



High Desert Voices

A newsletter published by and for volunteers

September 2025

HIGH DESERT
MUSEUM



Welcome the Night

by Torree Abrams, Newsletter Writer

“Welcome the Night is like Bat Walk Night on steroids,” according to Erik Frank, the Museum’s public programs coordinator. It definitely was! Yes, members of the U.S. Forest Service had iPads with programs that can pick up and identify any of the 14 species of bats in Central Oregon. These bat detectives set up the station at the Cheney Pond viewing platform, where the bats easily find flying insects. It was a marvel of technology meeting nature.

But wait, there was so much more offered at this event! [DarkSky Oregon](#) had a station that taught about the importance of dark sky conservation and ways to help at home. Minimizing outside night lighting and pointing it down can make a difference for creatures of the night. Many of you may remember the Dark Sky exhibit at the Museum a couple of years ago.

Outside on the patio, visitors could shade their headlamps and flashlights with green or red cellophane to reduce the glare, still allowing them to maneuver in the dark. Some folks thought red was the best color, but another volunteer insisted that green worked best for him when hunting. Controversy rages on.

Folks from the [Pollinator Pathway Bend](#) set up a station that talked about twilight and nighttime pollinators, which definitely benefit from dark skies. They were located near Cheney Pond too. Volunteer Jerry Freilich displayed his Bug Discovery station near the Desertarium. His ability to engage and educate children of all ages was like a superpower.

In the same hallway, kids could take part in the Twilight Art Station, using symbols of nighttime to scratch away black wax and reveal rainbow paint underneath. Kids could also become “art” with Face Painting by Anne. Foxes and bobcats prowled the Museum after leaving this station.

At the meadow, the [Sunriver Nature Center and Observatory](#) had a telescope available, but in July it was still a bit too bright for visitors to see much. Never fear, they also brought samples of meteorites that intrigued guests. Winged Things Crafts was also in the meadow area. Every 15 minutes a new game of Bat and Moth started, in which one bat is “it” and blindfolded, making fun screeching noises to simulate echolocation. Moths with noisy shakers responded to the screeches to help the bat locate the moths and “tag” them. Adults formed a “circle of trees,” whispering “swish” and “sway” to keep the children safe and in a contained space.

Designed by Donald M. Kerr Curator of Natural History, Hayley Brazier, and volunteer Thad Grudzien, a Predators at Night station was located near the Birds of Prey building. Thad had a variety of crepuscular and nighttime predator pelts for people to touch and learn about the special adaptations of those animals. At 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm, Aaron Rubin, the Museum’s senior wildlife outreach specialist, brought out an owl and taught people about owls’ incredible abilities to hunt at night using silent flight.

The *Forest at Night* exhibit located in the Changing Forests building continued to be a must-visit site. The exhibit brought predators, prey, and pollinators to life on the screen; and visitors had many opportunities to learn how they coexist in the dark together. If guests couldn’t view stars using the telescope in the meadow, they still could explore the night sky.





Two libation stations served adult and non-alcoholic beverages, and the Crepuscular Café with food catered by Luckey's Woodsman provided sustenance for the visitors.

Reservations exceeded 400 participants, and about 40 others showed up hoping to attend this fun and informative night. Volunteers and staff facilitated the movement of guests as they tried to get their stamp collector cards stamped at the 12 activity stations. People turned these in at the raffle table near the front entrance. Not every stamp was necessary to be eligible for the raffle, but folks made sure that they engaged with almost every station.

Happy faces, enriched brains, satisfied appetites, and tired feet exited the Museum at the end of the evening. The collaboration between Museum staff and other organizations made *Welcome the Night* a huge success. Learning about nocturnal and crepuscular wildlife, the night sky, and the conservation of darkness has never been so much fun. Once again, the High Desert Museum shone like a bright star in the night sky with innovative programming.



Photos by Museum staff

***Forest at Night* Exhibition**

by Siobhan Sullivan, Newsletter Editor



When you enter the room, an animated video on a large screen shows forest wildlife in action in dim evening light. The sounds of the forest creatures echo through the room. You can see brief clips of the forest scene video [here](#) and [here](#).

