



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 8, No. 12 Pendleton, Oregon December 2010



December Sighting Excitement: Black- legged Kittiwake

“They are commonly seen offshore from Northern Alaska along the Pacific Coast to Baja California, but NOT at McNary Dam.”

On December 4, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten had one of those super birding days when they came upon a Black-legged Kittiwake below McNary Dam. Aaron’s email announcement read:

*“This morning, June Whitten and I found a first year **Black-legged Kittiwake** just below McNary Dam. Neal Hinds arrived to see the Kittiwake, too. It was with the large gull flock on the “gull” island just off McNary Wildlife Nature Area. This is the second record of this species in Umatilla County. The first record was two birds found by the Dennys and John Gatchet below McNary Dam on Nov. 9, 2008. One of the two birds stayed until at least Dec. 4, 2008.*

*Also in the gull flock were 1 adult **Thayer’s, Herring, Glaucous-winged, Mew, Ring-billed,***

and California (by far the most numerous species).”

The wonder of this sighting is that fish eating Black-legged Kittiwakes nest on cliff ledges of offshore islands, sea stacks, or inaccessible areas of coastal mainland, and then winter at sea. They are commonly seen off shore from Northern Alaska along the Pacific Coast to Baja California, but NOT at McNary Dam. We surmise that perhaps our young kittiwake mucked in with the gull flock that Aaron noted in his email. When the flock made its way 300 miles up the Columbia River, the kittiwake came along to dazzle the eyes of the delighted birders who saw it. The National Wildlife Federation’s *Field*



*Black-legged Kittiwake, juvenile in flight.
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

Guide to Birds of North America states that this species often investigates gull flocks around boats, in our case actually joined a flock headed for Umatilla County.

The clean looking Black-legged Kittiwake is described by Sibley as “slightly smaller than the Mew Gull; large-headed, long winged with narrow “hand”, and short-legged. Flight buoyant and dashing, but wingbeats rather stiff.” Sibley also reports that Black-legged Kittiwakes with pink, yellow, and even orange-red legs are recorded (mainly 1st year birds) and should not be mistaken for Red-legged



*Black-legged Kittiwake, adult in flight.
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

Kittiwake. Juveniles, such as seen by Aaron, June, and Neal, are described by the Cornell Lab as having white underparts, gray back, gray patches on nape and crown, dark spot at the ears, black collar, black wingtips, and a dark bar across the wing. Wings show a dark “M” pattern in flight. Tail is white with a black tip, and the legs are black.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports that the hind toe on the foot of the Black-legged Kittiwake is reduced to a tiny bump, giving this bird its scientific name *tridactyla*, meaning “three-toed” (instead of four on each foot). Cornell Lab also points out that kittiwakes are dabblers, feeding in flocks at water surface, mostly in daytime. They may dive shallowly or snatch food from the surface. So, our kittiwake could readily exist with the various gull cousins along the Columbia.

When birding along the Columbia, check out flocks of gulls for the very occasional kittiwake. Know that they could be confused with



immature Bonaparte’s Gull and with Mew Gulls. Use your bird guide to double check the immature Bonaparte’s Gull that has a narrow, broken “M” across the back and lacks the black line across the nape of its neck. The Mew Gull shows white spots in wingtips and does not have the kittiwakes’ sharp, dipped-in-ink cutoff of black on the end of the wing.

May your next birding trip along the Columbia be as rewarding as Aaron and June’s December 4th sighting!
By Barbara Clark

Calendar of Events

Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, January 2, 2011

We need your help to count birds on the 111th Christmas Bird Count.

Check out the announcement in this newsletter or

For more information, contact

Aaron Skirvin umatbirder@yahoo.com

or 541-215-0761

Bird Club Meeting & Potluck Dinner

**6:30 p.m., Thursday,
January 13, 2011**

Potluck starts at 6:30 followed by

Club Members’ Night

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday,
February 10, 2011

LONG-BILLED CURLEWS

Presented by Sidra Blake

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday,
March 10, 2011

3rd ANNUAL HUMONGOUS ID CHALLENGE

Presented by Jack Simons

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Visit the Bird Club's website at
www.pendletonbirders.org



Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, Sunday, January 2, 2011

HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR THE 24th official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is scheduled for **SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2011**. This local count is part of the national 111th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. If you are interested in the history of the Christmas Bird Count and count data accumulated for the hundreds of counts across the country, please visit Audubon's website at (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>).

