



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 6, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August 2008

BLUEBIRDS ABOUND ON THE ALBEE TRAIL

In February 2008, several new nest boxes were added to the Bird Club's Bluebird Trail at Battle Mountain and along the Albee to Ukiah road, which are located about 40 miles south of Pendleton. We now have a total of 27 bluebird nest boxes erected on trees and fence posts along the Trail.

On August 3, we checked the nest boxes for evidence of nesting, and there were bluebird nests in all but one box, so a total of 26 boxes with nests. All of the adult bluebirds we saw on



Western Bluebird (male). Photo by Dave Herr.

August 3 were Western Bluebirds, including one adult male feeding a fledgling that was just out of the nest. Although Mountain Bluebirds are sometimes seen along the Albee Road and at Battle Mountain in spring, we had enough observations of bluebirds in and around the nest boxes when adult bluebirds, eggs and young were present earlier in the nesting season to know that no Mountain Bluebirds nested in the boxes this year. There is no definite way to tell how many young bluebirds fledged from any nest; however, of the 26 boxes that contained nests, 22 boxes showed evidence that some young bluebirds had fledged. It is not uncommon for Western Bluebirds to nest more than once a season. A new nest is built on top of the used nest, and it is difficult to tell at times whether both nests were successful. Of the 22 nest boxes with successful nests, at least 4 had two nests, making a total of 26 Western Bluebird nests.

When inspecting a used nest, it is reasonable to assume some young bluebirds fledged if the nest is flattened, obviously well-used, and full of pin-feather dust underneath. Occasionally, the old nest has an unhatched egg, or worse, a dead baby. Such is Nature's way, but the positive thing to remember is the live babies that hatched and fledged from the nest boxes.

After checking the first 10 boxes, there was a **SURPRISE** in the 11th! Two tiny, live babies were in the nest, and the Western Bluebird parents were nearby obviously upset with someone looking in their house! We quickly closed the door and made a rapid departure. But, the next box, had a similar surprise; four, large babies were looking out at people! These babies were approximately 12-14 days old and will fledge very soon. This seems a bit late for a second nesting, but since the arrival of spring was late this year, it is possible the first attempt was not successful; or possibly the first nest was successful but a bit later than usual.



Western Bluebird (female). Photo by Dave Herr.

Of the next 15 boxes we checked, there were three to five live babies in five more nests. Even with a late start, these nestlings (and hopefully fledglings) should do very well. In all but one nest with live babies, the parents were immediately visible, bringing food, and watching over the nest box. At the



box with the absent parents, we scanned the area for about 10 minutes but never did see the parents. When we check the boxes next month, we can determine the fate of these nestlings.

Considering all of the boxes with nests, including those with two nests, there was a total of at least 26 successful Western Bluebird nests. Assuming an average of three fledglings (a conservative estimate) per successful nests, that would be a total of 78 Western Bluebirds fledglings. And, by adding the 25 live babies still in the nest boxes on August 3, the estimation rises to as many as 103 fledglings along the Trail.

In September, we will check and clean the boxes that had late nests once more this fall. At that time, we will make another assessment of the total number of fledged Western Bluebirds during the 2008 nesting season.

The Bluebird Trail is a rewarding project that helps the Western Bluebird population in the Albee and Ukiah area. The high usage rate of the nest boxes by bluebirds indicates the area provides good bluebird habitat but is deficient in natural nesting sites. Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters (they do not make their own cavities), so they rely on woodpeckers to create their nest cavities. Due to the lack of snags, which are needed by the woodpeckers for nesting and foraging, and, unfortunately, to the increasing population of the European Starlings (effective nest-cavity competitor of bluebirds) in the area, suitable and available natural nesting sites for bluebirds are limited. The 1.5-inch diameter entrance holes in the nest boxes allow bluebirds to enter but exclude the larger European Starlings.