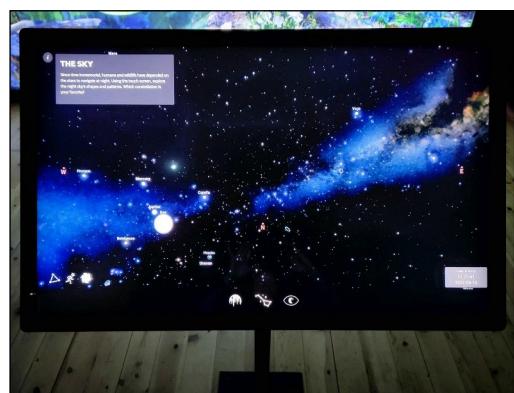
When you stand in front of the touchscreen control for the screen, you can view information on three night-related topics. These interactive displays engage visitors and help them learn more about the nocturnal world.

- *Explore the Sky* shows nighttime constellations in the sky. Visitors will learn how the constellations help guide migrating birds across the High Desert.
- *Explore Eyeshine* highlights the nightglow of wildlife eyes in a dark evening scene. When you click on the pairs of eyes, you'll learn who they belong to and more about them.
- *Explore the Forest* features a wide variety of wildlife, including striped skunks, coyotes, great horned owls, rubber boas, American bullfrogs, and white-lined sphinx moths. If you click on the animal, a pop up gives more detailed information.

On a recent summer morning, I checked out the *Forest at Night* exhibition in the Changing Forest pavilion building. I discovered an exhibit that is a hidden gem, full of wonders.

Museum curators and staff created the *Forest at Night* exhibition. It includes animated displays and still shots related to the night. Overhead, stars sparkle in a painted nighttime sky. Carved silhouettes of dark trees cover the walls. Small lighted cutouts feature closer views of wildlife.

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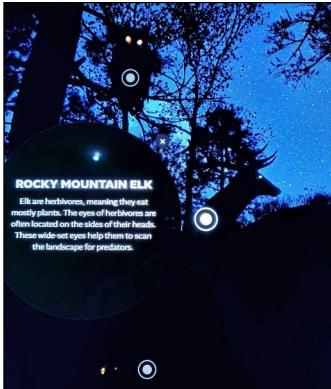
Forest at Night—continued



In addition to the interactive screen, there is also information about light pollution. Artificial light disrupts the delicate balance of ecosystems. There are several suggestions about ways to reduce light pollution where you live, work, and play. These include shielded outdoor light fixtures, lights with motion sensors, and the use of warm-colored lightbulbs.

I viewed this exhibit while sitting on a comfortable wooden bench. The plaintive call of a nighthawk reverberated within the room. *Where is it?* I wondered. I finally spotted the bird resting on a branch near the great horned owl. A rubber boa raised its head and slithered near the pond's edge. Elk in the background bugled. Coyotes moved into the scene, pausing to howl at the full moon. You will notice different details every time you visit the *Forest at Night* exhibition.

The beautiful videos and immersive components of this exhibit make it a memorable stop for visitors; one they will want to experience again and again.



Photos by Siobhan Sullivan

Wandering Thoughts on the Soda Creek Trail

by Tom McGibbon, Newsletter Writer



The morning sky brightened, cloudless, in a crisp blue ‘good-morning, get-going’ greeting. So, I hastily assembled a daypack, backed the car out of the garage, and drove up and past Mt. Bachelor onto the Cascade Lakes Highway. I drove past Todd Lake to the Green Lakes parking area. There, I laced on my boots, shouldered my pack, gulped down some water, and walked to a nearby trailhead.

Two separate trailheads originate from this parking lot: the Green Lakes Trail and the Soda Creek Trail. The Green Lakes Trail offers a beautiful symphony of waterfalls and cascades, with a gentle trail along Falls Creek from which to enjoy them. That day, however, I decided to walk on the Soda Creek Trail, which is much quieter, less spectacular, and has fewer people along the elusive namesake creek.

You'll need a limited wilderness permit to walk either of these trails. However, the immense popularity of the Green Lake Trail beckons most of the hikers, leaving a very uncrowded, often solitary ramble for those treading up Soda Creek.

