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BIRDING BONANZA

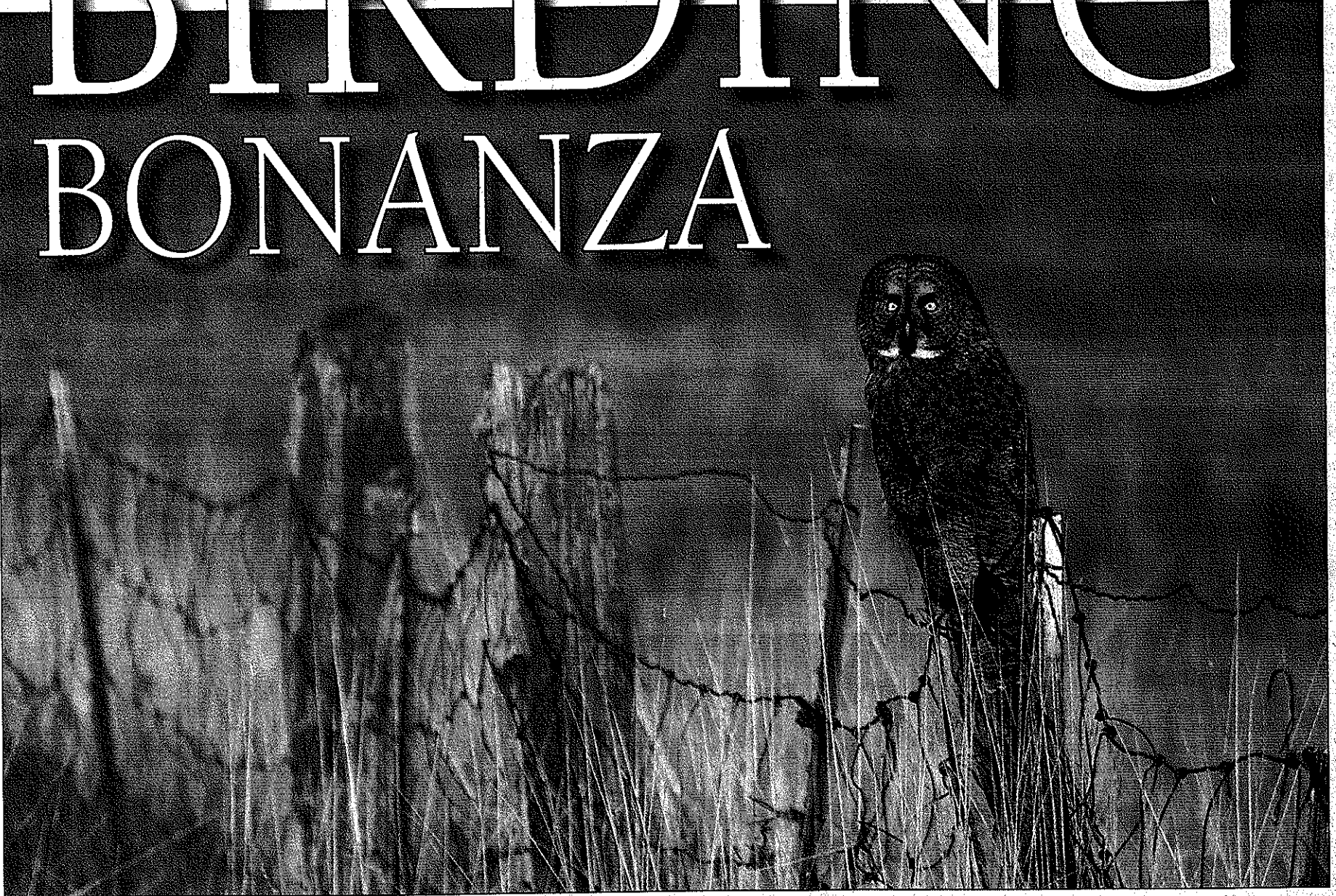


Photo by Dan Elster

A great gray owl is pictured near Howard Prairie Lake, During a field trip to a great gray owl nesting site, participants must agree to wear a blindfold so the site will remain secret.



...will include a blindfolded trip to a great gray owl nesting site

Three-day Mountain Bird Festival will include a blindfolded trip to a great gray owl nesting site

By **TERESA RISTOW**
for the Mail Tribune

A handful of eager birders may come face to face with the rare great gray owl later this month when they visit a nesting site on an undisclosed mountain somewhere in Southern Oregon.

The birders will be blindfolded when they are driven up to the secret nesting site at an elevation of about 4,500 feet, and they'll hope to see a mother owl feeding her offspring.

