



## Summer Intern Program 2016 by Tim Blount, Executive Director

Our intern program has wrapped up another season and was touted as a success for Malheur NWR. Our two interns, Jess Laney and Thomas Meinzen, performed many surveys ranging from birds, monarch butterflies and emergent vegetation. Thanks Jess and Thomas for a job well done! We asked them to give a brief wrap-up of their time here at Malheur which are included here:

### **Jess Laney:**



As I watched the tragic events of the illegal occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge unfold earlier this year, I was overcome with many strong emotions. I became angry, frustrated, and deeply saddened. I felt helpless. As with many others, Malheur NWR has been a very significant place to me for years and it was incredibly difficult to witness it being a place of conflict and strife. I moved to Oregon from the southeastern U.S. a decade ago and quickly fell in love with the Northern Great Basin. I remember my first visit to Malheur and how much of an impact it made in my life. I have been visiting the refuge and surrounding region continuously for the last seven years. This summer internship, living and working at Malheur NWR, has allowed me the chance to give back to this very important place and the work that is done here.

Despite the negativity of the recent events, my summer at Malheur has been an overwhelmingly positive experience. I've had the privilege of engaging with some great individuals during my time spent working among USFWS staff, ODFW duck banding crew, and the directors of Malheur Field Station. Their expertise, advice, and guidance helped me gain an even greater appreciation for this wondrous ecosystem and its management. My duties and experiences here have contributed much to my skill-set and will serve as a great boon to my professional development as I continue my career in wildlife science and resource management.

Due to the overwhelming beauty and wonder of this place, it is impossible for me to condense my time here at Malheur into a "favorite experience". However, some highlights from the summer might include watching juvenile Burrowing Owls poke their heads up while under the watchful supervision of nearby parents, a raft of over fifty American White Pelicans illuminated by moonlight diving in synchronicity while nocturnally feeding, observing the fascinating invertebrate communities associated with milkweed while searching for Monarch Butterfly larvae, or watching hunting Long-eared Owls silhouetted by the light of the Milky Way.

Although it will take time to repair the wounds inflicted on the refuge, its staff, and the surrounding community by the illegal occupation, this internship has given me some level of closure and healing. From the French, malheur translates to misfortune; however the only misfortune I will take from this place (aside from perhaps a few hundred mosquito bites) is how much I will miss this it once I leave. I consider myself very fortunate, indeed, to have been able to participate in this internship and to have hopefully contributed a positive impact on this integral and sacred part of the American West.

- Jesse A. Laney, 2016 Summer Intern, Friends of Malheur Refuge

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**Thomas Meinzen:**

For years, I've been coming out to Malheur in April or May, first with my dad and then with birder friends from the Valley. Never having the opportunity to stay more than a few days, I dreamed of the chance to witness a whole season flourish in this magical place, and to begin to understand the nature of its magic: the birds, the skies, the sage, the people. So when I heard about the Friends of Malheur wildlife internship in my freshman year at Whitman College, I hoped it might fill the coming summer.

Indeed, it has filled my summer to the brim, with extraordinary wildlife encounters-watching a bobcat cross the field station on my way to do laundry, observing five species of owls in as many days, witnessing nighthawks display before a brilliant golden sage sunset, seeing coyote pups wrestle each other in the crimson dawn-and an equally extraordinary array of challenges and learning experiences, from missing equipment (thanks, militia) and leaking radiators to strange sleep schedules and the pangs of solitude.

The aftereffects of the refuge's armed occupation earlier this year have colored my internship in interesting ways, giving my intern partner Jesse and I both greater responsibility in dealing with unforeseen problems, and greater independence in finding their solutions. From leading the installation of bat monitoring stations and designing my own nighthawk survey to all-night duck banding and navigating the Buena Vista marshes with a canoe and GPS, the diversity of my experiences has well matched the diversity of life here at Malheur. Although I've conducted waterfowl brood and monarch butterfly surveys at the same sites for the past two months, each week still brings new and exciting discoveries, and the sun never fails to rise or set without igniting in me a sense of wonder and gratitude for the chance to be a part of this place.

One particular gift has been that monarch surveys and the field station directors, Duncan and Lyla, have kindled in me a budding but avid interest in butterflies this season. Add that to my longtime fascinations with birds and dragonflies, and it seems my passions have really taken flight this summer! My gratitude and thanks goes out to the folks who have made possible (and incredible) my summer experience here at Malheur: Jess Wenick, the refuge habitat ecologist, Duncan Evered and Lyla Messick, directors of the field station, Tim Blount, who made the internship happen amidst the turbulence of this year, Alan Contreras, who first told me about the internship, and Jesse Laney, my intern partner. This summer of sage and sun will live long in my memory, and I look forward to many return trips to Malheur in the years to come.

- Thomas Meinzen, 2016 Summer Intern, Friends of Malheur Refuge

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