

A Wonder-filled Invitation for 2012

by Susan Ballinger, creator and lead instructor for *Wenatchee Naturalist*

The *Wenatchee River Institute* invites you to embark on a wonder-filled 2012 by becoming a *Wenatchee Naturalist*. This new Wenatchee-based program starts in February and will be filled with 25 adventurous and curious valley residents. What exactly will class members do? Here is a short list I've developed to whet your whistle and encourage you to sign up soon!

- While winter hiking with snowshoes, follow fresh snowshoe hare and Douglas squirrel tracks amidst towering Western red cedar trees on the banks of the White River.
- Crane your neck skyward to compare tail patterns and voices of calling common ravens and American crows.
- On hands and knees, peer inside the shiny yellow petals of sagebrush buttercup to examine many anthers, heavy with pollen.
- Peel open a sagebrush gall to look for a chamber eaten away during the winter months by a larvae of a gall-forming insect.
- Twirl bundles of ponderosa pine needles between your fingers and compare them to the softer, shorter sets of 5-needled western white pine bundles.
- In the lab, cradle a black-capped chickadee in one hand and a mountain chickadee in the other, getting an up-close look at the contrasting black-and-white color patterns on each head.
- Peer into a microscope as you cut open a 3-chambered ovary to uncover the gleaming green ripening fruits of yellowbell.
- Stand on the banks of a rushing river while using a magnifying glass to explore tiny macro-invertebrates that call the river bottom home.
- Listen to the ethereal call of the veery, a robin-like bird that chooses dense underbrush along creek bottom as a spring nesting territory.
- Count the front teeth or notice their lack in skulls of coyote, cougar, and mule deer.
- Reduce your innate fear of snakes by standing on a dirt road and watching a bull snake nestle beneath a bitterbrush shrub.
- Take delight in sharing a sack lunch with a new friend while surrounded by a field of sunny balsamroot blossoms.
- Gain confidence by learning strange new word like "ciliate," "pillose," and "tomentose" to describe hair on plants- *and* actually be able to identify these characteristics.

Between February and April, you'll make new friends, discover lovely local places you'll want to visit again, and gain new eyes for the natural wonders of North Central Washington. This class is designed to inspire a deeper connection to the wonders of our valley and to bring new sources of joy to your everyday life. Sign up today at <http://www.barnbeachreserve.org/programs/>.