"It is nesting season, so they will be nesting, and the parents should be feeding," said Brandon Breen, science communicator and biologist for the Klamath Bird Observatory in Ashland. "This is one of the few places in the U.S. where you can see great gray owls. It's really an

If you go

What: Mountain Bird Festival
When: Friday, May 30, to Sunday, June 1
Where: Event headquarters is at ScienceWorks Hands-On Museum, 1500 E. Main St., Ashland, and field trips will occur throughout the region
Who: Organized by the Klamath Bird Observatory
Info: Call 541-201-0866 or see www.klamathbird.org/education/mountainbird

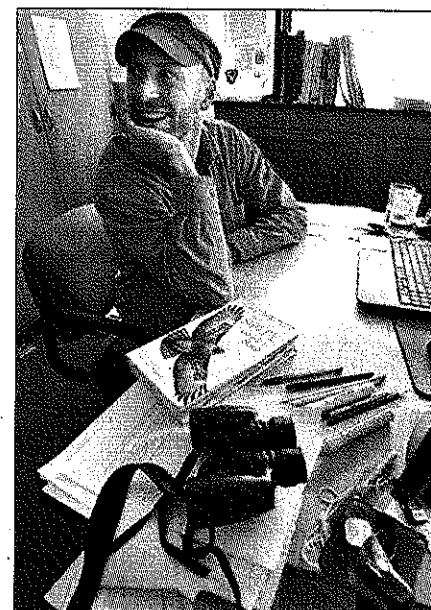
exceptional species."

Documented as the world's largest owl in terms of length, great gray owls usually nest from March through May.

The trip to the owl nest is one of a couple dozen field trips that will be offered by the Klamath Bird Observatory during its inaugural Mountain Bird Festival, which will take place in and around Ashland from Friday, May 30, to Sunday, June 1.

The festival will offer birding trips and have a strong focus on conservation, as KBO staff believe birds are invaluable to humans as indicators of the health of the environments in which they live.

"Birds are indicators of forest



Mail Tribune / Jamie Lusch

Brandon Breen of the Klamath Bird Observatory is helping to organize the group's inaugural Mountain Bird Festival.

health and indicators of our well-being," said John Alexander, KBO executive director. "Birds tell us a lot about what we can do better with our natural resources."

Staff will work hard to ensure

that delicate nesting sites such as those of the great gray owl are not disturbed, and festival attendees will each be given a booklet of ethical birding guidelines they are expected to follow to ensure birds aren't negatively impacted by the trips.

Field trips will take place Saturday and Sunday and include excursions to Soda Mountain, Klamath Lake and Table Rock. Trips will be led by local biologists and birders, some from KBO. Each excursion will have between 10 and 15 participants and one trip leader.

Both of the trips to see the great gray owl and a few other trips are already booked up, but several more still have space.

The festival, which KBO hopes will draw both locals and visitors, will also include evening keynote speakers and a social hour on Friday and Saturday nights. Those events will take place at ScienceWorks Hands-On Museum, which is one of the festival's sponsors.

Most field trips will begin early in the morning and last for some or all of the day.

"That's when there's more bird activity," said Breen. "Birds sing for a few hours after sunrise."

see **BIRDING**, Page 2C

"Birds are indicators of forest health and indicators of our well-being. Birds tell us a lot about what we can do better with our natural resources."

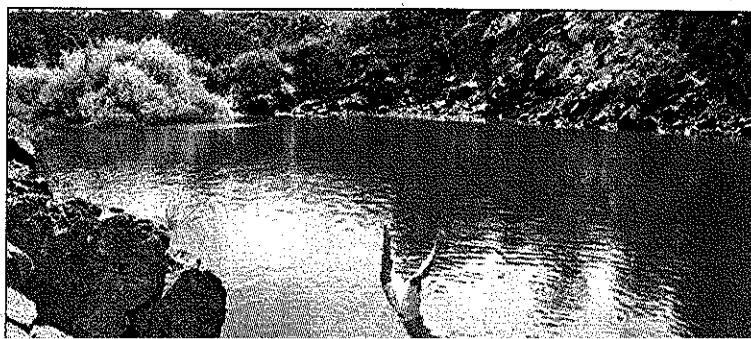
John Alexander, Klamath Bird Observatory executive director

By **SAM WHEELER**
Mail Tribune

To many people, the best part of summer is diving into a swimming hole on a hot, sunny day.

Not to bad-mouth swimming pools, but let's face it — chlorinated, concrete or Fiberglass ponds just aren't the same as a mountain lake.

If you're new to the area



muck-free bodies of water perfect for a summer swim. There are many other small lakes in the national forests and wilderness areas, but this will provide a starting point.

Remember before swimming to check for lake and stream health advisories related to E. coli and toxic algae blooms.

Howard Prairie

There is a large swimming

Birding

from Page 1C

Breen will lead two field trips — one at a mist netting station on Klamath Lake and a second focused on his favorite bird, turkey vultures.

The Ashland area is the perfect place for a

birding festival, said Breen, because the region is home to a diverse range of bird species, as well as being a cultural hub with plenty of restaurants, hotels and entertainment.

To highlight the conservation focus, each

attendee will receive a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation stamp — a duck stamp — as part of their \$100 registration fee. The duck stamp program uses money from the stamps to purchase and protect wetland habitats within the

National Wildlife Refuge System. Over the last 80 years, the program has helped to protect more than 6 million acres of wetlands.

Attendees will also receive a Mountain Bird Conservation Science stamp, modeled after the duck stamp but instead

helping to support KBO's scientific programs in the region.

Conservation efforts like the stamps and protecting the secrecy of some nesting sites help earned the Mountain Bird Festival a 2014 Mindful Birding Award and grant.

To learn more about the Klamath Bird Observatory's Mountain Bird Festival or to register, see www.klamathbird.org/education/mountainbird.

Teresa Ristow is a freelance writer living in Ashland. Email her at teresa.ristow@gmail.com.