

Peter Thiemann: Image hunter

BY HALEY MAY

While some hunt with a gun, Peter Thiemann hunts with a camera. Photographing all images of nature, but especially birds, is his passion. To Peter, birding is exciting because of “the surprise and the chase,” the appeal to hunter/gatherer instincts. To birders, a “lifer” is a bird first seen and positively identified. Peter’s list of “lifer photos”—high-quality, publishable shots—is 246.

Originally from northern Germany, Peter is the man behind the camera of the bird images in the *Applegater’s* “Birdman” column. Seventy-four years old, he is a retired electrical engineer who now lives on six acres in Applegate after living in the Bay Area and Alaska. Why relocate here? “It is not too rainy and there are big trees—and it’s not California,” he tells me. He has been in the area for 11 years.

We met at Ashland Pond to



Photos of Great Gray Owls by Peter Thiemann will be featured in an upcoming book by birding guide Harry Fuller.

watch birds. After spotting some White-throated Sparrows, he pointed out a small duck, the Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*). The male is particularly recognizable, displaying a black and white crest with white stripes along his tail and chest. Females have a cinnamon-colored crest, and both are excellent divers. We watched as they periodically disappeared, bottoms up, searching for fish.

Peter is working with well-known author and birding guide Harry Fuller of Ashland on a book about Great Gray Owls featuring Peter’s photos. The Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), with up to a five-foot wingspan, is one of the “most wanted” on any serious birder’s list. It is rare in southern Oregon, but Peter has been photographing a small population near his place as well as one in the Cascades that he has been photo-documenting for almost a year. Folks come from hundreds of miles, he tells me, just to catch a glimpse of this elusive creature. The owl hunts in the daytime, making it a wonderful subject for study. The proposed title for the book is *Living Ghost: The Great Gray Owl*. Peter and Harry are currently searching for sponsors.

Peter’s photo of White Pelicans flying over Mt. Shasta is on the cover of Harry’s recently published book: *Freeway Birding, San Francisco to Seattle*. The guide follows I-5 indicating various ideal sites for bird-watching. Taking a moment to participate in “the surprise and the chase” is one way to enjoy nature while stretching your legs.

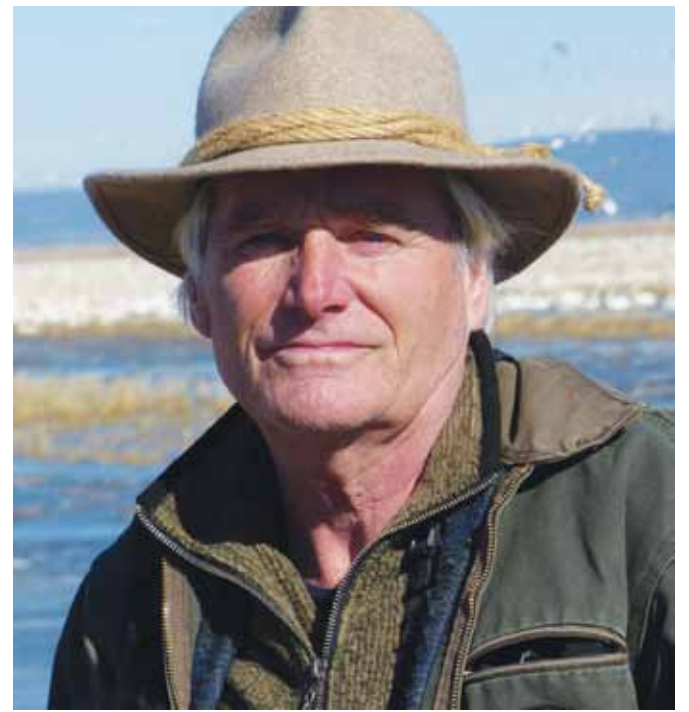
Peter and his wife Eva, a biologist and nurse, participated in the Ashland Christmas Bird Count (CBC) organized by Harry. Around 50 participants found 116 species from sunrise to sunset. The data will be submitted to Cornell University Lab

of Ornithology, which has over 200,000 citizens participating in bird observation. The data help researchers study climate change and/or behavior trends, such as the recent observation of south-ranging birds gradually moving 50-100 miles north.

I asked Peter why he thinks birds are so amazing. “They are beautiful and unique in that they can fly,” he says. “Think of the amount of energy it takes to migrate. Also the way they evolved, linked directly to dinosaurs. And they sing.”

He described the phenomenon of starling murmuration: the swooping flight of starlings, sometimes synchronized, in groups of a few hundred to a few thousand. “If this was music, it would be a symphony,” he says. While the process is not fully understood, individual birds follow the same rule of a school of fish escaping a predator: “when your neighbor moves, you move.” The mysteriousness of murmuration, like several other aspects of birds, is one of the reasons our flying friends deserve attention and respect.

There has been a noticeable decline in species directly related to human population growth and resource demand. Bird habitats are being compromised or are disappearing altogether. To help birds thrive, Peter suggests we stop using chemical and pesticide sprays that kill the insects that birds depend on. He feels that one of the main threats to birds is coal power plants, which emit harmful



Peter Thiemann has 246 “lifer photos” to his credit.

carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Due to his background in engineering, he feels it is essential to find “newer, better, safer” means of producing energy. It is feasible, for example, to reprocess waste material from nuclear power plants, which do not emit carbon dioxide. If radioactive waste is handled properly, nuclear plants are a much safer way to generate electricity.

There is an upcoming opportunity to kick-start your own bird exploration. At the end of May, thanks to a \$16,000 grant from Ashland, the Klamath Bird Observatory will host the Mountain Bird Festival in Ashland with field trips, poster exhibits, music and local food. Harry is helping organize the festival and will lead some classes. There may even be a chance to see Eva’s oil painting of Great Gray Owls. Online registration is available starting in early February. For more information on this event, visit klamathbird.org/education/mountainbird.

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Logtown Cemetery benches made by Boy Scouts

A nearly eight-month project has netted Logtown Cemetery five new benches.

Life Scout Ryan Trask, 14, of Medford, completed his Eagle Project on January 18 when he and four other scouts from Boy Scout Troop 7 placed the five benches in the cemetery with the guidance of Scott Traina.

Ryan first noted the lack of good benches in the cemetery in early 2013 when he was visiting the cemetery. He met with the Logtown Cemetery Association on May 18, 2013, to propose that he make five new benches for the cemetery. The board graciously accepted his offer.

Over the next few months, Ryan presented his plans, working closely with board member Janeen Sathre. Under the guidance of general contractor Scott Jensen of Jacksonville and using material donated by Foster IWP and Parr Lumber Company of Medford, bench pieces were measured and sawed to the size specified by the cemetery board.

Ryan organized and supervised



From left: Ryan Trask, Patrick Maloney, Jarod Biele, Connor McKeehan, Nathaniel Peterson and Scott Traina.

scouts from his troop to carefully assemble benches in November 2013. On January 18, 2014, he and four other scouts, Patrick Maloney, Jarod Biele, Nathaniel Peterson, and Connor McKeehan, delivered the final products and placed them throughout the cemetery.

These benches are a great asset to the cemetery and represent over 70 total hours of research and volunteer labor by these young men. Ryan will receive his Eagle Award, scouting’s highest, later this year.

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