



MK Nature Center

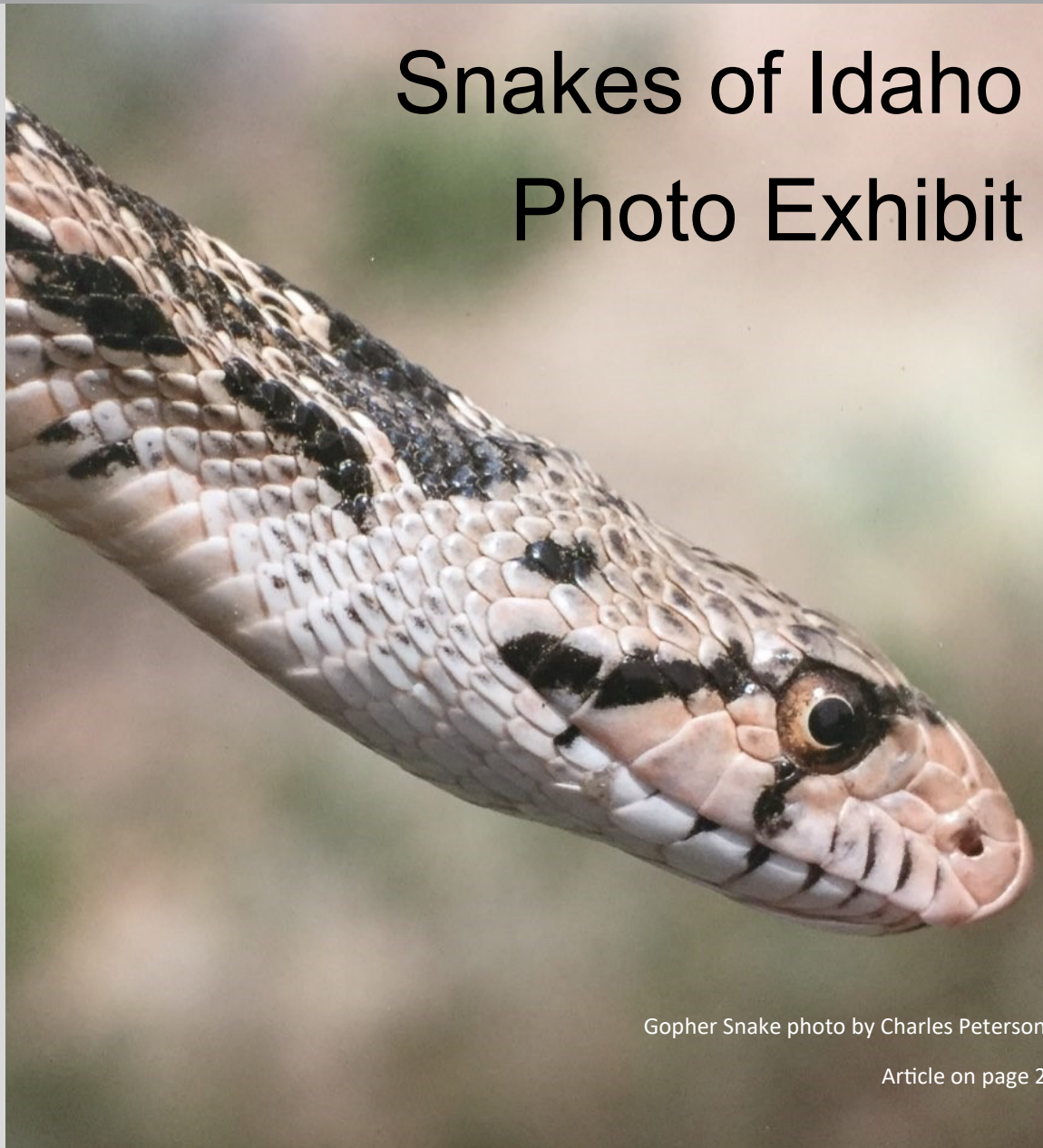
STREAM

The Seasonal Newsletter of the Morrison Knudsen Nature Center SUMMER 2021

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Snakes of Idaho Photo Exhibit



Gopher Snake photo by Charles Peterson

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Nature Notes

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG

One of the highlights of early summer is the arrival of mule deer fawns. Tottering on impossibly long legs and crowned with enormous ears, they easily capture the hearts of staff and visitors alike. While seeing the fawns is always a thrill, what is even more exciting is watching the reactions of nature center visitors if they catch a glimpse of a fawn. I remember a particular family standing in thrilled silence as a doe and her fawn crossed the path in front of the family. As it turned out, this was the first mule deer fawn they had ever seen, and the looks on their faces said it all. Even experienced outdoorsmen pause, roughened features softening at the sight of a doe with her tiny fawn daintily making their way into the trees.



