



# Burning Issues

Spring 2015

## BADGERS, RABBITS AND SNAKES, OH MY

NIFC has hosted myriad “wild critters” over the years, either as just passers-by or full-time residents. Most of the reported critters were sightings, but a few have a pretty good story behind them. All of the stories below are true... except one. See if you can pick out the false one!

**#1** Rebecca Flinders, part-time warehouse worker cornered a gopher in Rick Blanton’s office and caught it with her bare hands! As she’s no longer here, we’re unsure of the result of that catch...if it ended up in her or the gopher’s favor. Apparently native Idahoans call gophers “whistlepigs,” but a true whistle pig is a groundhog, a much larger rodent.

**#2** Returning late from a fire assignment one night, Mitch Mumma smelled a funky smell next to the monument while retrieving his vehicle. The black and white critter waddled away fast, and although he didn’t see it well, the smell was enough to verify that sighting!

**#3** Ken Frederick, from External Affairs, was walking through the Monument one sunny afternoon and happened to see a snake slithering among the tall tufts of grass. Although not positively identified--it was likely a gopher or bull snake--the fact that it wasn’t a rattlesnake likely saved its life. Frederick has been known to dine on rattlers for dinner. (They really do taste like chicken, he reports.)

**#4** Some thought it was a ferret, others called it a weasel. In either case, this slinky creature frequented the Monument pond in early evenings looking for snacks. It didn’t stick around long, but was reported from two different folks that chose to remain unidentified. Colors ranged from brownish with a blackish head to a tan color.

**#5** A report of a scary 3½-foot snake came into maintenance from someone in the old administration building many years ago. Maintenance folks responded promptly to chase down an 18-inch garter snake. As you may know, there were no rattles or fangs on these little innocent guys and no one was never in danger....but somebody’s measurements were a bit off.

**#6** Nicole Hallisey thought she saw a BIG cat with kittens when she came to work at NICC early one morning before daylight. As she got closer, she watched a raccoon and cubs run off into the Russian olive trees in the Monument. These cubs were likely the same bunch born in a nest on top of the old barracks about 10-12 years ago. (really?? And they’re still cubs?... and aren’t baby raccoon’s called Kits? Or Karis?)

**#7** Jenn Smith and Kari Boyd-Peak actually witnessed a squirrel climb the side of the Jack Wilson building one day. Yes, a squirrel climbed a vertical building...with only its toes. We named it “Spidey-Squirrel” of course!

Well, which one sounds too false to be true? Read on to find out.

For those of you that have worked here for a while, you may remember a pond over behind the weather service building. You can still see the divot in the ground where it once was. Apparently it hosted carp, crappie, and bass. An occasional goldfish would show up in the pond but wouldn’t last long. Goldfish still show up today in the monument pond...around fair time...weird how that happens. If I were a goldfish, I think I’d rather get flushed down a toilet than succumb to the next blue heron that passes by. Speaking of blue herons, apparently they were frequent visitors to the fish pond, for obvious reasons.

What else? Scott Anderson claims seeing a snipe once... but didn’t go hunting for it. Michelle Moore has large unidentified ugly spiders in her office. Speaking of spiders, I actually had a black widow come over the top of my desk around Christmas a few years back. Yes, it was shiny black with a red hourglass. No, it’s no longer a problem for any of us. Dave Hendren reported a critter that ended up being an employee. Sorry, Dave, that doesn’t count. Mike Tuominen spotted a little red fox around the monument early one morning. Bob Swears reminded us of a swarm of bees on the side of the main warehouse. He saw a rattlesnake once too, but not in the old admin building. Badgers have been sighted on the base as well. Did someone really bring a pet cougar to work and tie it

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*Badgers, Rabbits and Snakes Oh My continued from page 1*

up in the stairwell of the old administration building? I'm just reporting stories as they come in.

Among other critters passing through and calling NIFC home, have been a buck mule deer, Sasquatch, feral cats, and rabbits. Okay Sasquatch is a stretch. But again, I'm just dutifully reporting as I hear it! There are some Sasquatch believers on base. I think they might work at NICC.

Weasels have not been seen on the NIFC base. Nor have ferrets. If a ferret were running around NIFC, it would have to be someone's pet, as in the wild they are endangered and isolated to pretty much to the middle of the country. Weasels are cute, but super feisty, so if you do run into one let it have its space. If you guessed that story #4 was the false one, you were right!

As the decision to draft this story was tossed around, we decided to take it one step further and build a full listing of all critters spotted on the NIFC base. Currently, the following is what we've compiled. If you spot anything that's not on our list, please let Kari Boyd-Peak (x5457) or another member of External Affairs know and we'll add it. It won't be a formal list with specific species and sub-species, or scientific names, just a fun general list to reference as the years go by!