We are recruiting club members to help with the Bluebird Trail. If anyone would like to be involved in checking the boxes, please let Aaron Skirvin or June Whitten know about your interest. The nest boxes are easy to check since they are only five feet off the ground and most are placed very near the road. Besides, when you monitor the nest boxes along the Bluebird Trail, you can do some birding in one of the best birding areas in Umatilla County.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., October 9, 2008

Birds of the Down and Under

By Sharon and Jerry Como

**Pendleton First Christian Church
N. Main Street, Pendleton**

The Big Sit! Bird Count

Sunday, October 12, 2008

Enjoy a few hours or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam at Umatilla or Cold Springs NWR, east of Hermiston. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! Bird Count, so put October 12 on your calendar! Want to participate? We hope so! It's a fun day with birding friends.

For further information, contact June Whitten: 276-9019

Bird Club Meeting

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

North to Alaska: Birding at Gambell and Nome

By June Whitten, Duane Whitten, Betty Klepper, and Aaron Skirvin

**Pendleton First Christian Church
N. Main Street, Pendleton**



Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., December 11, 2008

Annual Bird Club Fund Raiser

**Pendleton First Christian Church
N. Main Street, Pendleton**

Bird of the Month – Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*)

Lesser Goldfinch is certainly not a common species in Umatilla County. There has, however, been quite an increase in the number of Lesser Goldfinches reported over the past 3 to 5 years.

Exactly why they seem to be moving into northeastern Oregon is unknown, but there is plenty of habitat in Umatilla County: weedy, brushy fields and fencerows, as well as brushy riparian areas, which attract Lesser Goldfinches. The cold weather doesn't bother them as they move to warmer climates in the southwestern states and Mexico for the winter. Some Lesser Goldfinches do stay in southern and coastal Oregon year-round. So, possibly, like most of the people who live here, they just like Umatilla County, and a few are moving in for the breeding season.

There are two subspecies of the Lesser Goldfinch, the black-backed and the green-backed varieties. Both subspecies have black caps, yellow throat and breast with a white wing-bar and a white patch on the wings and tail. The white patch on the wing is a good identification mark to separate Lesser from American Goldfinches, since they may be found together. The white patches are quite visible in flight, from both the top and underside of the wing. Also, on close inspection, the Lesser Goldfinch has yellow undertail coverts where the American Goldfinch has whitish. Unlike the



Lesser Goldfinch. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

American Goldfinch, the Lesser Goldfinch does not molt into different-colored plumage for the winter, but retains its bright gold front, black cap, and greenish (or black) back.

The subspecies seen in Umatilla County is the green-backed variety. Farther south, especially in Texas and Mexico, the black-backed is prominent. According to David Sibley, "All first-year males are green-backed. Virtually all adult males in Texas are black-backed and virtually all west of Colorado and New Mexico are green-backed. Between Colorado and Texas, the average amount of black increases clinally (a gradual change in a species) to the south and east."

The Lesser Goldfinch is only 4½ inches long compared to the 5-inch American Goldfinch. It has the typical cone-shaped bill of finches, which it uses for eating seeds, its favorite food. The nest is a small cup 2 to 30 feet off the ground. Usually, 4-5 eggs are laid. Nesting occurs rather late to allow seeds to mature to feed the nestlings. The parents feed them partially digested seed pulp, which discourages nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Like most baby birds, cowbird nestlings require protein (insects) to survive.

Like their American Goldfinch cousins, the Lesser Goldfinch is very acrobatic and an active feeder. They do come to feeders, and are often in small flocks. Some places to look for Lesser Goldfinch in Umatilla County include the Umatilla River and especially around the mouth of Iskuulpa Creek and on the Walla Walla River Road near Harris Park.

Dave Herr has reported the greatest number of Lesser Goldfinches in Umatilla County from his feeders in Pendleton. They are very fond of black sunflower and nyger seeds. One was seen flying in my neighborhood in Grecian Heights in southwest Pendleton this spring, and later it or another one came to our feeder.

