



Kákya Táymut

KUK-yuh TIE-moot, Umatilla Indian Translation: *Bird News*

Volume 6, No. 2 Pendleton, Oregon February 2008

Birding in Wallowa County

As it turned out, winter in Wallowa County was very much like winter in Umatilla County a week later. The snow was a little deeper, the temperature a little colder, and the scenery of the pristine snow on the Wallowa Mountains a bit more breathtaking. Eight members of the Salem Audubon chapter met eight members of the Pendleton Bird Club in Pendleton on Friday, January 18 for a 3-day birding trip in Wallowa County.

The prospect of finding winter finches and other cold-weather specialties drew us to the Wallowa Valley. We were hoping to find Snow Bunting, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Lapland Longspur, Pine Grosbeak, American Tree Sparrow, Bohemian Waxwing, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and other birds that are much more difficult or impossible to find elsewhere in Oregon.

Fortunately, the roads between Salem and Enterprise were mostly clear, and we had safe and easy travel to Enterprise where we stayed in the Wilderness Inn. On our way into Enterprise on Friday afternoon, we took a side trip on School Flat Road, where we found a flock of about three dozen Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches that were checking out a night roost under the eaves of a barn. A couple of miles farther down the road, the group had great views of three American Tree Sparrows.

The scenery was not lost on us birders as we traveled to Joseph early Saturday morning for a community breakfast at the Thunder Room, which is a counterpart to Pendleton's Let 'Er Buck Room during Round-Up week. From the conversations among the slightly tardy chefs, the room had been through quite a bit of thunder the night before! We weren't the only ones enjoying a winter weekend in the Wallowa

Valley; a lively group of snowmobile racers kicked up their heels overnight and put the "Thunder" in the Thunder Room. The breakfast chefs finally got their act together, and we enjoyed breakfast in the large facility heated by two huge wood stoves.

After a brief drive around a few blocks in Joseph (doesn't take long!) we went to Wallowa Lake State Park, where the snow was definitely deeper. Although

the climb is imperceptible (the elevation is 3,757 ft. in Enterprise, 4,150 ft. in Joseph, and 5,005 at Wallowa Lake), it is over 1,200 ft. Now, we were ready to do some birding. Well, maybe not. One of the dog sleds was just in from the 200-mile race, and we stayed to see his outfit and especially the dogs. According to the "musher," this race from Wallowa Lake to Halfway and return (or the shorter race to the Innaha River Crossing and return) is the only race he has done that is mostly uphill BOTH ways. The dogs seemed happy and in high spirits as they were off to get out of their harness and eat their dinner.



Snow Bunting (female). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.



We walked in a foot of snow through the park to the Wallowa River where we found an American Dipper or two, who apparently could care less how frigid the ice-rimmed water was. A few other forest birds, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, and Townsend's Solitaire, rounded out our Wallowa Lake list. Back to Joseph and a drive which included Upper Prairie Creek and the Joseph Cemetery, where we found a nice covey of Gray Partridge. We had several drives and short walks both Saturday and Sunday, where we saw wintering hawks, mostly Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, and a few Bald and Golden Eagles, American Kestrels, a Merlin, and a Prairie Falcon.

Golf Course Road out of Enterprise is one of the best areas to search for Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur. On Sunday, we were rewarded for our efforts when a huge flock (300 – 400 birds) of Snow Buntings showed themselves. They flew on to points unknown, but our views were less than satisfying. However, another smaller flock was located, and as they flew, one bird stayed behind. This cooperative bunting hopped through the pasture, on the fence, in the road, and posed for the scopes for 15 minutes! A bird watcher's dream, and a life bird for several of us!

Although we searched the Leap Lane/School Flat Road area several times for Sharp-tailed Grouse, none were to be found. No wonder! A rather crusty high-school classmate of Duane Whitten's, who lives on Leap Lane with her two dogs, told us the blankety-blank hawks ate them all!

We did see Northern Pygmy-Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Shrike, and the Arctic variety of Horned Larks in the Joseph vicinity. It seemed all too soon and we were preparing to return to Pendleton and Salem on Monday morning. On Sunday afternoon and evening, the snow began to fall in earnest. As we walked a block or so from the motel to the restaurant Sunday evening, we were in deep snow that seemed to engulf the world and muffle the sounds.

