

# Turnbull Wildlife Refuge Friends Newsletter

## Friends of Turnbull President Summer 2022

by Lorna Kropp

### Friends Board Meeting with Refuge Staff on May 13th

Our Friends Board has planned to have an annual meeting with Refuge Staff, but it was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic for two-plus years. The Board did have a get-together in the Refuge Classroom on May 13th, where we had the chance to meet in person with the new Refuge Manager, Lisa Wilson, the new Refuge Biologist, Molly Dixon, the new Complex Manager, Kelly Moroney, and our old friend, Private Lands Biologist, Brian Walker.

### Flower walk on Refuge June 25th

A small group of wildflower enthusiasts gathered on June 25 to walk the trails near the Administration Building to both enjoy and identify the flowers we found. Armed with flower guidebooks and the Seek app on a phone, the group identified and photographed more than 30 species of flowers in the meadow between the start of the Auto Tour and the Parking lot!! A working committee is beginning to develop plans for a demonstration Pollinator Garden to identify the best pollinators which are native to the Refuge.

### Plans for developing demonstration Pollinator Garden near Classroom/Admin Building

- **Process**

- o Research best plants to be included
- o Gathering interest for plans
- o Selecting location
- o Setting plan in motion

We are seeking interested FOT members to participate. The planning will use Zoom for meetings and to organize work parties as we get closer to enacting the exciting plans. Please send an email to [activities@fotnwr.org](mailto:activities@fotnwr.org) to indicate interest and willingness. Watch the website and newsletters to keep up with progress and dates for work days.

**Annual Membership Meeting** – September 13th, from 5:30 – 7:30 pm in Classroom building

**Potluck:** FOT provides burgers/dogs/Veggieburgers. Members bring salads and desserts

**Program:** Introduction of new Refuge Staff

**Activity:** Silent Auction items; Raffle for Nuthatch Roost Boxes; Nature Store open

Plan now to attend the Friends of Turnbull Annual Meeting. After being limited to Zoom meetings for two years, we will be meeting in the classroom and just outside for a potluck gathering and a program that introduces the new Refuge Staff members. The date chosen is the first Tuesday evening after Labor Day, September 13, from 5:30 – 7:30 pm. The program will be a brief business meeting with annual reports and then an introduction to the 5 new Refuge/Complex staff members: Refuge Manager – Lisa Wilson, Refuge Biologist – Molly Dixon, Complex Leader – Kelly Moroney, hopefully, the new Visitor's Service Manager and the new Turnbull NWR Park Ranger - Breanna Hild. In addition, we will be holding a small fund-raising silent auction with several art pieces from the Nature Store, and several Nuthatch Roost boxes for your yard.

### Saturday morning hikes led by Turnbull NWR Park Ranger - Breanna Hild

Two Saturday mornings each month for July, August, September, and October, Breanna Hild will lead a hike at either the Kepple Peninsula Trailhead or the Pine Lakes Loop Trail. The hike will begin at 10am each day. Participants are asked to meet at the trailhead.

Hike Schedule:

July 9 & 23	Kepple Peninsula	10am
August 13 & 27	Pine Lakes Loop	10am
September 10 & 24	Kepple Peninsula	10am
October 1 & 15	Pine Lakes Loop	10am

More information on [fotnwr.org/activities.html](http://fotnwr.org/activities.html) or call 509-559-3023





## New Trumpeter Family!

A pair of Trumpeter Swans has four cute cygnets! How quickly will they grow? They will weigh 20 pounds by the time they are 4 months old. They will start by eating insects and after, a few weeks, will forage for pond vegetation.

A duck was resting on a rock when the Trumpeter parents chased it off. You can tell by their body language that they didn't want that duck anywhere near their babies! I was only able to watch them on Cheever Lake for about 20 minutes before they disappeared into the reeds where their nest most likely is.

A wild turkey hen spotted me and moved quickly away. Of course, she kept an eye on me as she disappeared behind the lovely purple hairy vetch (commonly called "cow peas" around here). The wildflowers and hairy vetch plants are bringing a lot of color to the landscape!



**Stories and Photos by Carlene Hardt**

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# Meet Molly!

