

Windows to *Wildlife*

A View From the Blind

On the Idaho Birding Trail at
Payette River WMA

Catch the Bloom

Summer wildflower
destinations around Idaho

Bighorn Highway

Bighorn Sheep viewing

Northern Bog Lemming

An elusive bog dweller of
Northern Idaho



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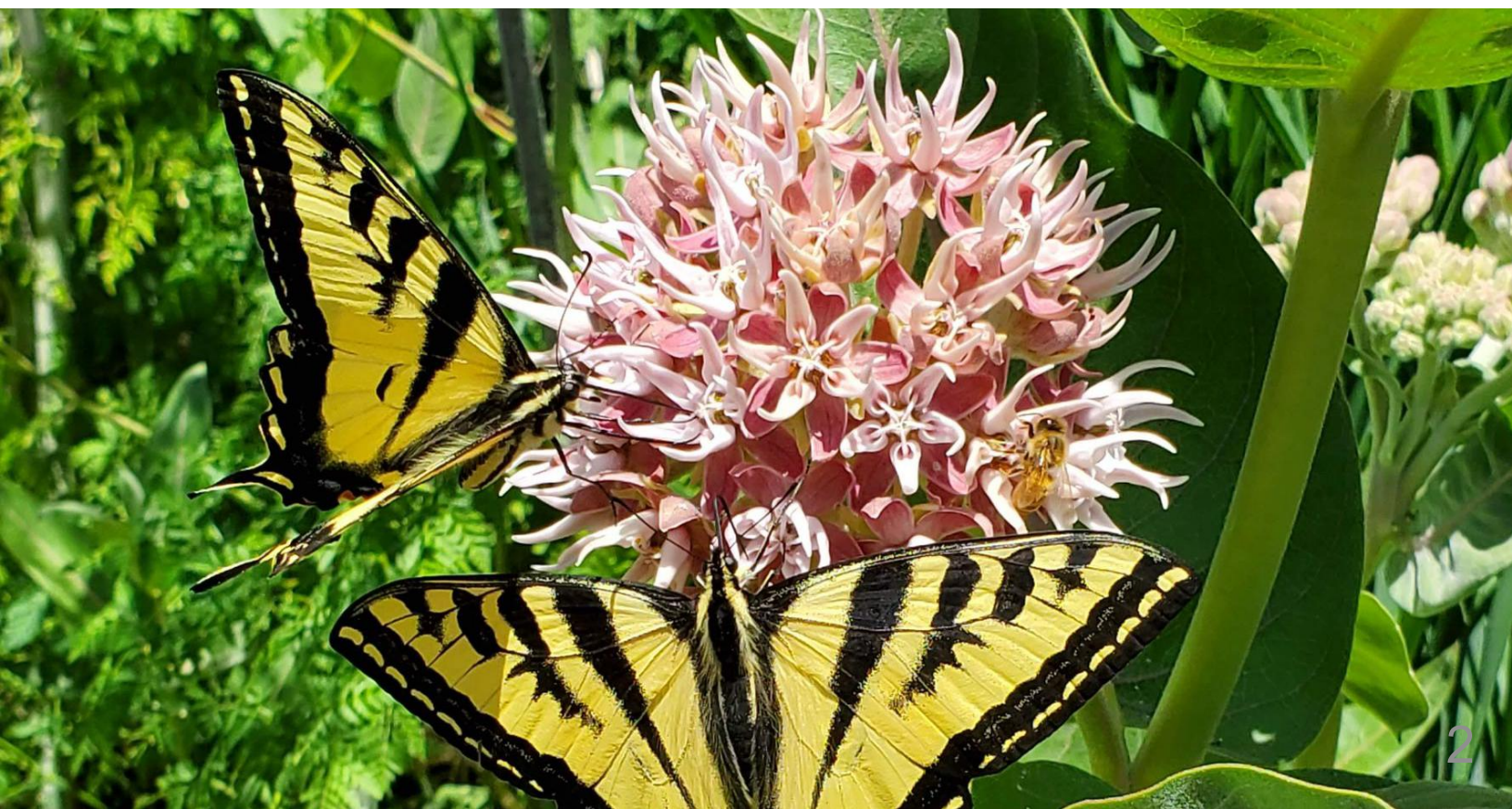
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Viewing bighorn sheep along the "Bighorn Highway"