On Monday morning, the highway was packed snow, so travel was a bit slower on the return trip. We enjoyed Eurasian Collared-Doves and another Merlin in Elgin, and most of the group opted to return via the Tollgate route. Tollgate can only be described as a winter wonderland! The fresh, roadside snow in 8-foot drifts and the snow-dusted conifers framed a

bright blue, nearly cloudless sky. Absolutely gorgeous!

We continued birding to the Columbia River and ended our trip at Umatilla. The Salem group enjoyed the McNary Wildlife Nature Area, with its ponds full of waterfowl. The Harris's Sparrow, who had been in the vicinity for a few weeks, made its appearance for the offered bird seed. The last bird of the trip was the winter-resident Peregrine Falcon perched on the girders of the Umatilla Bridge.

It was a great weekend, plenty of interesting birds, good food and lodging, and lots of camaraderie. The Salem participants were Glen Lindeman, Wes Craven, Vivienne Torgeson, Eugenia Becker, Bruce

Patterson, Kathy Patterson, Janet Williams, and Pat Tilley. The Pendleton participants were Betty Klepper, Russ and Connie Betts, Ann Wyatt, Jill Wyatt, Aaron Skirvin, and June and Duane Whitten.

Contributed by June Whitten

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 13, 2008

**Book Reviews by Russ Betts,
Haval Norman, and Jane Holmes**
Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

April 10, 2008

Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m.

**Dave Herr presents a program
on his recent trip to east Africa**

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., May 8, 2008



Program on Mountain Quail

by **Jamie Nelson, ODFW
Biologist**

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

The Artwork of John James Audubon

Bravo! Ole! Hooray! Jack Simons, featured speaker at the Pendleton Bird Club's February meeting, gave an extraordinary talk complete with pictures on the fascinating and wondrous world of John James Audubon, an early 19th-century folk hero for ornithologists and the public alike. Club members learned of his cross-country plight to capture birds and their habitat on paper with watercolors. Audubon later compiled his work into an atlas of prints in the publication of *The Birds of America*.

Audubon was a man of contradictions: Unable to make a living selling goods in a hardware store but able to pre-sell his atlas of prints for \$1,000 each (a small fortune in those days) to European collectors before the project began; Audubon dined with royalty and heads of state but was disliked by his mother-in-law; and Audubon was foreign born and raised but is portrayed as the quintessential American frontiersman who roamed the country in buckskin and captured the

imagination of many with his incredible drawings of birds never seen before.

Jack enriched his discussion of the life of Audubon with a print-making lesson—engraving, etching, and aquatinting techniques used to create *The Birds of America* and chromolithography, which was later used to produce the prints in less time and at less cost.

Engraving, etching, and aquatinting techniques start with a reverse image of the picture (made with tracing paper) that is meticulously incised into a metal plate either engraving or etching, with the ink-filled recessed grooves used to create the printed image.

Etching is a technique where the metal plate is coated with wax or varnish, the print image is drawn into this layer by a needle and then acid is applied to “etch” into the exposed plate made by the needle. Aquatinting is a type of etching that provides various shades of gray by sprinkling resinous powder in the wax or varnish layer on the plate before acid is applied. Watercolors were added to the images to give color once the ink had dried. Chromolithography is a method where each color is applied from a separate plate that is carefully positioned on the paper, one on top of the other, to give a rendering of the original color image.



Golden eagle by John James Audubon

Jack treated the audience to visual images of Audubon's

watercolors and print reproductions using printmaking methods of etchings with aquatinting and watercolors and chromolithography. Side by side comparisons were made with each technique, and yes, there



was a test at the end. I am happy to report that the audience, not surprisingly, given the keen observant nature of birders, passed with flying colors. We thank you Jack for a very enjoyable and enlightening on both the art of John James Audubon and that of print making.

Contributed by Kate Ely

Poet's Corner

Violet Green Swallows of February 25, 2005

Late February, and the southern wind brings
Jewels sweeping and gliding over the hillside.

Nearly weightless beings,
They have crossed deserts and mountains,
With more mountains to come.

Spitting flakes and sprinkles vie with wan sunlight.
And snow lies on the highlands and draws,
But the change has begun from gray to green.
Tiny white and yellow flowers are under every footfall,
The first colors of the coming celebration.

The living land, and the living air, have brought me here.
The sky, and the first new colors.
We greet each other with joy,
Survivors, perhaps, of yet another winter.

And here, on this day of turning, they come.
Heroic creatures, nearly defenseless.