Hello, Friends of Turnbull! I'm Molly Dixon, the new Refuge Biologist here at Turnbull NWR.

I came to Turnbull back in April after a cross-country trip from Nashville, TN! I'm originally from Ohio, but have moved between Michigan, Tennessee, and Georgia for a variety of jobs and internships.

I earned a Bachelor's in Zoology and a Minor in French Language from Ohio State University and then completed my Master's in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology at Eastern Michigan University. For my thesis research, I studied the diets of four Michigan snake species, using DNA Barcoding to identify differences in dietary diversity and composition (which just means that I spent grad school collecting a lot of snake poop!).

Outside of school, I've worked in both research and environmental education, with my most recent position as the Community Education Coordinator for the Nashville Tree Foundation. I came to Turnbull through the Directorate Resource Assistant Fellow Program (DFP), where I spent my last summer of graduate school at Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge. There, I led fieldwork using terrestrial LiDAR to survey forestry, habitat, and fire metrics, as part of an interagency monitoring project.

In my four months here, I've been learning the refuge and conducting surveys on waterfowl, threatened plants, forest health and more! Right now, I'm surveying Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), which is a federally threatened plant species. This is a very beautiful and very sticky plant that has declined throughout its range primarily due to habitat loss. Recovery initiatives for this species include protecting and maintaining reproducing populations so that they may become self-sustaining. I am in constant awe of the beauty of this landscape and have been overwhelmed by the amount of support that I've received from USFWS staff, FOT members, and volunteers. I'm excited to apply my experience to Turnbull's biological program, but as I learn this new landscape and career, I appreciate the knowledge and ideas generated by those that have called Turnbull home long before I arrived. I look forward to working with you and learning from you in the years to come!



Molly Dixon with her friend, the wandering garter snake (*Thamnophis elegans vagrans*), which is a subspecies of the western terrestrial garter snake

*Three different subspecies of the Western Terrestrial Garter Snake (*Thamnophis elegans*) inhabit western North America. The picture shows a typical wandering garter snake skin pattern, characterized by the light color stripes. A close up picture would show the snake's eight upper labial scales, typical of all *Thamnophis elegans* subspecies.*





# Doing the Pelican Stretch!

by Carlene Hardt

Recently my husband and I were driving down the Cheney-Plaza road to Turnbull NWR and had just crossed over the Columbia Plateau Trail, when I spotted two big groups of pelicans on the west side of the road, on Railroad Lake. There must have been at least 25 pelicans in each pod!

This set of pictures is so weird it's disorienting. What the heck is happening here and what kind of bird IS that?

Well, this is a pelican and what it is doing frequently is referred to as the "pelican stretch." You'll recall that the lower beak of pelicans isn't entirely hard like that of other birds. Their beak is a tough, flexible hoop with stretchy skin across it (their "gular pouch") that they use to scoop up fish from lakes, ponds and oceans. They then dump out the water and swallow the fish

whole. That alone is pretty strange, but this "stretch" is bizarre. It turns out that their lower beak skin is SO stretchy that pelicans can pull their head back and down, forcing their neck and upper chest up through the stretchy skin. We do know that it's NOT for cooling off. But, apparently, it must feel good because they do it frequently - while on the ground.

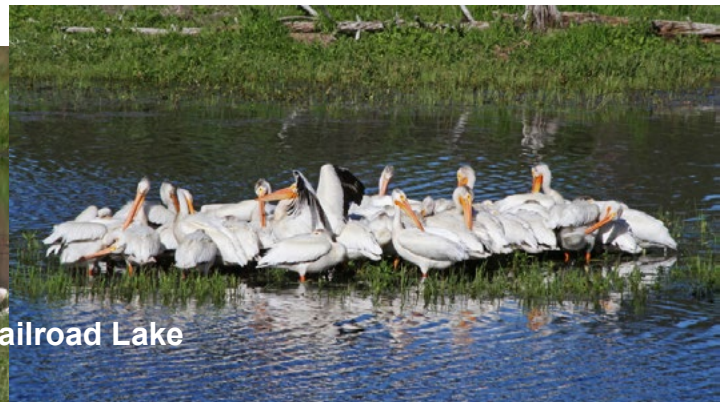
A stretchy lower beak pouch is definitely useful: they not only catch fish with it but use it like a butterfly net to catch treats thrown by humans, and they've been known to collect rainwater to drink on rainy days.

