a bare plant covered with caterpillars still in need of a good meal growing next to a totally unparasitized plant. Eventually, though I have never seen this, each fat caterpillar forms a pupa and overwinters on the ground or in the duff until it hatches as a cinnabar moth the next summer. The tansy plants that are not consumed go to seed and produce the next generation of plants to nourish cinnabar moth larvae. That is the nature of biological control. A balance between predator, the moth, and prey, the tansy, is the goal.

So what has gone so terribly wrong this year that both Oregon's and Washington's Departments of Agriculture are sounding the alarm, and we are hearing about tansy ragwort on the morning news? I think the problem started last year when May and June were cooler and wetter than usual, though not as cool and wet as this year. I remember that we did not notice the moths flying as early as usual, and that there seemed to be fewer larvae on the tansy plants we saw when we were riding in the hills. The weather turned cool in late August, so it was a short season for the caterpillars. Because predation by caterpillars was weaker, more tansy plants set seed in 2010. And so this year there are many more tansy plants, and

sadly once again, the very cool wet weather in May, June and much of July, delayed the emergence of cinnabar moths, the laying of eggs and the hatching of those very important greedy caterpillars. We're keeping a daily watch on the tansy plants on our neighbor's hill. We're trying to give every caterpillar a good chance of surviving to pupate, but to avoid having too many plants go to seed, we will pull up and destroy any plants that do not have larvae on them by mid-September. I'm sure we'll face another tansy bonanza next year. But a future year will see different conditions. The moth populations will rebound and tansy will decline. That is the nature of Nature.

President's Corner

Malheur 2011: Field Notes By Tom Titus

Thursday, June 2: We can't outrun the rain, not in June, not even on Highway 20 150 miles east of Eugene with an average yearly precipitation of 15 inches. Rain clouds chase us across the sagebrush steppe spitting occasional showers, as contemptuous of our need for sun as a drill sergeant. But this was only a test of our will. In Burns the sun falls through a broken sky, disappearing behind the western hills, transforming scattered piles of storm clouds into pink fortresses floating on damp air redolent with new spring growth on sagebrush.

At dusk we cross the Narrows between Harney and Malheur Lakes, and I am stunned by the quantity of water pushing upward toward the roadbed. The basin hasn't seen this much water since the early 1980's when a years-long wet cycle flooded every small ranch around Malheur Lake. Carp spawned in the gravel shoulder of the road, and the birds became scattered and difficult to find.

Friday, June 3: Finally, an honest-to-goodness sunrise. Early risers wait like obedient slaves while the Dark Lord drips through finely ground beans. At the dining hall we are fed twice the breakfast most of us would normally eat at home then hit the road for Refuge Headquarters. Last evening's worries over the quality of the birding vanish when we stop by a flooded pasture along Sod House Lane. Waterfowl of every sort paddle, waddle, quack, squawk, and squeak from green rushes or fly across a blue, cloud-strewn sky. Someone starts a bird list. Oh no, not The List! We have rules for identification. I try to sabotage the effort by inventing names for every long-distance passing silhouette, but this is serious and the tribe threatens to send me naked into the wilderness if I don't shape up. Soon I revert to my old ways, scanning the emergent vegetation for that

one additional species that might still be added before leaving the stop.

At Refuge Headquarters we scatter into two's and three's. Spring is late here, too. The trees are only beginning to leaf out, and they are as full of perching birds as the marsh was of waterfowl. The List grows: Townsend's Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, Evening Grosbeak, Yellow-rumped Warbler. Western Tanagers are flying Tequila Sunrises in the subdued leaves. A baby Great-horned Owl peers down from a large cottonwood, a frumpy half-and-half of feathers and chick down. I try to maintain a healthy distance from The List and don't ask for the latest count. 100 species is beginning to seem like a nice round number for the weekend.

In the office we learn that snow melting off Steens Mountain is swelling the Blitzen River by the hour, inundating parts of the Central Patrol Road. We are flexible and instead drive to Ruh-Red Road at the northern periphery of the refuge, where the high water has brought waterfowl into pastures normally dry. The sun is warm, but a stiff wind nips at us from the northeast, and I can't seem to decide on whether to wear a jacket. Here I learn that the Western Grebe must now be distinguished from the Clark's Grebe. Dang. We stare through spotting scopes at a long peninsula covered with White Pelican babies and wonder how their naked reptilian awkwardness will ever be transformed into the wheeling, white-winged, breathtaking grace of the adults.

Back at the Station there is time for happy hour. After dinner, Chris's guitar and Elaine's mandolin become acquainted. Margaret, Tom, and John discuss the quantum nature of photosynthesis. This requires a lot of energy, so instead I let my eyes slowly close and enjoy waves of quiet conversation and music washing over me, merging into one single evening of people enjoying one another.