Western Tiger Swallowtail butterflies feeding on milkweed at Payette River WMA. PHOTO: Steve Dempsey/IDFG



Northern Bog Lemming

An elusive bog dweller

Species of
Greatest
Information
Need

A Needle in a Haystack

by Casey McCormack*
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When thinking about rodents in Idaho, common and widespread species like the North American Deermouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) or Columbia Ground Squirrel (*Urocitellus columbianus*) may first come to mind. It can be easy to forget there are dozens of rodent species native to the state, some of which are quite elusive and live very different lives than the mice or squirrels you may see daily. One of these unique species that calls Idaho home is the Northern Bog Lemming (*Synaptomys borealis*); have you heard of it?

The Northern Bog Lemming is in the Cricetidae family which includes many common species of voles and mice including the North American Deermouse mentioned earlier. They are typically brown or grey in color and no more than five inches in total length with a comparatively short (three quarters of an inch) tail. If you see a glimpse of a rodent and wonder if it was a Northern Bog Lemming, this short tail may be the characteristic that could help distinguish it from other rodents at first glance. The other physical characteristics unique to Northern Bog Lemmings require closer examination, like a vertical groove found along their upper incisors.

Very little is known about the Northern Bog Lemming in Idaho and elsewhere within its range. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game is hoping to change that with a new survey effort. PHOTO: Casey McCormack/IDFG
ILLUSTRATION: Mark McCollough



With a name like the Northern Bog Lemming, you might think that this small rodent inhabits boggy areas in the north, and you would be correct!... as far as we know. The species is found in the northern latitudes of North America, primarily in Canada and Alaska. The southern extent of its range does dip into the lower 48 to states like Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Washington, and Idaho. All observations for the species in Idaho have been in Bonner and Boundary counties; the northernmost region of the state. The species is often documented in peatlands with abundant sphagnum moss. These unique areas accumulate peat from dead plant materials, typically sphagnum moss, to create what are described as bogs or fens. While Northern Bog Lemmings do appear to be associated with peatlands, it is not exactly clear why or how they seem to be linked to these unique habitats. To further sow uncertainty in their life history, Northern Bog Lemmings have also been documented in other habitat types in Idaho. Some of these other habitats include mature forests of Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*), Engelmann Spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), and Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), although many of these observations are quite old and difficult to verify.

While the species has been surveyed for in Idaho in the past, there have been less than two dozen individuals documented in just a handful of locations in the state. The most recent observations were nearly 20 years ago with most dating back to the early 1990s or prior. This lack of Northern Bog Lemming observations could be due to a few reasons. For one, the amount of suitable habitat for the species may be limited as bogs and fens are not widespread in Idaho. More significantly, the species can be difficult to survey for as they are small, elusive, and seem to inhabit areas that are remote, difficult to access and only accessible to survey for a short window in the summer. Thankfully a new survey technique allows us to determine if the species is present by extracting DNA from collected rodent scat.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game has recently initiated a new survey effort for the Northern Bog Lemming using this new scat collection technique. Stay tuned for a deep dive into this new survey effort in a future *Windows to Wildlife* issue.