During our count last year on January 2, 2010, twenty nine bird counters saw **78 species** of birds, and tallied a total of **8,041 individual birds** in our circle. The Umatilla County count circle is 15 miles in diameter, with the center located about 7 miles southeast of Pendleton.



We welcome **everyone** (from beginning birder to expert) to help count birds on January 2, 2011. There are no major changes in Audubon's rules from last year as to how we conduct our count. The participant fee remains at \$5 per birder for those participants older than 18 years of age, and each participant can receive a CBC issue of *American Birds*.

Our count circle is divided into four areas, and each area has a Coordinator (see below). Each Coordinator is responsible for organizing and managing the bird counters in his/her area. To get involved and help count birds, each interested participant must contact one of the Area Coordinators to join that group for count day. The Coordinator will set a place and time for his/her team members to meet on count morning. If you want to help count birds on January 2, please contact one of the Coordinators listed below.

- ◆ **Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek, Patawa Creek and Riverside)
Jack Simons — home: 541-276-8566
- ◆ **Area 2** (Umatilla River and Cayuse)
Bruce Mayfield — cell: 541-969-8444

- ◆ **Area 3** (McKay Reservoir, Upper McKay Creek, and Birch Creek)

June and Duane Whitten — home: 541-276-9019

- ◆ **Area 4** (Mission, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats)

Aaron Skirvin — cell: 541-215-0761

Birders can also choose to do feeder counts if you have an active feeder within the count circle. If you want to do a feeder count, contact Aaron Skirvin (see contact information below).

All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the count results. Abby's Pizza on Southgate in Pendleton has reserved the banquet room for us from 4:30 – 7:30 pm that evening. Please contact Aaron Skirvin (541-215-0761 or umatbirder@yahoo.com) if you have any questions about the areas or feeder counts or how to participate.

**LET'S GO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTING
ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2011!!!**

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

BIRD OF THE MONTH AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizella arborea*) by June Whitten

IN SPITE OF THEIR NAME, American Tree Sparrows spend a great deal of their lives on the ground. They often forage for seeds on the ground and nest on the ground as well. When there is snow cover on the ground, they may beat tall weeds with their wings to dislodge seeds, and then eat the fallen seeds from the snow.

The American Tree Sparrow is a bird of the far north during the breeding season. This sparrow's breeding range includes most of northern Canada and Alaska, and during the breeding period, they eat insects almost exclusively. The tundra and wetlands of the north are prone to produce huge numbers of insects so their food supply is abundant.

The nest is often in a shallow depression or grass tussock on the tundra and is made of grasses, forbs, rootlets, or fine bark and lined with feathers or fur. The female will deposit 3 to 5 pale bluish or greenish eggs marked with browns so they are quite camouflaged in the nest. Apparently the female does the brooding while the male brings her food and both sexes feed and nurture the young.

An adult American Tree Sparrow is about 6.25 inches long, rather fluffy brown with wing bars, a longish tail, and gray underparts. The most outstanding features are the rusty cap and eye line; a dark spot on the unstreaked, gray breast; and a 2-tone bill that is dark



American Tree Sparrow. Photo by Thomas Klak.

on top and yellow below. Juveniles are similar but have a streaked breast losing the streaks around October or November. Their song is a high warble descending in pitch and ending with buzzy notes.

As the far north freezes over, these birds migrate to southern Canada and northern to middle United States for the winter. Here they are often seen in flocks in brushy areas, weedy fields or fencerows, or in trees. Now, their principal food becomes seeds and some berries where available. In some areas in winter, they may partake of seeds from backyard feeders often with Dark-eyed Juncos.



