

News from the Living Earth Nature Sanctuary Summer 2025



Three foot diameter Black Oak in the sanctuary woodlands

We Received a Grant to Remove Blackberries!

We are excited to announce that the Living Earth Nature Sanctuary has received the first grant we applied for. The Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District has awarded us \$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.

The contractor will remove the blackberries by cutting the canes and then digging up the crowns. We will not have them using any poisons. We will have the work done during the fall when native forbs are mostly underground and native deciduous shrubs are going dormant. We will choose a contractor with knowledge of native plant identification so that they can avoid damaging similar-looking native plants such as Dewberry and Nookka Rose. Most likely our contractor will be the nonprofit Walama Restoration Project.

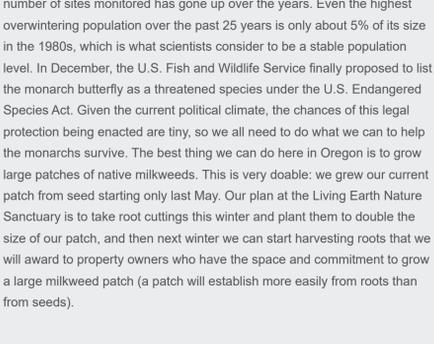
We will have the contractor come in September or October to cut down and chop up the blackberries with brush cutters. About a month later, after the rain has softened the ground and the blackberries have sprouted up so they can find them, they will dig up the crowns.

Before the contractor comes, we need to remove a livestock fence through this area. If you would like to help, please reply to this email.

We wish to thank the Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District for their generosity and all the work they do to help preserve wildlife habitat. You can find out more about them [here](#).

Monarchs on Our Milkweed!

We were so excited in June to see a monarch on our milkweed, not once but twice! The first was a female on June 15 who seemed to be laying eggs. We got a photo from a distance. The second was also a female. Sharon saw her fly across the driveway on June 28 and followed her to the milkweed patch where she nectared for so long on one flower that we got many good photos and a video with just a cell phone. We also transferred some monarch caterpillars to our milkweed from a much smaller milkweed patch grown by Lynda Christopher in Cottage Grove. Lynda found 20 caterpillars on her milkweed and was worried they would be disturbed by people passing by on the sidewalk, so she gave us ten. In our networking with the Lane County Butterfly Club and other groups, we have not heard of any other monarchs seen this season in the greater Eugene/Springfield area. We believe the monarchs came to our milkweed patch because it is about the biggest one in this area: 800 square feet of solid milkweed, shoulder high.



Monarch nectaring at the sanctuary Milkweed patch

The Western Monarch is in serious trouble. Every winter since 1997, volunteers have counted the monarchs wintering along the California Coast. Last winter the count was the second lowest in 28 years, even though the number of sites monitored has gone up over the years. Even the highest overwintering population over the past 25 years is only about 5% of its size in the 1980s, which is what scientists consider to be a stable population level. In December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finally proposed to list the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Given the current political climate, the chances of this legal protection being enacted are tiny, so we all need to do what we can to help the monarchs survive. The best thing we can do here in Oregon is to grow large patches of native milkweeds. This is very doable: we grew our current patch from seed starting only last May. Our plan at the Living Earth Nature Sanctuary is to take root cuttings this winter and plant them to double the size of our patch, and then next winter we can start harvesting roots that we will award to property owners who have the space and commitment to grow a large milkweed patch (a patch will establish more easily from roots than from seeds).

Other Interesting Sightings and Misses

Here is what else we've seen or heard at the Nature Sanctuary lately:

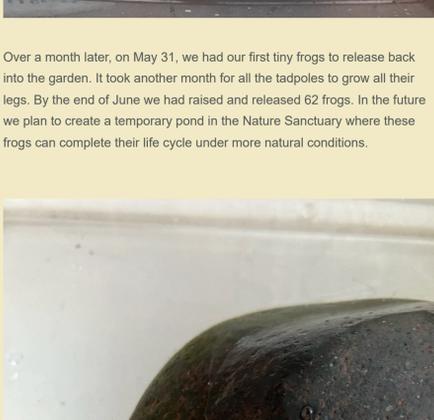
All three species of tree crickets that inhabit the sanctuary are now singing. These species are Snowy ([fast song](#)), Riley's ([slow song](#)) and Western ([constant song](#)). The Snowy and Riley's (formerly one species) are known as "thermometer" crickets because their rate of chirping is well correlated with temperature. More info [here](#).

We had an unusual visitor to the bird bath: a Brown Creeper. We usually see creepers in the oak woodlands in the winter and in the past we would occasionally see them in the spring and summer, but lately they have become rarer and we missed them on the Christmas Bird Count this year. So, we were very surprised to see one show up and take a bath! From its rather scruffy appearance we think this was a juvenile.

We had a great view of an Olive-sided Flycatcher who posed on a garden post just outside our bathroom window. We also had Western Bluebirds nesting in one of our bird houses (along with several pairs of Tree Swallows).

Though we saw most of the usual spring bird migrants this year, we missed or observed only a few individuals of some species. Cassin's Vireo is usually a fairly common breeder in the sanctuary, and we begin hearing them in April, but not this year - we never saw or heard any. Warbling Vireos and Black-throated Gray Warblers usually migrate through in fairly good numbers, but we only heard one vireo and no warblers. We usually have two or three Northern House Wren pairs breeding, but this year we only heard one male for a short period of time. What do these birds have in common? They all winter in the Southwest and western Mexico, and a severe drought there may have contributed to a lack of migrants along the west coast (see more [here](#)).