**Mammals**

Mule deer	Badger	Skunk	Gopher
Fox	Raccoon	Squirrel	Rabbit



**Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fish**

Bull snake	Gopher snake	Carp	Bass
Rattlesnake	Garter Snake	Crappie	Spiders

*What's small and hairy and has been hanging around "upside down" outside the front of the Jack Wilson building for a week or so? Okay, several things may come to mind, but this little guy was uncharacteristically out of his element. This little brown bat should be in hibernation or at least holed up somewhere during the day out of sight. It made us wonder if it was suffering from white-nosed bat syndrome, a disease which causes bats to come out of hibernation early. This particular one didn't have the physical characteristics of a white fungus like growth on its nose and muzzle. One thing for sure, is he did NOT like being bothered. He made a low whirring noise when we pulled him off the wall, and you can see from the picture that he is less than pleased with our decision. On any account, we got some pictures, documented him on our "Critters of NIFC list" and he was taken home and released in a safer spot by an employee.*



## NEW TO NIFC

In November, Lieutenant Garry Sam joined the BIA, Branch of Wildland Fire Management as a Police Officer Instructor/ Wildland Fire Investigator.

Garry is from the Shoshone Paiute Tribe of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Owyhee, Nevada, and was born and raised in Nampa, Idaho. He joined Indian Affairs, Office of Trust Services (OJS) in 2001 and became a law enforcement officer stationed at Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Owyhee, Nevada. Since that time, he has worked at Standing Rock Indian Reservation in Fort Yates, North Dakota and numerous reservations in Nevada, Utah, and Arizona.

In a shared position between OJS and Fire Management, Garry splits his

time as a Police Officer Instructor for the Indian Policy Academy in Artesia, New Mexico and as a Wildland Fire Investigator, working with BIA's Wildland Fire Prevention Program.

Garry's position is important to BIA's wildland fire prevention program because he is helping to bridge the BIA law enforcement and wildland fire communities, particularly in the field of criminal arson investigation. His focus includes evaluating the OJS wildfire training needs in order to develop a training strategy for law enforcement personnel.

A Boise State University fan, Garry loves his time with his wife and son and enjoys attending pow-wows to connect with family and to dance. Asked which dance he performs, he

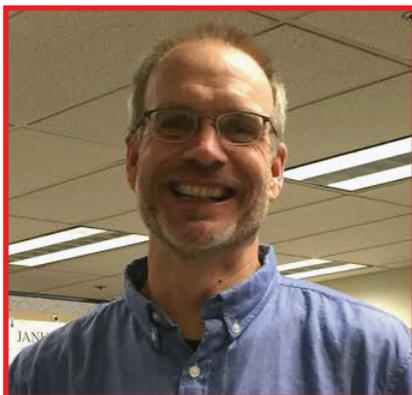


*Garry Sam, police officer instructor and wildland fire investigation.*

explained, "the Men's Traditional, because it all about dancing your joy." Graced with an easy smile and a welcoming office (Sho-Pai building), Garry is happy to be in Boise and is a welcome addition to the NIFC staff.

National fire ecologist, Nathan "Nate" Benson has been selected as the Fire Science and Ecology Program Leader for the National Park Service's (NPS) Branch of Wildland Fire, based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

"I'm looking forward to my new role as Fire Science and Ecology Program Leader and being able to assist all levels of the National Park Service in furthering wildland fire ecology and research," stated Benson.



*Nate Benson is the new Fire Science and Ecology Program Leader for the NPS.*

"Nate's wide-ranging experience related to fire ecology in both large and small parks; his ability to listen and then discern the big picture issues, as well as his ability to step in as a fully functional representative to the NPS Fire Management Leadership Board made him the ideal candidate for the program lead position," stated Fire and Aviation Division Chief Bill Kaage.

Nate began his National Park Service over twenty-five years ago and has held a variety of positions in the national parks. Starting his NPS fire career as a fire effects monitor at Glacier National Park, he then moved to Yellowstone and Great Smoky Mountains national parks as a wildland fire module leader. He was the prescribed fire specialist at Great Smoky Mountains and Everglades national parks, and the fire ecologist-natural resource liaison at the NPS Natural Resources Program Center in Fort Collins, Colorado. He moved to Boise to become the national fire ecologist in June 2004.

In his position as national fire ecologist, Nate also served as the NPS representative to the interagency Joint Fire Science Governing board for 11 years and was chair of the governing board for eight years. The Joint Fire Science Program funds scientific research on wildland fires and distributes results to help policymakers, fire managers and practitioners make sound decisions.

Nate has a Master of Science degree in Land Resources from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute for Environmental Studies. He and his wife Jessica live in Boise with three sons, one cat, and two small dogs.

