

News from the Living Earth Nature Sanctuary Fall 2025



Digging up blackberries in the sanctuary woodlands

Blackberry Removal Project

As we announced in the previous newsletter, the Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District awarded LENS \$5000 to hire a contractor to remove non-native blackberries from two acres of oak woodlands at the center of our 15 acre property. This project will increase biodiversity of native plants and improve habitat for many wildlife species, including five sensitive species which breed on the property.

In late September and early October, we removed from the woods about 800 feet of wire fencing topped with barb wire which we took to metal recycling. The removal of this fencing will make it much easier for deer, coyotes, foxes, and other wildlife to make use of this habitat. It also made it faster and easier for our contractors to work on removing the blackberries.

We hired the nonprofit Walama Restoration Project to carry out the removal. The staff of this group has knowledge of native plant identification so that they can avoid damaging similar-looking native plants such as Dewberry and Nootka Rose. On October 6, three staff spent eight hours cutting the canes with brush cutters. Then, on November 24-25, six staff spent 14 hours digging up the crowns. Sharon and Jim transported the crowns into the graveled area behind the barn and left them there to be burned later after they dry out and regulations permit, along with a large pile of English Hawthorns which we also cut down. See the photos below for the effect of the operation.

During the spring, we will look for any non-native blackberries which sprout in this area and dig them up. If native plants are not filling in the areas where blackberries were removed, we will seed and/or transplant appropriate species. We will continue collecting data to see how the blackberry removal affects the biodiversity in the woodlands.



