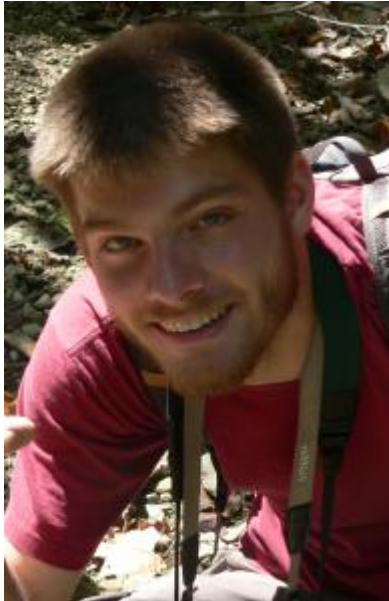


# Your Lands, Your Wildlife

## Your Lands, Your Wildlife, Your Story Contest

### BIRDING

Submitted by Stephen Kolbe – Stow, Ohio



This past summer, I was bird watching in Tahoe National Forest in California. The scenery was beautiful, with sharp, rocky ridges ringing a lush, green mountain meadow below. It was early morning, and the sun had just risen above the eastern ridge. I was watching the line of sunshine slowly slide down the opposite ridge into the valley below. Clouds of steam were still rising from the river that meandered its way through the meadow. I stepped down into the meadow and was immediately greeted with the familiar sound of the birds that lived there: willow flycatchers, yellow warblers, song sparrows and Wilson's snipe.

I stood still for a while, taking in the sounds of the morning chorus amongst the tall, bushy willows that surrounded me. I decided to walk to the river to see if there was anything interesting there. It was only a few moments later that I could see most of the river from behind a large willow. I took one more step and immediately was stopped in my tracks. Peeking out from around the willow, I could see a pair of sandhill cranes, no more than 30 feet from me, which were foraging on a small sandbar in the middle of the river. I was amazed at how tall they were and how they had not seen or heard me coming.

After I had been watching them for a few minutes, they started to call: a strange, bugling that sounds much more like an extinct creature than a modern bird. One of the two birds would start to trumpet its call and the other, as if compelled to do so, would join in almost instantly. It was quite a magical treat for both my eyes and ears, and one that I will not soon forget. I stood as if in a trance just watching these beautiful birds for close to 15 minutes when suddenly both birds simultaneously took flight and flapped away, bugling into the misty morning sky. I watched them until they were two small specks on the horizon and their calls were no longer audible.

I am grateful that there have been areas such as the Tahoe National Forest set aside for everyone to enjoy both now and in the future. I believe that one of the main benefits of these areas is to show the general public that natural areas are special and worth protecting. I hope that people can see wildlife like sandhill cranes in their natural habitats for many decades to come.