You might be interested to know that the largest pelican pouch belongs to Australian pelicans, whose lower beak reaches about 1 ½ feet long.

Apparently people can't agree on what to call a group of pelicans so you might see them referred to as a "brief", "pod", "pouch", "scoop", or a "squadron" of pelicans.



Pelicans on Railroad Lake



Pelicans working up to a "stretch"

The elegant, eye-catching Tree Swallow is a welcome sign of spring in much of North America. Although named for its habit of nesting in tree cavities, this medium-sized swallow is most often seen in open spaces such as wetlands or farm fields.

Male Tree Swallows have shining blue-green plumage on their backs, and contrasting gleaming white underparts. Females are less colorful, their backs ranging from dull greenish brown to almost as shining as the males'. Immatures are flat gray-brown above, with little or no iridescence. Tree Swallows show less white on the face and sides than is seen on the closely related Violet-green Swallow.

This sleek feathered aerialist leaves its breeding grounds later in the year than do its relatives the Barn Swallow and Purple Martin, and it returns earlier.

### Dietary Versatility

Although Tree Swallows feed heavily on flying insects, they also eat more berries and seeds than do other swallows. This dietary versatility allows them to linger longer on their breeding grounds, migrate shorter distances, and return to nest sooner. The habit of switching from insects to fruit as the seasons change is also noted in unrelated species such as the Yellow-rumped Warbler and Hermit Thrush, for the same reason.

### Avian Tornadoes

Before migration, Tree Swallows congregate along shorelines in large flocks that can number in the hundreds of thousands. They migrate during the day in smaller groups, but re-gather every evening, forming dense, swirling tornadoes of birds, before descending upon a marsh or tree grove to roost for the night. The Tree Swallow is a chatty species, constantly vocalizing with bubbly, liquid twitters and chatters, while perched and in flight.

***ed note: Tree Swallows regularly nest in Turnbull's bluebird boxes.***

### Bluebird Neighbor

The Tree Swallow is a secondary cavity nester, laying eggs and raising its young in spaces excavated by other animals — often woodpeckers. There are many cavity-nesters in the bird world, including other swallows like the Purple Martin, and various others, including the Red-masked Parakeet, Mountain Bluebird, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, and Resplendent Quetzal.

Tree Swallows are also quick to adopt artificial nest boxes when available, and efforts to help the Eastern Bluebird, Western Bluebird, and Mountain Bluebird by providing nest boxes inadvertently have helped the Tree Swallow as well. Many people now put up boxes in pairs — one for Tree Swallows and one for bluebirds. The arrangement seems to work well, with each species able to successfully raise young in close proximity to the other.

The nest, built mostly by the female Tree Swallow within the cavity, is made of grasses, straw, and other vegetation, and is canopied with other birds' feathers, which both birds bring to the nest. Both female and male Tree Swallows show a marked preference for white feathers, and may often be observed "playing" with one, dropping and retrieving it in mid-air, as they carry it to the nest.

Female Tree Swallows incubate the four to seven white eggs, brooding the young after they hatch. While the chicks are in the nest, usually two to three-and-a-half weeks, both parents feed them. Once they leave the nest, the parental "meal plan" lasts at least another three days before the young birds are on their own.



Tree Swallow chicks by Steve Byland

Friends of Turnbull NWR  
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*The Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, a nonprofit organization, supports the mandate of the refuge to protect and enhance wildlife and their habitats through education, research, habitat preservation and restoration.*

Got email? Add it to your membership form for quick activity updates!

### Membership Application

YES! I want to support the Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and its programs with my membership.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, and Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

#### Annual Membership: (Circle one)

Individual \$15

Family \$25

Business/Group \$35

Patron \$100

Benefactor \$500

Donation \$\_\_\_\_\_

Endowment Fund Donation \$\_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer \_\_\_\_\_

Nature Store \_\_\_\_\_

Committee \_\_\_\_\_

Environmental Education \_\_\_\_\_

Where needed \_\_\_\_\_

My check is enclosed payable to

Friends of Turnbull N.W.R.

P.O. Box 294

Cheney WA 99004