After brushcutting the blackberries

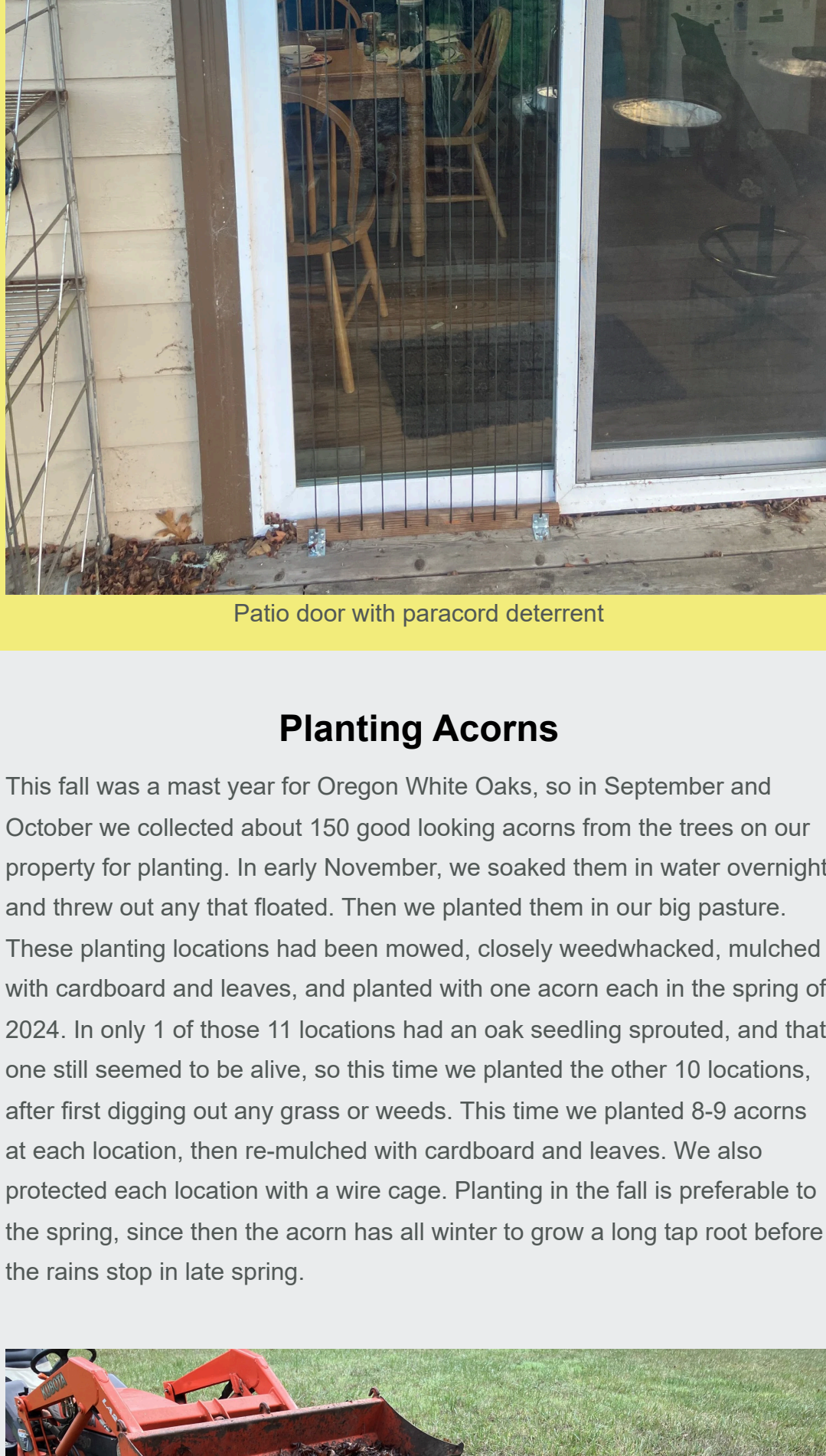


Piles of grubbed blackberry crowns and English Hawthorns

Helping Birds Avoid Window Collisions

Over the years we have tried various window stickers that were supposed to stop birds from flying into the window, but they didn't work. Recently we read about a [new idea](#) and tried it and it seemed to work better. What you do is to string paracord vertically in front of the window. We used olive green paracord and for our first attempt we placed the cords 4 inches apart. You want to put the paracord as close to the window as you can and also have a way to easily remove it and replace it for cleaning and painting. The best method we found was to have detachable boards at the top and bottom of the window with holes drilled 4 inches apart (but see below). A single piece of cord is then threaded up and down through all these holes with a knot at each end. You want the cord to be tight.

Bird strikes on these windows (that are within 15 feet of a bird feeder) were much reduced after putting up the cords and most birds hit lightly and flew away, but one bird died. Then we watched a PBS [video](#) about putting dots on windows which said to put them 2 inches apart. We have now placed our paracords 2 inches apart, and so far, we haven't had any strikes that we know of. Vision from the inside is surprisingly not greatly obstructed.

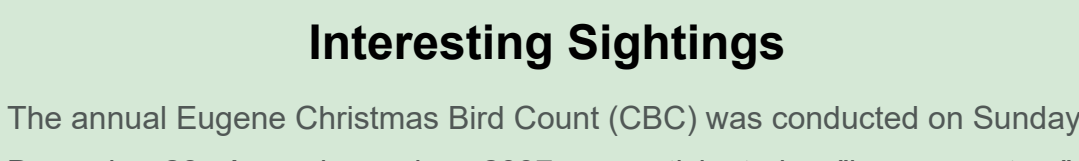


Patio door with paracord deterrent

Planting Acorns

This fall was a mast year for Oregon White Oaks, so in September and October we collected about 150 good looking acorns from the trees on our property for planting. In early November, we soaked them in water overnight and threw out any that floated. Then we planted them in our big pasture.

These planting locations had been mowed, closely weedwhacked, mulched with cardboard and leaves, and planted with one acorn each in the spring of 2024. In only 1 of those 11 locations had an oak seedling sprouted, and that one still seemed to be alive, so this time we planted the other 10 locations, after first digging out any grass or weeds. This time we planted 8-9 acorns at each location, then re-mulched with cardboard and leaves. We also protected each location with a wire cage. Planting in the fall is preferable to the spring, since then the acorn has all winter to grow a long tap root before the rains stop in late spring.



Planting Oregon White Oak acorns in the pasture

Interesting Sightings

The annual Eugene Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was conducted on Sunday December 28. As we have since 2007, we participated as "home counters" where we observe and count birds on the property during the day. This year, on a cold and foggy day, we saw or heard 34 species and 271 individuals. We saw three species that were new to our CBC list (though we have observed them at other times in the sanctuary): Lesser Goldfinch, Lincoln's Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow. If you want to see the complete list and how it compares to previous years, you can look at our website [here](#). For the entire year, we observed 95 species of birds. The listing by month can be found [here](#).