Mule deer fawn. Photo by Bronwyn Myers.

Seeing mule deer may seem old hat to many of us, but for a lot of urban residents, it is anything but. For those of us for whom wildlife is an important part of our connection to the land, we need to remember our own initial excitement at seeing a “lifer” critter. Here at the nature center, we hope to foster such moments for all visitors by providing healthy habitat for our wild residents. Our education programs offer additional ways to see wildlife and forge connections. This summer, come down and stop by one of our education tables. The topics are varied, yet always fascinating and our volunteers are ready and willing to share their knowledge. You never know what tidbit of information might just spark a lifelong interest. And if you are lucky, one of the fawns just might appear, giving you the chance to simply pause and enjoy. We hope to see you soon.

Snakes of Idaho

Austin Reich, AmeriCorps Member, MKNC

For the Month of June the MK Nature Center had the privilege of hosting the “Snakes of Idaho” photo exhibit by Dr. Charles “Chuck” Peterson. Starting it all off with a presentation on his photographs, Dr. Peterson shared decades worth of research, knowledge, anecdotes, and beautiful photos of the 12 species of snakes you can find in Idaho.



Ring-necked snake photo by Charles Peterson

Snakes of Idaho Exhibit at MKNC. Photo by IDFG



Chuck also shared of the importance of the iNaturalist projects for reptiles and amphibians, describing the impact of the citizen science project for researchers in Idaho. If you happen across the slimy, scaly, or slithery, put in your observations at the link below and help scientists across the state understand the natural history of these amazing creatures. <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/idaho-amphibian-and-reptile-inaturalist-project>

Let's Compost!

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MKNC

The Gray Beards* have done it again! They have constructed a new compost bin at the MK Nature Center. The old bin was so effective that it was starting to compost itself and the walls were deteriorating. To solve that dilemma this time, the walls were constructed out of cinder blocks-totally non-compostable!

The compost pile at the Nature Center plays an essential role in creating habitat and recycling nutrients. Leaves, plant trimmings, and pond scum are all added to the pile for worms and fungus to decompose. The result is nutrient-rich soil we use to enhance native flower beds and gardens.

Composting is an important natural process that can be accelerated by placing organic matter in a pile! Not only do we get the benefit of the end product, but we help keep organic material out of the landfill. Come check out our new compost pile next time you are here.



Top: Gary Hundt fortifies the walls with concrete.

Bottom: The finished product with the crew pictured left to right (Howard Sheppa, Kevin Drews, Steve Berg, Gary Hundt). Not pictured Brent Davy and Kevin Wilson. Photos courtesy, The Gray Beards.



*The Gray Beards are a self-named dedicated volunteer group made up of Idaho Master Naturalists. They take on projects big and small at the Nature Center. The Gray Beards accept new members. A gray beard is not required to join!

Friends Update

Kim Chmura, FoMKNC Board Member

The long awaited new MKNC information kiosk is well under construction. The Friends of MKNC thanks our many members and donors for making this ambitious project a reality. In addition, Boise Cascade donated much of the lumber needed for this project, and with today's wood prices, this gift was a true budget-saver. To all who contributed to this project, we are extremely grateful!!

The new kiosk will replace a structure that was built in the early 1990's, original to the nature center. The old structure served its purpose as an educational display and storage shed for many years, but ants, squirrels, weather, and good old-fashioned rot took its toll, and a replacement was sorely needed.

The new kiosk was designed to create a state-of-the-art educational window with a large display space and lighting, while providing much needed storage space for educational materials and maintenance equipment. The structure has a cantilevered roof over the outdoor space to provide a shaded and dry area for our volunteers staffing "learning tables", and our visitors to rest and enjoy the nature center surroundings. The new kiosk is also in a perfect location, right at the intersection of several pathways!

The educational displays in the kiosk are designed to teach visitors about key concepts in nature that are seasonally relevant, such as migrating and spawning salmon, turkey adaptations, winter survival strategies and pollination. We hope these displays delight and inspire our visitors, while creating a greater awareness and understanding of Idaho's natural environment.