Saturday, June 4: Morning is clear and calm. But a rough tongue of clouds protrudes toward us from the southern horizon, and I wonder what weather awaits us on our drive around Steens Mountain. Ten new birds and a road-killed badger later (Can we put road-kills on The List?), we arrive in Mickey Basin, a northern arm of Alvord Desert. Sun barely penetrates a thin lizard skin overcast stretching from one horizon to the other. We make the short walk to clear hot pools, bubbling mud pots, and vents of hissing water so hot not even the orange mats of thermophilic cyanobacteria can survive this boiling entry to the surface. There is just enough heat and light to bring out the lizards; western whiptails and long-nosed leopard lizards, normally elusive and fast, allow us to

approach closely. Dave demonstrates his method for capturing them by hand.

Back on the Fields-Denio road Tim and I corral a large gopher snake basking on the road. After a minute of pit viper mimicry, hissing, biting, and flattening its head, it becomes a docile pet, crawling languidly across my arms and shoulders. People stand back, snapping pictures, watching with apprehensive appreciation, then slowly approach, touch, and then take the snake in their own arms. I love handing the snake to Evelyn who waits patiently in the rear van, how she takes it unflinchingly into her lap, gently restraining it hand over hand, holding it against her body until the time comes to send it on its way into the sagebrush. We are not so cavalier with the next snake, a 30-inch Pacific rattler. Pike Creek tumbles off the steep east face of Steens Mountain, a torrent of snow melt that only the adventurous can cross to the trail into the canyon. Most of us are content to explore the side on which we arrived. Sun has broken through the haze, and from the top of a dead willow a Lazuli Bunting sings his brains out. Each one is the most beautiful I've ever seen: deep blue above a tangerine breast and white belly. He hurls his song into the afternoon light, against the rushing water, upward into the green-willow canyon, perfect colors in perfect light in a perfect place. On The List it is only a Lazuli Bunting.

Dinner at the Field Station is at 6:00, and we have two hours to drive, leaving no time for afternoon

milkshakes in Fields. We arrive at the dining hall at 5:55. The evening meal is followed by wine and snacks and chatting deep into the evening. I fall asleep to gentle guitar chords carrying the tinkling melody of the mandolin.

Sunday, June 4: After breakfast there is a whirlwind of cleaning and packing. Dave good-naturedly changes a flat on Bluebell. We drive three hours to Fort Rock, a spectacular ring of volcanic tuff $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile across and 300 feet high that erupted 50,000 years ago through water once covering the basin floor. Finally we find a Golden Eagle that isn't actually a Turkey Vulture. In the brightness of midday the wind kicks up, and a thunderstorm threatens. Hiking into the low crater of the old volcano, Green-sided Towhees regale us from gray sagebrush interspersed with orange paintbrush and purple larkspur. White-throated Swifts skitter and chitter from the high cliffs through an increasingly ominous sky. A few fat raindrops send sagebrush lizards reluctantly scurrying for cover. But the brunt of the storm moves north, and we are spared. Gathering at the park picnic table, The List is finalized over one more bag lunch courtesy of the Field Station.

Three days and 107 bird species later, our tribe disbands.

Out and About

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



Kokanee at Trapper Creek. Late each September, these landlocked sockeye salmon begin their migration from Odell Lake up Trapper Creek. Watch for these bright orange fish from the bridge over Trapper Creek on the south side of Odell Lake. Turn south on the road, just west of Willamette Pass, and proceed about a mile to the bridge just past Trapper Creek campground. Google "Odell kokanee". David Stone (After the Sept. meeting a color version of this photo will be on the ENHS webpage.)

Events of Interest in the Community

Lane County Audubon Society

Tuesday, 27 September, 7:30 pm. Favorite Oregon Hikes and Adventures, by Bill Sullivan. Based on his new book, *Oregon Favorites*, the slideshow will include tips on new trails as well as anecdotes about history, geology, wildlife, and people along the way. 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 Peg Douthit-Jackson at 541-747-1504, email mtpisgjp@efn.org, or look at <http://mountpisgaharboretum.org/> to find out about current Arboretum activities. Mark your calendars for the Mushroom Festival, Sunday, 30 October.

Nearby Nature

For details call 541-687-9699 or email info@nearbynature.org.

Nearby Nature Volunteer Guides Needed: Love exploring nature? Enjoy working with children? Learn to lead morning nature walks for elementary school kids in Alton Baker Park this fall. Training starts **15 September**. Call 541-687-9699 or see www.nearbynature.org/volunteering for details.

