

BIRDMAN

Friends on feeders

BY TED A. GLOVER

With winter season in full swing it seems as though it's even more fun to sit in our warm house and look out our big picture window and watch all the activity at our bird feeders. Food is getting scarcer

now for our little feathered friends, so more and more of them rely on bird feeders for extra nourishment.

There is a regular assortment of birds that visit every day. These include large

groups of dark-eyed juncos, often called "Oregon" juncos, plus mourning doves, Steller's jays, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, and a small flock of wild turkeys, whose voracious appetite and constant scratching in the ground make for quite a spectacle.

Although juncos are year-round visitors to our yard, we see lots more in the winter months as they migrate down from their boreal breeding grounds. Studies of these little dark-headed guys show that the ones you see in your yard this year are likely the same ones you saw last year, as they tend to return to the same place each year. You may see as many as 30 or 40 together foraging on the ground from early morning and through the day until just before sunset when they disperse to roost in trees and shrubs nearby. They are fun to watch as they raise their tails and flash their white outer feathers when alarmed, heading for the nearest safe place.

Other visitors we are watching this winter include the spotted towhee, larger than the juncos, with a dark hood and rufous sides and lots of white spots on its wings and sides. We like to watch our sunflower seed feeders to pick out the three species of chickadees that visit this time of year. The regular black-capped chickadee comes through the yard several times a day, but every once in a while we see a chestnut-backed and even a mountain chickadee traveling with them.

And even in winter we don't forget to keep our hummingbird feeders clean and full. The Anna's hummingbirds are regular visitors all winter long.

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Photos, left to right: **Red-breasted nuthatch**, which has a call like a tin trumpet. Photo by Dave Menke, USFWS. **White-breasted nuthatch**. Has more young, but is shorter-lived than the red-breasted nuthatch. Photo by David Brenzinski, USFWS. Source: wikipedia.com.

Volunteers are the heartbeat of Sanctuary One

BY DELLA MERRILL

At Sanctuary One volunteers are the heartbeat of the farm. Folks come from the far reaches of Jackson and Josephine Counties, from the other side of the country, from points in California and beyond. They come as groups, families, or individuals. Most are motivated by the animals in our care and are willing to participate in any way that's needed. They are folks of all ages (including Gabe, who informed me he is six and three-quarters), who come from all walks of life and all political perspectives.

They come to muck pastures, clean dog pens and empty cat boxes, and to walk old Jack Russell terriers and puppy pit bulls. They wash windows, do laundry, groom horses, hang with the cats, scratch the pigs, sheet mulch the garden, build rock walls, pull weeds, lead public tours and school groups, walk the labyrinth, and much, much more.

Why do they come? Why do they choose to drive 45 miles one way to give

freely of their time and energy? Why do they choose to spend their Saturday mornings or afternoons cleaning up poop left by a young dog not yet housebroken, or breaking ice on the water troughs for the horses and other farm animals, or showing up at 7:30 in the morning when temperatures are below 20 degrees, or spending their one-week vacation to work every day helping us?

I decided to ask a few of them so I could understand.

Brian, a resident of Ruch, volunteers every Thursday. He's self-employed. Work is slow and, with time on his hands, he wanted to do something productive. "I started volunteering because of a desire to be of service, to give something back."

Niti is from San Jose and arrived the day after Christmas to volunteer during her one week of vacation. "I decided from now on I want to spend my vacations doing something meaningful."

Chad, a Medford small-business owner, allows his employees one paid day a week to volunteer at a nonprofit of their choice. They have chosen Sanctuary One. "It's a kind of pay-it-forward idea. The happier employees

are, the more productive they'll be, and everyone wins," says Chad. "And actually, I'm not sure who's helping who more."

Meghan, one of Chad's employees, is a contact manager and spends the majority of her work hours at the computer. She says of volunteering: "It's the perfect complement to my job."

Several families make a point of coming out on a regular basis. "We started coming out because our daughter needed community service time for high school," says Rich, who volunteers with his wife and daughter every Saturday. "It's a great reason to unplug from the home and come out and commune with nature. The animals are kind of like the toys on Misfit Island; one missing a leg, most of them unwanted. This is their second chance, and I bet everyone who volunteers here gets back way more than they give. It has been such a blessing for our family."

There's a lot of talk, articles and research about the therapeutic benefits of care farming: working, loving and playing with animals, digging in the dirt and moving 75-pound bales of hay. But I've always wondered how something could be therapeutic when there was no therapist

around to facilitate the experience. Well, what I'm learning is that there is a therapist at the farm. In fact, there are many, and they come in many forms.

Take Lilly the cat, for example. Lilly arrived with barely any hair, skinny and timid. But with time, gentle handling and good food, she has emerged as a robust, beautiful, trusting cat.

Another example is the 500-pound bag of peanut skins donated by a local peanut company. Four Lithia Springs teens, working as a team, managed to tip the bag over in order to spill the skins so we could spread them on the garden.

We live in uncertain times and it's often difficult to find reasons for hope. But after a day at the farm, working alongside volunteers, seeing their smiles, listening to their stories of a tender, delightful, loving moment, I can't help but have hope.

As Rich said, "We get a great connection from the land and the animals. It's nice, really, really, nice."

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Photos, left to right: Volunteers Gabe, six and a half years old; Chad, a Medford business owner; and Meghan, with Lisa and Lulu.

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