We hope that you will visit the MKNC soon to see how your donations are making a difference in the educational opportunities and overall visitor experience. Again, a huge "Thank You!!" to our many donors to the Friends of MKNC for making projects like this new kiosk possible!!



Friends of MK Nature Center raised \$19,050 in May during the 2021 Idaho Gives Campaign. This money will launch their next big project which will be to replace the Auditorium bird-viewing area with bird-friendly glass and a new educational mural.



As the Hive Buzzed

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor

As it turns out, an observation hive is rather like a soap opera. A varying cast of characters, mysterious disappearances, regicide, abandonment, and changing loyalties make for never a dull moment. But the opportunities for learning are endless and the rewards are sweet, indeed.

The bees overwintered very well and we were looking forward to an active hive this season. However, a much-needed HVAC replacement intervened. Naturally, where the work needed to be done was directly underneath the hive. We decided that the good folks from YMC, Inc. would probably appreciate a work environment free of armed, flying insects, so the display was dismantled, including the hive. The bees went to beekeeper Roger Wallace for the duration.

Fast forward several weeks and we had a wonderful new, fully-functional HVAC unit. It was time to bring back the bees. Upon their return, however, it was discovered that the hive was queen-less. What happened to her in the interim is anyone's guess, but the bees had taken things in hand and created several queen cells. For a week, we kept an eye out and finally, a new queen emerged. After a week or so of wandering around the hive with no egg-laying activity, she disappeared. She might have gotten lost on her mating flight, was killed by the workers, or abandoned the hive altogether. Once again we were left with a queen-less hive, but this time there were no larvae available for the workers to raise queen cells. Into the breach stepped Roger to bring us another colony. The accompanying photos show Team Apis installing the new colony into the observation hive.

This new hive of bees settled right in and has been, well, busy as bees. They have been so busy, in fact, that they filled their honey frame, allowing us to harvest just shy of three pints of honey at the end of June. The colony is quite content, indicating a healthy, productive queen. Nature center visitors are enjoying observing the bees again and learning about the importance of all pollinators. If you come by to see the bees, the new queen has a white dot on her thorax, making her easy to find amongst the rest of the colony.



Vicky Runnoe (IDFG), along with bee volunteers Roger Wallace, Kevin Drews, Kevin Wilson, and Howard Sheppa. Photo by IDFG.

It's a Girl!

For the first time since she arrived at the nature center Wilson, the center's non-releasable peregrine falcon, laid some eggs. In fact, since she had not done so for so long, we often wondered if "she" was actually a "he?" But egg-laying confirms her gender.

So, why did it take her so long to lay eggs? At between six and seven years old, it seems reasonable that Wilson should have laid eggs previously. In order to get some clues to her behavior, it helps to look at the breeding behavior of wild peregrines. In the wild, female peregrines often lay their first clutch when they are two-three years old. Wild birds that do not have a breeding territory often postpone egg-laying until later. Since

Wilson does not have such a territory, this could be one factor in the postponement of her egg-laying.

Another factor could be the lack of a male to initiate courtship. While photoperiod is involved in the breeding cycle, so are active courtship behaviors. How such behaviors impact the hormonal changes that occur during the breeding season is not well understood, but biologists feel they are indeed linked.

In addition, male peregrines feed their mate---a lot! Extra nutrition above and beyond a normal diet is necessary for egg-laying. Wild females benefit from the extra meals brought to them by their mates. Even with Wilson's nutritionally complete diet in captivity, it may not have been enough for her body to initiate egg-laying.

We will probably never know exactly why Wilson has not laid eggs until now. Raptor behavior in captivity can be quite different from that of a wild bird. Captivity, even with the best of care can still create stresses on the bird that are unseen by handlers. It will be interesting to see if this is a one-off or if Wilson becomes more regular in her egg-laying in the future.



Wilson, the Peregrine Falcon. Photos by Brian Lawless.