The trail begins at an elevation of 5,400 feet and extends for five miles before it meets and melds into the Broken Top Trail. At that junction, it's gained around 1,500 feet of elevation from the trailhead, with most of that being in the middle third of the route.

That morning, as I headed up the trail, I wondered what encounters this hike would bring. My thoughts wandered back and forth, between being mindfully present and focused on my surroundings to being detached from the moment in dissociated musings and daydreams.



My thoughts drifted to bears and cougars, wondering if I'd see any that day, even though in this corner of the wilderness, I never have. That's probably just as well, since being a solitary hiker, would make me the only prey in any human/apex-predator encounter.

The first stretch of trail, a mile or so, crosses a broad, mostly flat plain through open scrubby forest of pine and small fir, teasing views of Broken Top's southwest massif. Downed trees clutter the forest floor; stripped of bark and color, their tangled trunks and branches are gray from seasons on the ground. As far as bears go, there are hardly any berries, roots, or edible grasses to keep a bruin happy. They will eat insects, but don't seem to have made a dent in the mosquito population.

I've met bears in different areas, and my reactions have been good, with both of us in those situations being curious and tolerant, and me happily leaving with a good memory and all of my limbs. Cougars present a very different story. They are even rarer. This summer, I ran across an Oregon Department of Fish and

Wildlife officer in the Three Sisters backcountry, and we discussed cougars. He said Oregon has about 5,000–6,000 cougars and that in *this* wilderness, "they're around." I've never seen one in the wild, although more than once, I've had that heightened sense that one was eyeing me. As stealthy ambush predators, they will see me long before, if ever, I see them.

My thoughts snapped back to the moment. I laughed at myself and moved along.

Further along, the trail crossed through an expanse of dark basalt mounds and block outcrops jutting from the ground before a short descent. At the bottom, the forest disappeared, and the view opened to a stunning, large, lush green meadow, bordered by a shallow, crystal-bright, whispering stream. I lingered, hoping that a deer or elk might appear, but none did. Today, only the melody of the tiny stream graced the meadow.

I noticed a large number of small butterflies with deep orange triangular wings tattooed with black borders. They clung like ornaments to the sun-drenched branches of the small fir trees that hugged the meadow's edge, their wings slowly opening and closing to warm and dry.

Beyond the meadow, the trail begins to climb, crossing the singing stream and several spring-fed rivulets, before coming to Crater Creek. I was last here in early summer of the previous year. Crater Creek was crowding its banks in a raging flow, from heavy snowmelt and rains. It presented a dangerous crossing. Happily, today, the creek flow is low and friendly. A tangle of small Christmas tree-sized trunks lay stuck amidst the rocks, providing an easy cross.

Across Crater Creek, the trail has its single brief and distant association with Soda Creek. It follows well above and along the flow for a half mile. After a steady climb, the flow fully reveals itself at a delicate waterfall. There, as suddenly as it appeared, the creek and trail part company, the former disappearing up the mountainside while the trail turns away, in a huff, fleeing up several sharp switchbacks into the dark woods, never to reunite.

Most of the trail's elevation gain occurs after crossing Crater Creek. It climbs into open, south-sloping meadows dense with colors from Monet-laden banquets of flowers woven into the dense greenery. Brightly punctuating the hillsides, the scenery invites me to frequently stop and gaze. Numerous springs keep the hillside spongy and clad in color. In the distance, Sparks Lake is below, and waves of mountain ridges spread out against the clear horizon.

It looked as if very few people had hiked past here this season. The grasses and flowers were crowding over the slash of trail, making it difficult to see the worn ground, and brushing my legs as if I were wading through knee high water.

As I continued through the sloping meadow, the sound of a distant rushing stream became clearer. Here, the trail turns markedly north as it approaches the edge of a ravine eroded by Crater Creek, flowing below. The timber again became heavy as the trail flattened and wound in an ongoing chicane of alternating dark trees, open hummocks of sand and talus, and occasional tarns of shallow static water-mosquito nurseries, accumulated from this past winter's melted snow.





I stopped for a moment to listen to a very large, old fir tree. A low breeze was blowing through its crown and slowly, slightly rocking its trunk, which groaned, like an old man, getting out of bed in the morning, and stretching the night's sleep away.