Contributed by June Whitten



Editor's note: The article below was extracted from the Internet at the following website: http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080819/sc_nm/magpies_mirror_dc **The subject of the study was the European Magpie (*Pica pica*), a close relative of our Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*).**

Magpies Are No Bird-brains, Mirror Test Shows

By Ben Hirschler Mon Aug 18, 8:03 PM ET

LONDON (Reuters) - Magpies can recognize themselves in a mirror, highlighting the mental skills of some birds and confounding the notion that self-awareness is the exclusive preserve of humans and a few higher mammals.

It had been thought only chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants shared the human ability to recognize their own bodies in a mirror.



A magpie with yellow mark used in a mirror self-recognition experiment. Magpies can recognize themselves in a mirror, highlighting the mental skills of some birds and

confounding the notion that self-awareness is the exclusive preserve of humans and a few higher mammals.

(Institute of Psychology, Goethe University, Frankfurt/Handout/Reuters)

But German scientists reported on Tuesday that magpies -- a species with a brain structure very different from mammals -- could also identify themselves.

"It shows that the line leading to humans is not as special as many thought," lead researcher Helmut Prior of the Institute of Psychology at Goethe University in Frankfurt told Reuters.

"After finding this kind of intelligence in apes, many people thought it had developed once in one evolutionary line with humans at the end. The bird studies show it has developed at least twice."

The discovery of self-awareness in magpies follows a 2002 study in which a crow stunned researchers with its tool-making skills, by twisting a wire into a hook to lift food from a tube.

Prior and his colleagues tested their magpies by marking the birds' bodies with a red or yellow dot that could only be seen in a mirror. They found the birds regularly scratched the mark on their body, proving they recognized the image in the mirror as themselves and not another animal.

To ensure they were actually seeing and reacting to the mark, and not just investigating what had been done to them, a "sham" black mark was used as a control that was invisible on the birds' dark feathers. The result throws into question some basic ideas about how our brains work.

In particular, it had been thought that the neocortex brain area found in mammals was crucial to self-recognition. Yet birds, which last shared a common ancestor with mammals 300 million years ago, do not have a neocortex, suggesting that higher cognitive skills can develop in other ways.

Prior believes parrots, too, may yet show hidden mental skills -- but it is the crow family, which includes magpies and jays, that is the smartest. "Crows have really huge brains compared to other birds," he said in a telephone interview.

The research was published in the Public Library of Science journal PLoS Biology and is available online at

<http://biology.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1371/journal.pbio.0060202>

July – August Bird Sightings

Now, in mid-August the water levels at both McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs have dropped low enough to provide good shorebird habitat. Thus it is not surprising that most of the new "County Year Birds" found this report period have come from those two areas.

McKay Reservoir:

There is little question the best species located this report period is a **RUDDY TURNSTONE** found by Aaron Skirvin on August 10, at McKay Reservoir. Aaron reports this is only the 2nd or 3rd record of this species in Umatilla County. After finding the first bird, June Whitten joined Aaron and they were able to locate a second **RUDDY TURNSTONE**. Other "County" birds found that day included a **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, several **Baird's**





Ruddy Turnstones. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

Sandpipers and 3 SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHERS. Although **Long-billed Dowitchers** are commonly found in the County, Aaron notes **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHERS** are not found here every year. Other shorebirds seen included **Killdeer**, 1 adult **Semipalmated Plover**, 2 **Spotted Sandpipers**, one **Long-billed Dowitcher** and about 20 **Western Sandpipers**. Checking the area the following day, Russ and Connie Betts were able to relocate one of the **RUDDY TURNSTONES**.

Birding at McKay on August 12, Aaron and Tanya Harrison did not find any new species but noted that at least one of the **RUDDY TURNSTONES** was still present. Other shorebirds seen included one **Solitary Sandpiper**, 3 **Greater Yellowlegs**, one **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 4 **Long-billed Dowitchers**, one **Semipalmated Plover**, at least one **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, 2 **Baird's Sandpipers**, **Spotted Sandpipers**, **Least Sandpipers** and approximately 25 **Western Sandpipers**.

Cold Springs Reservoir:

August 2, Aaron and June visited the southeast ponds at the Reservoir looking for shorebirds. They found one **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 15 **Greater Yellowlegs**, 3 **Great Egrets** and a **Red Crossbill**. While there, Aaron and June met Ken Thompson, a retired biologist volunteering at the Refuge. Ken informed them that the proper name for the area where the southeast ponds are located is "Memorial Marsh".