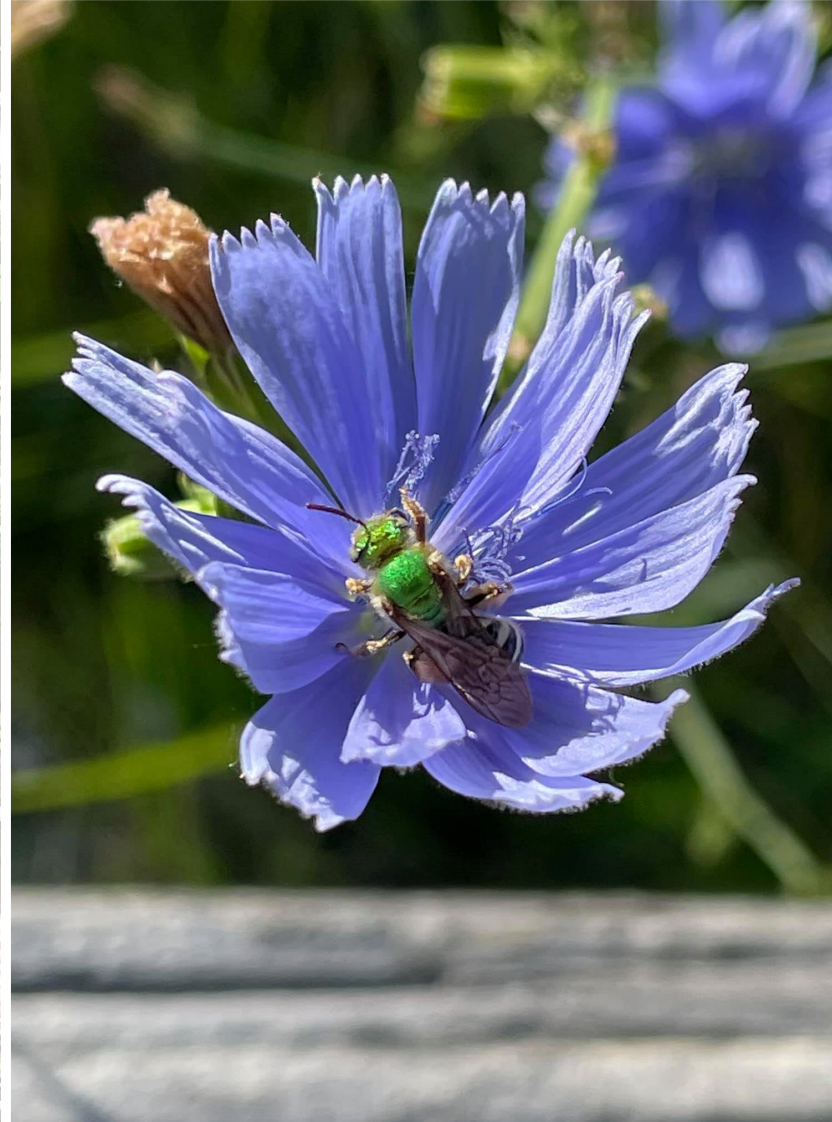


Egg photo by Maria Donovan.



Images of Summer

Native bee on chicory, mule deer doe and fawn photos by Vicky Runnoe (IDFG). Swallowtail butterfly in hand by Sara Focht (IDFG).



VOLUNTEERS

D O N O R S

Kim Baar
Steve Berg
Kody Cochrell
Kevin Drews
Jon Dudley
Elizabeth Grosse
Gary Hundt
Carolyn King
Kevin Laughlin
Cindy Marlow
Jon Mathews
Bronwyn Myers
Lyla Olson
Katherine Powell
Howard Sheppa
Chuck Staber
Claire Veseth
Roger Wallace
Kevin Wilson

April
May
June

John and Edwina Allen

Sue and Jim Jameson

Wild Birds Unlimited

Donors listed here do not include donors who gave to [Friends of MK Nature Center](#) (the Nature Center's 501c3 nonprofit organization).

IDoTeach Summer Intern



Photo by IDFG.

My name is Abby Goodell and I am the Boise State IDoTeach intern here at MK Nature Center for the summer. I am originally from the Seattle, Washington area but have come to love Idaho and the community at Boise State, especially from the teaching program. I am a mathematics major with an emphasis in secondary education, so teaching about wildlife has been a bit different than what I am used to. However, it is so fun to see the kids in the programs get so excited about nature and wildlife.

My favorite way to spend my time is being outdoors, whether that is camping, hiking, or just exploring all that Idaho has to offer. Being at the nature center I have learned even more about wildlife and that has gotten me excited to get younger kids interested and excited about the outdoors and exploring nature.