They must be greater beings than they appear.

Perhaps they exist on some other plane,
And we see, here in our humble world of startling miracles,
Only a tiny portion of their being.

Brave, touring, flowers of the sky, they are faith embodied.
Nothing but faith could impel an earthly creature
To live a life in the sky.

Only faith, courage, tenacity could form a being
That lives and feeds on the air
And send it this distance on a journey not yet done.

But only joy could clothe him in colors so bright
Or fellow feeling make them pause in this patch of warming hillside
To share with a fellow wanderer the promise of Spring.

© 2008 Christopher L. Burford

Will California Condors Return to the Columbia River Gorge?

On May 16, 2008, you can get the answer to that question. Dave Moen, a research associate for the Oregon Zoo and graduate student at Portland State University, will give a presentation on his research on the history of the California Condor in Oregon and the efforts to restore this magnificent and ancient bird to its former range.

You can see Dave Moen's presentation, free of charge, from 4 to 6 p.m. on Friday, May 16 at the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Everyone interested in birds, condors, Oregon wildlife, and/or endangered species should plan to attend this presentation.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Member's Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.

www.pendletonbirders.org

Spring Migration: It Starts Early

We often think of spring bird migration as occurring in April and May. And, it's true that is the season when most birds move into or through Umatilla County.

For some species, however, migration starts much earlier. You may have noticed the influx of American Robins in the past few weeks; they begin moving through, sometimes in large flocks, as early as late January. Say's Phoebe and Killdeer are early arrivers, too; we begin seeing them in early or mid February. Killdeers, which have been virtually absent from the Pendleton area since last October, have just arrived from their wintering areas and are already setting up nesting territories!

Chris Burford's poem about Violet-green Swallows reminds us that these swallows will begin migrating through Umatilla County any day now. Chris's observation of Violet-greens on February 25, 2005, is the earliest spring date for this species in Umatilla County.



You might be surprised to learn (I know I was) that a few Violet-green Swallows have been reported in eastern Washington in the past few days. And, on February 19, three Violet-greens were seen at Castlegar, which is located in south-central British Columbia!

Chances are very high that some swallows have passed through our area in the last week. Although, to my knowledge, no one has reported seeing any swallows, locally, this year. These earliest swallow



Violet-green Swallow (male). Photo by Joy Jaeger.

migrants are usually seen in small flocks – 2 to 10 birds – passing overhead on a direct, determined flight, not wasting any time on their northward journey.

Keep an eye out for swallows and be sure to report any you see to Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

January – February Bird Sightings

February is probably the slowest time of the year for birding in this area, but even with the snowy weather, some interesting birds have been reported.

Jenny Barnett reported a **Say's Phoebe** on January 7 near her office at Mission. Say's Phoebe is a widespread breeding species in Umatilla County, but by October or November each fall, they leave Umatilla County for their more southern wintering grounds. Only a few spend the winter locally, and they are hard to find.

On January 23, Nancy Brown spotted a **Great Egret** in Stage Gulch Creek in Stanfield. The same day, Connie Betts reported a **Black-**

crowned Night Heron along McKay Creek near her home in SW Pendleton. Connie notes the bird roosted in the same location for several days. On January 25, Connie reported a **Winter Wren** near her home.

Since the inclement weather forecast for January 26 did not materialize, Aaron Skirvin spent the day birding. Covering many areas in the county, his trip list included **Northern Shrike, Wilson's Snipe, Western, Herring and California Gulls, a Common Loon, American White Pelican, Bald Eagle, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee and Cedar Waxwing.** However, his most exciting find occurred late in the afternoon just north of the intersection of Mud Springs Canyon Road and Coombs Canyon Road. Stopping to check a flock of about 150 **Horned Larks**, Aaron noted a dark-bellied bird fly in land amongst the larks, probably a Rosy-Finch. While looking for the apparent Rosy-Finch in the field, he heard a rattle call and after about 30 seconds was able to confirm he had found a **LAPLAND LONGSPUR.** After further observations, he was able to identify 8-10 longspurs. Aaron noted that to his knowledge this is the first sighting of **LAPLAND LONGSPURS** in Umatilla County. Quite a find!