We also saw many large Northwestern Garter Snakes living under our tarps, a Red Admiral butterfly which probably emerged from its nettle patch where their caterpillars feed, and Grass-Carrying Wasps nesting in a piece of hose and on top of a sliding window. There were also at least four Beavers (including at least one baby) living in Amazon Canal near Fir Butte Road.



Olive-sided Flycatcher posing on a garden post.

Tadpole Rescue

On April evenings, we heard two Pacific Chorus Frogs (formerly known as Pacific Treefrogs) singing in our vegetable garden. They were there because we had covered the unplanted portion of the garden with a large tarp and rainwater had collected there. Normally these native frogs sing in large choruses earlier in the spring, but they almost always choose temporary ponds since they are small frogs and can be eaten by the non-native bullfrogs and fish found in permanent ponds. This strategy is always a gamble since the pond may dry up before the tadpoles grow up, which probably happened in most places during our dry spring. In the case of our tarp puddle, we discovered that our hose was leaking and keeping it from drying up. But we needed to remove the tarp to plant the vegetable garden, so on Earth Day we scooped up the tiny tadpoles and brought them indoors to raise on boiled lettuce and dead earthworms (see [here](#) for details).



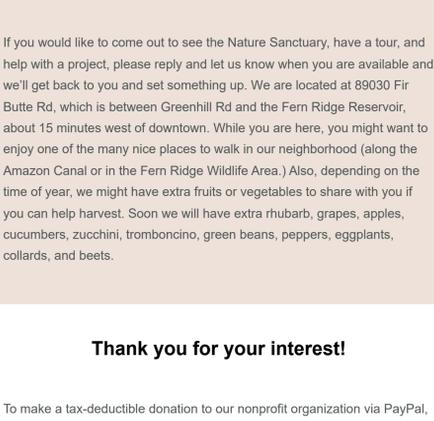
Over a month later, on May 31, we had our first tiny frogs to release back into the garden. It took another month for all the tadpoles to grow all their legs. By the end of June we had raised and released 62 frogs. In the future we plan to create a temporary pond in the Nature Sanctuary where these frogs can complete their life cycle under more natural conditions.



Wild Livestock

For 17 years before it was a nature sanctuary, this property was a farm which raised goats, sheep, pigs, chickens, and ducks and we also had dogs as pets and guard animals. Now that we don't have any dogs or livestock, the deer are much more numerous and are willing to come out in the daytime close to the house and to us humans. In the later farm years, our remaining dog was small, old, and mostly in the house, but she must have still served as a bigger deterrent to the deer than we were aware of at the time. Also, we never stopped to think how much forage the sheep and goats were taking away from the deer.

The deer will now forage in the orchard just 10 feet on the other side of the garden fence from Sharon while she is weeding. She can hear them chewing. She puts out garden trimmings for them and they come eat them before they wilt. We can walk by the deer within 20 feet and they look at us and don't run away. They sleep in our backyard and in the barn stalls.



Black-tailed Deer in woodlot

In 2023 there was a doe with an injured back leg who hung out around our house until she decided we were safe and then she brought her twin fawns out of the woods. We named her Rosie and put out a water bucket for her. Despite her bad limp and not being able to run or jump, Rosie raised those twins to the point where they could live without her. During the ice storm, we found a yearling deer sheltering on our front porch. It did not panic when we suddenly came out the door and had it cornered, so we figured it must have been one of Rosie's kids. Later, we found Rosie dead with her bad leg tangled in the barbed wire on the property line. One of our goals is to remove all the barbed wire fencing in and around our property.

During a hike through our woods this June, we flushed two small spotted fawns out of the tall grass. For most of the summer we had been seeing a doe with an udder, but it wasn't until recently that she brought her two fawns to visit the orchard during the day.

Book and Film Recommendations

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

The Mind of a Bee, by Lars Chittka (2023)

After reading this book, you will see bees in a different light. Describes, in a readable way, experiments the author and others have conducted that demonstrate bee intelligence and consciousness.

My Garden of a Thousand Bees

An episode (number 1 of season 40, streaming until 10/15/2025) in the PBS Nature series, this film follows an accomplished wildlife filmmaker as he investigates the bees in his garden during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 in England. A fascinating look at the intelligence and personalities of bees.

Touching the Wild: Living with the Mule Deer of Deadman Gulch, by Joe Hutto (2016)

The author spent nearly seven years getting to know and being accepted by a herd of Mule Deer in Wyoming. His observations and insights of deer behavior are fascinating. While the Black-tailed subspecies in Oregon do not form the migrating herds that Hutto's deer do, we have encountered many of the same behaviors of the deer in the sanctuary. A must read for a deeper understanding of life as a deer. Hutto also made a movie of the same name in the PBS Nature series (season 31, episode 15).

The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World, by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2024)

This beautiful and mesmerizing book, by an author with deep insight into the natural world, focuses on what life could be like if humans focused on interconnectedness and generosity instead of competition and consumption.

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. Soon we will have extra rhubarb, grapes, apples, cucumbers, zucchini, tromboncino, green beans, peppers, eggplants, collards, and beets.

Thank you for your interest!

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

Living Earth Nature Sanctuary
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