We had been mowing our big pasture annually in the late summer to control blackberries, but this year Jim didn't get started until late September. In a particular part of the pasture, he started noticing sparrows flushing from the tall grass. Upon further study, they turned out to be a mix of Savannah and Song Sparrows. We decided not to finish the mowing and see if the sparrows continued to utilize this habitat. So far, they have - and the two Savannahs counted on the CBC were found in this part of the pasture. For next year we are thinking of only mowing the specific areas with blackberries along with a few corridors.

With warm temperatures throughout the fall, we had flowers blooming and pollinators flying. A California Tortoiseshell butterfly was observed on November 19th. A yellowjacket nest remained active until mid-December, until it was finally dug out by a racoon or skunk.

Book and Film Recommendations

Some of the books we have read and the films we have watched recently include:

A Lane County Almanac by David H. Wagner (2021)

I (Sharon) was pleased to find that local naturalist Dave Wagner has compiled his writings and drawings into a book. Dave is known for creating annual *Willamette Valley Nature Calendars* since 1980 which included his drawings and local natural history information such as when do certain wildflowers bloom, when do certain birds migrate, when do garter snakes give birth, etc. Whenever I got one of these calendars, I never wanted to recycle it at the end of the year because I wanted to keep all that information! Dave also wrote a monthly illustrated nature column for the Eugene Weekly for many years. A *Lane County Almanac* is a compilation of writings from these calendars and columns, plus a bit more. Part One goes month by month, describing local nature happenings. Part Two contains Essays, Observations, and Contemplations. As Bill Sullivan writes in the Introduction, "David Wagner is that rare scientist with the gift to bridge worlds, sharing his love of nature in a way that everyone can understand." Back when I was starting Nearby Nature in the early 90s, I met Dave and participated in some of the nature walks he led in Alton Baker Park. At that time, he had already been leading those weekly walks for 15 years. The extensive knowledge of the park that he accumulated over those years provided a foundation for the environmental education curriculum we created for Nearby Nature programs, and I was pleased to see that he mentioned Nearby Nature in this book. Even if you already know a lot about nature, you will probably learn something new from this book, and you will learn it in an engaging and amusing way. We are lucky to have a naturalist so observant and so talented in writing and drawing make his forever home here in Eugene, despite losing his job at the UO to budget cuts in 1993. This self-published book is available at Wild Birds Unlimited and probably at local independent bookstores.

The Birds of Towhee Lane: A Journal of Avian Life in a Western Woodland by Betty Shannon (2012)

The author, a bird rehabilitator in the foothills of the northern California Sierras, describes the bird life on her nine acre oak woodland. With a couple of exceptions, all of the birds also live in the Willamette Valley oak woodlands, so her observations are highly relevant to the birdlife here.

Wonderfully written with interesting stories and information about birds that you may have often encountered but know little about.

Public Broadcasting System Films

Many of you may know about or watch the PBS Nature series, but PBS also has other series with shorter films about natural history. Some of the ones we recommend are:

[In Her Nature](#) which showcases women who are involved with various conservation projects around the world.

[Wild Hope](#) which highlights projects that are restoring wild places and bringing about positive change. The film about birds striking windows mentioned above is in this series.

[Deep Look](#) which investigates tiny organisms and their behavior with some extraordinary photography.

Do You Want to Volunteer?

If you would like to come out to see the Nature Sanctuary, have a tour, and help with a project, please reply and let us know when you are available and we'll get back to you and set something up. We are located at 89030 Fir Butte Rd, which is between Greenhill Rd and the Fern Ridge Reservoir, about 15 minutes west of downtown. While you are here, you might want to enjoy one of the many nice places to walk in our neighborhood (along the Amazon Canal or in the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area.) Also, depending on the time of year, we might have extra fruits or vegetables to share with you if you can help harvest.

Thank you for your interest!

To make a tax-deductible donation to our nonprofit organization via PayPal, click the button below:

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Living Earth Nature Sanctuary

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