On January 27, the Pendleton area was again blanketed with snow. Jenny Barnett noticed a **Bewick's Wren** in her yard in the Rice subdivision in SW Pendleton. This species is fairly common around



Lapland Longspur. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

Pendleton, especially in brushy riparian habitat, but is very unusual in a residential neighborhood away from streams. As inevitably happens when we get a snow, my feeders become very busy. On January 28, I found 2 **Lesser Goldfinches** feeding along with



more than 100 **American Goldfinches**. I continue to see a couple **Lesser Goldfinches** periodically.

On January 28, Aaron braved the snowy roads and drove to McNary Dam, then to Milton-Freewater and back to Pendleton. On his trip he was able to add several new species to the 2008 County list including **Eared Grebe, Redhead, Killdeer** and **Wild Turkey**.

One January 29, Connie Betts added a new species to her yard list and the county year list when she found 3 female and one male **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at her feeder. Participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, Nancy Brown reported seeing one and sometimes two **PURPLE FINCHES** at her Hermiston feeder several times between January 1 and February 6. These were most likely the same bird(s) seen each time, and this is only the 5th record of Purple Finch in Umatilla County.

On February 2, Aaron, Jack Simons and Russ and Connie Betts attempted to relocate the Lapland Longspurs found previously by Aaron. However, impressive snowdrifts along Coombs Canyon and Alkali Canyon Roads necessitated a change of plans. Driving along Highway 74 about 3 miles into Morrow County they found a flock of about **300 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** along the road. Aaron reports they had up-close looks at distances no greater than 25 feet.

The following day I had a new yard bird at my feeders. I glanced out the window and noted a black and white bird about the size of a robin in the bushes. After checking with my binoculars, I realized it was an immature **Northern Shrike** which had killed and was eating a Dark-eyed Junco.

While running along the Parkway February 5, I noticed there were 11 **Great Blue Herons** sitting at the nesting site across the river from the little league fields. The following day Connie Betts reported a couple hundred **Cedar Waxwings** in her McKay neighborhood in Pendleton. She also found 22 **Mallards** and 3 pairs of **Gadwall** in McKay Creek.

On February 9, Aaron birded in the Ukiah area. He was surprised by the lack of raptors and found only one **Bald Eagle**. In Ukiah itself, there were a few dozen **European Starlings**, a **Red Crossbill**, 8 **American Goldfinches**, some **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Steller's Jays** and **House Sparrows**. Before leaving Pendleton he noted 2 **Hooded Mergansers**, 3 **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, and an **American Coot** along the Umatilla River Parkway.

Birding along the northwest Umatilla County on February 10, Aaron found one **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in Stanfield and 2 more at a feed lot along Stanfield Meadows Road just west of Mann's Pond. At the Umatilla Marina Aaron found a **Mew Gull**; at McNary Dam, two **Western Gulls**; and at Hat Rock State Park, a **Mew Gull** and a **Glaucous-winged Gull**.



Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Photo by Rose Scott.

On February 10, Khahn Tran (a Portland birder) found 2 **Northern Pygmy Owls** and **Red Crossbills** in the Kamela area and a male **WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER** near Deadman Pass. The woodpecker was a great find as this species is hard to find in Umatilla County.

The **Great Gray Owl** continues to be seen northwest of Milton-Freewater, and February 9, John Rogers found a **Long-eared Owl** near the same location.

On February 10, Lyle and Nancy Brown, birding in the Stanfield Meadows area, found the first **Eurasian Wigeon** of the year feeding with a group of **American Wigeons**. The following day Connie Betts noted 3 **Common Mergansers** in McKay Creek near the Pendleton Community Park. Connie reports this is an unusual sighting for this area. On February 11, Bob Tapley found a **Song Sparrow** at his bird feeder in east Pendleton.

Killdeer is an early spring migrant and breeding species in our area, and on February 15, Aaron Skirvin reported one at Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds. On February 16, Aaron relocated the male **Eurasian Wigeon** at Mann's Pond that the Browns had reported a week earlier. And, on the 18th, Aaron



and June Whitten saw 2 male **Eurasian Wigeons** at Wildhorse Golf Course ponds.

Well, the snow has melted and for the last few days the temperature almost reached 50 degrees. As spring migration progresses, more and more birds will start to show up, so please continue to send your bird

sightings to me, Dave Herr at 276-6413 or dsherr1@mac.com.

Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant
Editor for February: Aaron Skirvin
Phone Number: 276-1948
Email Address: umatbirder@yahoo.com



Original art work by John Green
Copyright 1989, Dover Press