Typical bog lemming habitat in north Idaho. PHOTO: Casey McCormack/IDFG



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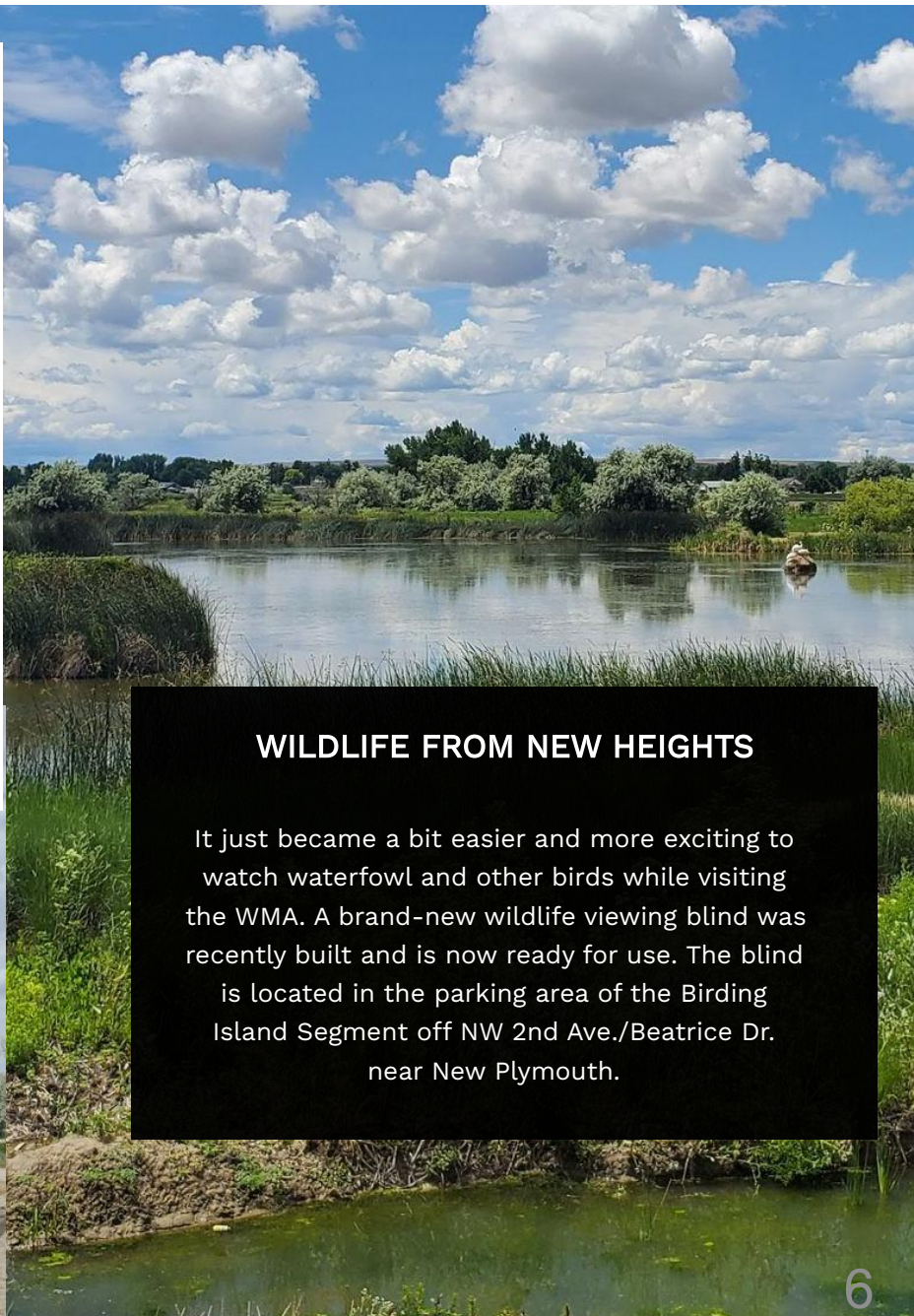
Payette River

Wildlife Management Area

Payette River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is 1,066 acres of scattered parcels on the Payette and Snake rivers in southwest Idaho. It includes three main sections - Birding Islands, Emmett segment, and Little Banks Island.

The WMA has some of the best quality riparian habitat remaining on the lower 30 miles of the Payette River; nine waterfowl production ponds, six shallow ponds for waterfowl nesting, as well as over 200 acres of nesting cover habitat for waterfowl and upland birds.

During the summer, sandhill cranes, white-crowned sparrows, cedar waxwings, bufflehead, willow flycatchers, and four species of swallows may be seen.



WILDLIFE FROM NEW HEIGHTS

It just became a bit easier and more exciting to watch waterfowl and other birds while visiting the WMA. A brand-new wildlife viewing blind was recently built and is now ready for use. The blind is located in the parking area of the Birding Island Segment off NW 2nd Ave./Beatrice Dr. near New Plymouth.

The best part
of wildlife viewing.

