

Nature Notes

July 2026

A clear, cool July morning turned the observation area into a lively stage for midsummer activity. From 9:15 to 10:40 AM on Sunday, July 12, 2026, under cloudless skies and a light breeze, the Goat Island heronry, Willamette channel, sand bar, and nearby shoreline were alive with movement. Several bird species—and one eye-catching native plant—made the morning feel full of sound, motion, and small surprises.

In the Goat Island heronry, the remaining observable active heron nest stood high in a cottonwood behind the large snag. Two juvenile herons held court there, sometimes together and sometimes alone, standing in the nest or along its edges. Several times, their calls carried through the heronry, sounding like the familiar excitement that follows an adult arriving with food. The young birds also showed growing independence: one flew from the shore near the boat rails back to a cottonwood branch near the snag, while another was already working the south end of the sand bar, fishing on its own.

A bald eagle delivered the morning's most dramatic moment. It landed on a cottonwood branch at the south end of the sand bar, waited there for about 15 minutes, then plunged into the willows between the north and south beaches. When it reappeared at the shoreline, it stood belly-deep in the river, dipping its face into the water again and again. The scene may have been post-meal cleanup, a common bald eagle habit after feeding, when they rinse their heads and hooked bills.



The morning kept offering quick surprises. **A kingfisher** flashed from the Maddax Woods shore across the Willamette channel, hovered briefly, and dove into the water—only the second kingfisher observed this summer.



Overhead, **four turkey vultures** drifted past before settling along the shoreline north of the observation area. They may have been drawn by carrion, but riverbanks also give vultures places to drink, bathe, sunbathe, rest, and launch back into the sky on thermals.



Spotted sandpipers brought the reward of a closer look. Usually too restless and distant for easy identification, they landed along the shore just below the observation area. Their bobbing heads and white, spotted underparts helped confirm the identification, with Merlin also confirming the sighting. These birds offer one of the morning's most surprising natural history facts: according to the National Audubon Society, male spotted sandpipers build the nest, incubate the eggs, and raise the chicks, while females—the larger of the sexes—do not take on those roles.



Alongside the birds, **coastal hedgenettle** (*Stachys chamissionis*) added a bright note of color. This tall native West Coast member of the mint family is blooming at the observation area and growing on the steep hill near the picnic table at Roger's Point, though the Roger's Point plants are not yet in bloom. Hummingbirds are drawn to the flowers, and despite the plant's prickly-sounding name, coastal hedgenettle does not sting.

Maddax Woods is well worth a visit for anyone who enjoys watching the quiet dramas of birds, plants, and river life unfold. Take time to walk the woods and linger by the Willamette, where the changing seasons reveal new flora and fauna with every visit.