Nate will continue to be stationed at the National Park Service's Fire Management Program Center, which is located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). Nine federal and state agencies call NIFC home where they work together nationally to coordinate and support wildland fire management activities. For more information about the National Park Service Wildland Fire Program, visit <http://www.nps.gov/fire>.

## FOR THE BIRDS

We see them fly by when we look out the windows. We hear them chirping from the trees when we walk across the base. Think about the last bird you saw on the NIFC campus. What color was it? What sound did it make? Was it nesting here, or just resting after a long day's journey? Is it a bird that lives in Idaho or just passing through? Is it a common species or is it considered a rare find?

Jon Curd, BLM fire operations and bird enthusiast, can probably answer all those questions. Since 2011, Curd has recorded 81 different bird species right here at NIFC. That's right, 81! He's compiled that impressive list by looking around on his occasional walks by the Monument. The list also includes birds he's seen flying overhead or out his office window. Although impressive, Curd believes the list could be even bigger. He often travels out of town for work during the peak of the migration season and can only imagine what bird-treasures he's missed out on seeing!

What makes NIFC a hot-spot for so many types of birds?

"NIFC is potentially a 'Mini-Migrant Trap' for birds," Curd said. "As they migrate across the relatively barren northern Nevada and southern Idaho areas, they are likely drawn like a magnet to the trees and shrubs that appear once they cross the airport and discover the lush vegetation surrounding the Wildland Firefighter's Monument."

Each year, the trees and vegetation at the monument continue to flourish. The flowering plants and trees entice more and more birds to stop at NIFC.

The number of bird species seen here on base varies from year to year. For example, last year, chipping sparrows were really abundant during migration, while they were almost impossible to find in previous years. The western tanager is often seen in numbers so high during migration they seem to be "dripping" from the trees, but Curd didn't see one here at all last year. Curd said it could be a matter of migration conditions, like storms and wind. "Sometimes



*A brightly colored Western Tanager.*

birds just continue straight through towards their summering/wintering grounds, while in other years they need to stop for a while to rest and feed."

Curd has seen a few rare birds here at NIFC. He found a female pine grosbeak in January, but unfortunately it was either sick or injured. He also spotted a common poorwill in the monument grasses last spring and a winter wren at the monument waterfall during fall migration the year before.

Some of the birds that fall into the rarely-seen-at-NIFC category but are common in nearby areas and habitats include red-wing and brewer's blackbirds, western meadowlarks, black-chinned hummingbirds and many of the local sparrows and swallows.

"Among the coolest sighting was a large flock of Bohemian waxwings feeding on tree berries only a few feet away from the rear entrance to the Jack Wilson building. Bohemians are uncommon winter visitors from Canada and Alaska. The more common cedar waxwings are seen here year-round" Curd said. He is also surprised that he hasn't yet seen a black-capped chickadee, great horned owl, or a common nighthawk at NIFC.



*A beautiful Bohemian Waxwing.*

Introduced-birds are seen in fairly large numbers around NIFC. Examples include the English house sparrow, European starling and the California quail. Another introduced bird, the Eurasian collared-dove-was never seen around NIFC 10 years ago, but now they are quite common year-round and nest around the base. More than a few folks around the base have mistaken their odd call for the soft hoot of an owl. A few years ago, a crowing male ring-necked pheasant delighted employees at NIFC for weeks.

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The next time you are walking across the base, look up in the trees and listen to the birds. Do you know what kind of bird it is? If not, and you are close enough, take a picture and send it to Curd (jcurd@blm.gov). He may be able help you figure it out. If it's too far away for a picture, note the size, color patterns and any other potentially identifying marks on the bird and enter it into a downloadable app online to assist you in the identification. Or call Curd!

If you want to take things one step further, begin your Life Bird List. This is simply a list of every species of bird you see. When you see a bird for the first time, write down the name, location and date of the sighting. Some people take things a step further and sketch pictures, include stories and interesting tidbits about each sighting and even use computer databases to record and keep notes on birds. Once you've recorded a bird for the first time, you can keep track of future sightings, but you might drive yourself crazy, as birds are always all around us, no matter where you go. Use Curd's list of birds and their abundance, based on the last four years of sightings at NIFC, to help you get started. A good pair of binoculars always helps too!

## NIFC BIRD LIST

Compiled by Jon Curd over the past four years.