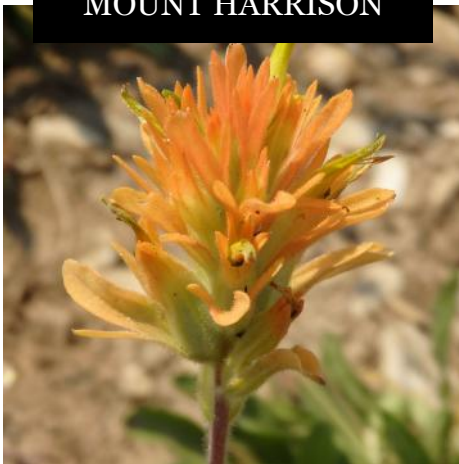


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Summer destinations

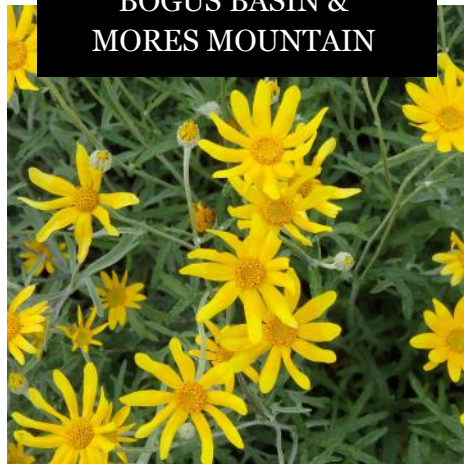
for WILDFLOWERS

MOUNT HARRISON



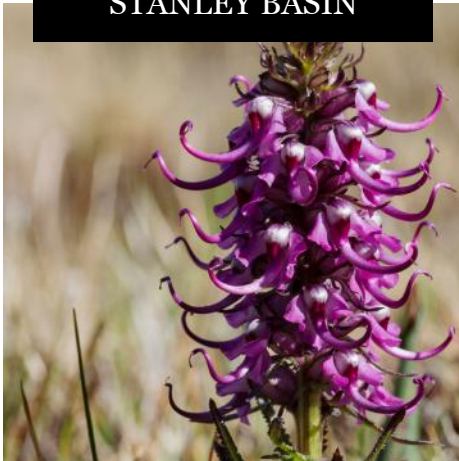
Christ's Paintbrush/Jennifer Miller, IDFG

BOGUS BASIN & MORES MOUNTAIN



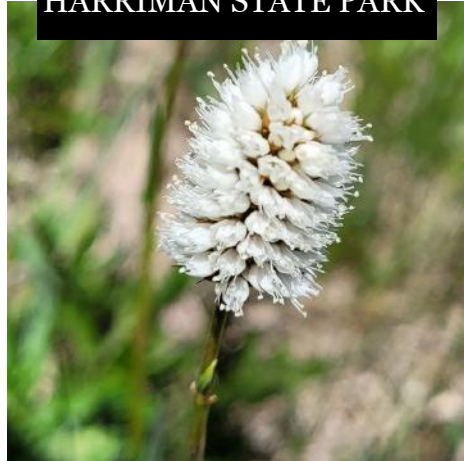
Common Woolly-sunflower/Lynn Kinter, IDFG

STANLEY BASIN



Bull Elephant's-head/Patrick Alexander

HARRIMAN STATE PARK



American Bistort/Harriman SP

Big Horn SHEEP

Species of
Greatest
Conservation
Need

Anyone traveling near Salmon this summer or fall should stop by the bighorn sheep viewing station at Redrock Sportsman's Access Area to hopefully catch a glimpse of one of Idaho's most iconic big game species. The viewing station is located just north of Salmon and has plenty of parking, a restroom, and an interpretive kiosk where visitors can read about Idaho's bighorn sheep, their local population, how they live, the challenges they face, and how people can support wild sheep.

For some of the best bighorn viewing in Idaho, take a trip down "Bighorn Highway" - travel along US Highway 93 from North Fork south to Mackay or State Highway 75 from Challis east toward Clayton. Sheep can be viewed from the road in these areas year-round.



Thank You

Thank you to those who made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or contributed to the Idaho Nongame Wildlife Fund when completing their taxes.

Your contribution provides important funding for wildlife and habitat conservation, research, and outreach in Idaho.



Windows to Wildlife

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM

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*The contents of the articles in this publication are the views and opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the policies or opinions of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game or the State of Idaho.