Saturday, 22 October, 5:30-9 pm. 15th Annual HAUNTED HIKE! Join us for an evening of night creature fun and discovery. Go on a pumpkin-lit hike through Alton Baker Park and meet our costumed night critters—Bat, Owl, Raccoon, Frog, Moth, Beaver, and Spider! Back at the picnic shelter, enjoy creepy crafts and munch on tricky treats. Pre-registration required: 541-687-9699. This event fills to capacity, so call to secure your spot! Event happens rain or moonshine. Cost: members FREE, non-members \$5. Volunteers also needed to help run the event.

Directions to the Alton Baker Park Host Residence/Nearby Nature Yurt/Learnscape: Turn into the main Alton Baker Park entrance or follow the bike path to the main part of Alton Baker Park. Go east on the road through the park, through the parking lots and down the road that says Dead End. Go past the Cuthbert Amphitheater. The newly painted blue Park Host Residence (our office), our yurt, and the Learnscape are on the right, immediately after the Community Gardens. Lock your bike in our bike shelter or park your car in the gravel lot in front of the gardens. For a map, see www.nearbynature.org.

Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter

For information on current activities contact ngap@emeraldnpsoregon.org or look at <http://emerald.npsoregon.org/>

Monday, 19 September, 9 am-noon. Herbarium Work Party: Assist guides Susie Holmes and Gail Baker with mounting and organizing specimens in the Rowe-Love Herbarium at Lane Community College. Learn collection and preparation skills and contribute to our collection. For more on the Rowe-Love Herbarium visit: <https://teach.lanec.edu/bakerg/Herbarium.htm>. Meet in the Science Building Rm 117. Refreshments provided. No background necessary and all assistance is appreciated. Contact Gail Baker, Science, LCC, 541-463-5085 or bakerg@lanec.edu

WREN

Tuesday, 13 September, 9-10 am. Wander at the Tsanchiifn Walk. Wanders are casual walks through the West Eugene Wetlands. Please meet at the West Eugene Wetlands Project office located at 751 S. Danebo Ave. WREN will provide binoculars. FREE!

Saturday, 8 October, 10 am-2 pm. Family Exploration Day at Meadowlark Prairie. Explore the West Eugene Wetlands through unstructured play! Please park at the Meadowlark Prairie Overlook located on east side of Greenhill Road south of Royal Ave. Bring a picnic or a snack and water, and wear sturdy shoes or boots. WREN will provide bug nets, binoculars, field guides, and packs. FREE!

Tuesday, 11 October, 9-10 am. Wander at Stewart Pond. Meet at the Stewart Pond parking area located on Stewart Road east of the intersection with Bertelsen Road. WREN will provide binoculars. FREE!

For more information about any of these events call 541-338-7047 or email info@wewetlands.org.

Emerald Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society

Tuesday, 4 October, 7 pm. "Fresh Air: The Importance of Letting Alpine Plants Breathe". Growing alpine plants in our soggy NW climate can be a challenge. Truls Jensen and Emma Elliott of Wild Ginger Farm will discuss how to balance air, moisture, soil structure and fertility in growing alpiners in a variety of garden situations including troughs and containers, scree and sand beds, and alpine and rock gardens. There will be plants available for purchase. Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St. Door prizes and refreshments follow. For more information, contact Tanya at 541-937-1401.

BOGS (Birds of Oregon General Science)

Thursday, 15 September, 9:30 am. Bruce McCammon – Birds: Trip to India. BOGS is a birding group. Meetings are in the Campbell Center, 155 High St., Eugene.

Beginning this year you can get an online full-color version of NT rather than the traditional paper copy. There is a place on the membership form for you to indicate your preference. If you leave

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*. Our web address: <http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs/>

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State & Zip _____ Phone _____
E-mail (if you want to receive announcements) _____
I (we) prefer electronic copies of NT rather than paper copies. ___ Yes ___ No
If yes, email address (if different from the one above): _____

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
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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



**Mt. Kanchendzonga –
3rd highest peak in the world**

ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2011-2012

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|----------------------|------------------------|---|
| 16 Sept. 2011 | – Dave Wagner | – A Naturalist Returns to 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 |
| 20 Jan. 2012 | – Pat O'Grady | – Sheep Mountain Clovis site archeology |
| 17 Feb. 2012 | – Larry Deckman | – Astronomy, field trip weather permitting |
| 16 Mar. 2012 | – Gordon Grant | – Willamette River hydrology |
| 20 Apr. 2012 | – Deanna Kingston | – Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Inupiat |
| 18 May 2012 | – Bob Pyle (tentative) | – Butterflies |

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