___ Canada Goose (B) .....	R1	___ American Robin (B) .....	R1
___ Mallard (B) .....	R1	___ European Starling (B;Int) .....	R1
___ Great Blue Heron.....	R4	___ Rock Wren .....	M5
___ Turkey Vulture .....	SM4	___ House Wren .....	M5
___ Bald Eagle .....	R4	___ Winter Wren .....	M5
___ Northern Harrier .....	R4	___ Violet-green Swallow .....	M5
___ Sharp-shinned Hawk.....	R3	___ Northern Rough-winged Swallow .....	M5
___ Cooper's Hawk.....	R5	___ Barn Swallow (B) .....	SM1
___ Swainson's Hawk (B) .....	SM2	___ Cliff Swallow .....	SM4
___ Red-tailed Hawk (B) .....	R2	___ Ruby-crowned Kinglet .....	R2
___ Rough-legged Hawk .....	WM3	___ House Sparrow (B;Int) .....	R1
___ American Kestrel (B) .....	R1	___ Pine Siskin .....	WM5
___ Prairie Falcon .....	R4	___ American Goldfinch (B) .....	R2
___ Ring-necked Pheasant (Int) .....	R5	___ Lesser Goldfinch .....	R5
___ California Quail (B;Int) .....	R1	___ Cassin's Finch .....	M5
___ Long-billed Curlew .....	M5	___ House Finch (B) .....	R1
___ Killdeer (B) .....	R2	___ Pine Grosbeak .....	R5
___ Ring-billed Gull .....	R2	___ Orange-crowned Warbler .....	M5
___ Rock Pigeon (Int) .....	R2	___ Nashville Warbler .....	M5
___ Eurasian Collared-Dove (B) .....	R1	___ Yellow Warbler .....	M3
___ Mourning Dove (B).....	R1	___ Yellow-rumped Warbler.....	R2
___ Common Poorwill .....	M5	___ MacGillivray's Warbler .....	M3
___ Calliope Hummingbird .....	M5	___ Common Yellowthroat .....	M5
___ Lewis's Woodpecker .....	M5	___ Wilson's Warbler .....	M3
___ Red-naped Sapsucker .....	M5	___ Song Sparrow .....	M4
___ Downy Woodpecker .....	R5	___ Lincoln's Sparrow .....	M5
___ Northern Flicker .....	R3	___ White-crowned Sparrow .....	M4
___ Olive-sided Flycatcher .....	M5	___ Dark-eyed Junco .....	WM2
___ Western Wood-Pewee .....	M5	___ Chipping Sparrow .....	M3
___ Willow Flycatcher .....	M5	___ Brewer's Sparrow .....	M4
___ Hammond's Flycatcher .....	M5	___ Lark Sparrow .....	M5
___ Dusky Flycatcher .....	M4	___ Spotted Towhee .....	M5
___ Cordilleran Flycatcher .....	M5	___ Western Tanager .....	M4
___ Say's Phoebe .....	R5	___ Black-headed Grosbeak .....	M4
___ Western Kingbird (B) .....	S2	___ Lazuli Bunting .....	M5
___ Black-billed Magpie (B) .....	R2	___ Bullock's Oriole .....	M5
___ American Crow (B) .....	R1	___ Red-winged Blackbird .....	R5
___ Common Raven .....	R3	___ Western Meadowlark .....	R5
___ Warbling Vireo .....	M4	___ Brewer's Blackbird .....	R5
___ Bohemian Waxwing .....	W4	___ Brown-headed Cowbird .....	M3
___ Cedar Waxwing .....	R2		

If you do spot a rare find, send us the photo and we'll include it in the next edition of Burning Issues.



iBird Pro Guide to Birds *The iBird Pro app for Apple and Android is a great resource. It has an extensive database of birds with lots of information and pictures to assist you in identifying birds. In addition, "eBird" is a free computer database that allows you to record, track and share your bird sightings (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/about/>).*



### Expected birds at NIFC, but not yet recorded.

Osprey .....	SM
Ferruginous Hawk .....	SM
Golden Eagle .....	R
Peregrine Falcon .....	SM
California Gull .....	R
Great Horned Owl .....	R
Common Nighthawk .....	M
Black-chinned Hummingbird .....	SM
Horned Lark .....	R
Tree Swallow .....	M
Bank Swallow .....	SM
Black-capped Chickadee .....	R
Red-breasted Nuthatch .....	WM
Hermit Thrush .....	WM
Varied Thrush .....	W
Townsend's Warbler .....	M
Yellow-breasted Chat .....	M
Vesper Sparrow .....	SM
Savannah Sparrow .....	SM
Evening Grosbeak .....	WM

### Legend

#### Season

- R-Resident (year round)
- M - Migrant (spring +/- or fall)
- W - Winter
- S - Summer

#### Abundance

- 1 - Abundant, usually easy to find
- 2 - Common (at least at certain seasons) & seen every year
- 3 - Uncommon, but expected at least once every year
- 4 - Rare, not seen every year
- 5 - Casual, only 1 record

- (B) Breeding evidence (either at NIFC or in close vicinity)
- (Int.) - Introduced species