I (Dave Herr) visited the main reservoir on August 15, and found a nice selection of shorebirds including **Western Sandpipers**, **Least Sandpipers**, **Solitary Sandpipers**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Dowitchers**, **Spotted Sandpipers**, **Killdeer** and **Black-necked Stilts**. Checking the area August 17, Aaron and June

were able to add **Pectoral Sandpiper**, **Baird's Sandpiper** and **Black-bellied Plover** to my species list. They also noted one adult **Peregrine Falcon** kept the shorebirds nervous.

Checking the reservoir on August 19, I was unable to find any new species, but noted the numbers of **Western** and **Least Sandpipers** were increasing.

Other Bird Sightings:

July 21, Russ and Connie Betts had a **Calliope Hummingbird** visit their feeder in southwest Pendleton. On July 24, Connie noted that a **Black-capped Chickadee** had been in the area for several months and that 2 **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** had visited her feeder the previous evening.

Dolly Robison noted the two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** reported earlier near her Hermiston yard are still in the area, and she found another **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in Echo. Aaron also reported the **Eurasian Collared-Dove** population in Pilot Rock (where they were first found by Aaron 3 years ago) is continuing to expand.

July 28, Aaron found 5 **Common Goldeneyes** on Langdon Lake. Aaron checked the Pearson Creek area (southeast of Pilot Rock) on July 19 and July 27 and was surprised by the lack of birds. Aaron notes that normally in mid-July Pearson Creek canyon is



Chukar. Photo by Connie Betts.

full of birds. Also, on July 28, Jack Simons reported there are the "usual" 3 or 4 **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** at his feeders between Pendleton and Mission.

August 3, June Whitten and Aaron checked the 27 bluebird nest boxes in the Albee and Battle Mountain area. Highlights of the trip included 23 **Chukars**



crossing Highway 395 near Pilot Rock and along Gurdane Road a **Sage Thrasher**, 4 **Lark Sparrows** and 3 immature **Grasshopper Sparrows**. Check Aaron and June's article in this newsletter for more details regarding the Bluebird Trail.

August 4, Jack Simons saw signs of successful hatching from two species along the Umatilla River near his home. He reported 3 juvenile **Belted Kingfishers** and 3 juvenile **Eastern Kingbirds** at the same location along the river.

Connie Betts reported on August 8, she now has three species of hummingbirds visiting her feeders: **Rufous**, **Calliope** and **Black-chinned**.

On August 8, Mayanna Kopp reported she had been having baby **California Quail** visiting her Pilot Rock feeders for about 3 weeks. She also had **Mourning Doves** each day and an occasional **Evening Grosbeak**.

Birding with friends on August 17, Bob Tapley toured the southern part of the County. Bob noted there were a lot of **Black-billed Magpies** along the old Echo-Rieth highway, 2 **Eastern Kingbirds** on Gurdane Road, and stated they found numerous

Horned Larks throughout the day. Bob reports the best finds were an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** on Mud Springs Canyon Road and several **Red-necked Phalaropes** (a new "County Year" species) at the Ukiah sewage ponds.



Turkey Vulture. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

It looks like the annual **Turkey Vulture** gathering behind Jack Simons' home along the Umatilla River has begun. On August 12, Aaron noted one **Turkey Vulture** soaring over Jack's home. On August 20, Jack found 6 "really nice" **Turkey Vultures** eyeing a dead calf along the river dike road behind his home. It will be interesting to learn the total number of vultures Jack is able to count this fall.

Late August and September is a great time to be birding. Fall migration for many passerine species is well underway and shorebirding will be good for the next several months. Whatever birds you find (shorebirds, songbirds, waterfowl, raptors, etc) during your outings or in your backyard, please send your sightings to me, Dave Herr, at dsherr1@mac.com or call 276-6413.

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



Original art work by John Green
Copyright 1989, Dover Press