The small orange butterflies were now along the trail in abundance. Many fluttered about in erratic zigzag flight in a frenetic swirling flurry to nowhere. Others lit on the ground, sipping from the wet soil along the streams and rivulets. Many more clung to the small green fir trees, warming themselves in the bright morning sun.

The butterflies and mosquitoes weren't the only flying insects on that stretch of trail. Grasshoppers were zipping by my head, sounding like flying kazoos, and a large native bee decided to pester me, buzzing into my face and ears and encircling my head. I wasn't sure what I'd done to

invite its persistence, but it was starting to get on my nerves. As I continued walking along, I waved my single hiking pole at the buzzing, first in front of me to no avail, then behind me with similar ineffectiveness, and finally in a wild motion all about myself, until the intruder decided it'd moved me out of its territory.

Now, with the bee behind me, I recognized I was on the last mile or so of the trail's five-mile length, with most of its elevation gain also behind.

The large, dark fir forest had now transitioned to smaller scrub pine and fir, standing in scattered tree islands with little undergrowth, and stunted from living half of the year in 20 feet of ice and snow. The ground cover is also short and patchy, with the limited growing season restricting its height. Dry rolling hillocks of talus and sand opened wide area views along the trail. On this high alpine plain, Crater Creek has forked, and soon the trail crossed both branches.

With each step, Broken Top's crown of ragged spires slowly comes into view above the treeless knolls until the entire southeast panorama of the mountain is revealed. Details of the mountain slowly emerge until the entire mountain and massive sweeping shoulders come into view. In the center is the impressive terminal moraine, with its deep cleft that marks the entrance to the crater and Crook Glacier as well as the exit for meltwater flowing out through the gap.

The three massifs that make up Broken Top clearly stand out: the southwest with its false pyramidal summit, the lower northeast with its towering spires and needles, and the northwest massif, which has a friable and exposed block summit.

I say to myself: this is why I love to hike. These views highlight the Soda Creek Trail.

As I arrived at the Broken Top Trail junction, which is the terminus of the Soda Creek Trail, about five miles and several hours from its trailhead, I realized I had not seen another person along its entire length. No one, moving either up or down the trail. I'm reminded that even a well-known and established trail can still be off-the-beaten path.

At this junction, I decided that, rather than hiking back the way I'd come, I would hike a loop—an additional seven miles, back to the parking area—by heading west on a mostly flat stretch of the Broken Top Trail, passing Cayuse Crater, the saddle on the northwest ridge of Broken Top and into the Green Lakes Basin. There, the trail meets Falls Creek for the remaining due south hike to the parking area. I passed many hikers and backpackers along this stretch, with friendly greetings and brief trail chats. At last, I emerged from the woods, and back into my world.

On the drive home, I thought about the places and things that I saw that day, and where my frequent stops along a familiar trail stirred pleasant memories, like silent conversations with an old reliable friend. There is a calming comfort and confidence that comes with walking in the woods and mountains alone, accompanied only with thoughts and memories.

Photos by Tom McGibbon

High Desert Voices

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HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

High Desert Museum
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2025



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September 2025	
16	Museum Event: <i>Indigenous Speakers Series: Transformational Paths for Indigenous Libraries, Archives, and Museums.</i> 6:30–7:30 pm, doors open at 6:00 pm. Sliding Scale Pricing: \$20 Pay It Forward, \$10 Standard, \$5 Supported. FREE for Tribal members. RSVP here .
18–21	Museum Event: <i>Lost in Place Nature Writing Intensive.</i> \$1,200. RSVP here . Space is limited.
20	Museum Event: <i>Art in the West Closing Party.</i> 6:00–8:00 pm. Free. RSVP here .
23	Museum Event: <i>Kids Camp.</i> Fall and winter camp registration opens at 7:00 am. More information here .
24	Museum Event: <i>20-Dollar Art Show Extravaganza.</i> Tickets go on sale at 12:00 pm.
25	Museum Event: <i>Waterston Desert Writing Prize Award Ceremony.</i> 6:00 pm reception with appetizers and drinks. 7:00–8:30 pm program followed by a book signing. \$8 members, \$10 nonmembers. RSVP here .
	To RSVP or register, click the link next to the event description or call 541-382-4754.