American Tree Sparrows have been well-studied in Churchill, Manitoba. Judging by estimates made from those studies, there may be 10 to 20 million breeding pairs. A study also found that the American Tree Sparrow looks for predators from its left eye. This preference may be due to the visual dominance of the right hemisphere of the brain. Strangely enough, in the same study Dark-eyed Juncos used their right eyes to watch for predators.



*American Tree Sparrow.
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

While very probably annual in winter in Umatilla County, American Tree Sparrows are fairly rare and often difficult to locate here. It would be nice if a few more of those 10 million birds decided to winter in Umatilla County! Large flocks do not seem to enter this area, as often only single birds, or possibly two or three may be seen together. They seem to avoid urban or residential areas and prefer open, grassy or weedy areas with scattered bushes and trees. One of the best places to look for American Tree Sparrow in Umatilla County is Alkali Canyon Road near its intersection with Mud Springs Canyon Road.

Some of the information for this article was obtained from: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American Tree Sparrow/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Tree_Sparrow/lifehistory) from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Tree_Sparrow/lifehistory

Fabulous Fund Raiser

The Pendleton Bird Club 2010 fund raiser at the December meeting was great fun! The Annual Raffle/Auction Fund Raiser netted \$1,000. This sum should nicely cover the club's expenses for the upcoming 8th year of the Pendleton Bird Club.

A big **THANK YOU** to all the members who donated goods and services for the raffle and auction.



Another big **THANK YOU** to all who bid in the auction and purchased the raffle tickets.

THANK YOU to Lorna Waltz for arranging the refreshments for this event and helping with the raffle set up.

THANK YOU to Jeanne Jensen and June Whitten who organized the selling of the raffle tickets.

THANK YOU to first time auctioneer, Andrew Clark who donned different hats to deliver a bird club version of the Gettysburg Address. Andrew proceeded to read his "letters" from African and Australian bird clubs as the auction moved from bids on Bruce Mayfield's 1-hour plane ride to the Como's dinner for 8 at their home to Tanya Harrison's beaded hummingbird. With bird food, bird books, and hand-crafted quillow to mention a few of the treasures raffled and auctioned at this year's event, an evening of spending was well spent!

From the Editors...

As we go to press our annual Umatilla County Bird Count for 2010 stands at **250** species sighted to date. Our highest recorded count was in 2004 with 259. Last year we sighted 256 species. With a little luck perhaps we'll see a few more species in the remaining 9 days of this year! If not, it has been a wonderful year of bird watching with one totally new species recorded for Umatilla County: the **Ruff** on October 9th. For more statistics, local bird photos, and Umatilla County birding information, visit the Pendleton Bird Club website.

Happy Holiday Birding to all our readers and may your New Year be filled with hours of enjoyable bird watching.



**IF THERE'S EVER A TIME TO LET YOUR
INNER SCHOLAR AND BOOKWORM
OUT OF THE CLOSET, WINTER IS IT!**

Submitted by June Whitten

Is it beginning to look like Christmas — or a very long winter? In case it is the latter, here is a recommended reading list taken from “The Backyard Birds Newsletter,” by Ed Kanze.

On Watching Birds by Lawrence Kilham, contains some of the most engaging writing about birds ever tucked between covers.

The Art of Seeing Things; essays by John Burroughs, edited by Charlotte Zoe Walker, gives readers a chance to discover, or rediscover, one of the world's first great writers on birds.



Walden: An Annotated Edition by Henry David Thoreau, presents the greatest of American nature books in an accessible new form.

Rural House by Susan Fenimore Cooper, abounds in observations of birds, first published in 1850 and remains in print. (The author is the daughter of the celebrated American novelist James Fenimore Cooper).

John James Audubon: Writings and Drawings; a gorgeous edition, a pleasure to hold, browse, and read closely.

Winter World by Bernd Heinrich, gives glimpses into one scientist's passionate engagement with wildlife. (Note: Coming attraction to the Pendleton Bird Club Newsletter; a review of another book by Bernd Heinrich, *Mind of the Raven*, and a feature on the Common Raven, one of the most intelligent birds).

November – December Bird Sightings

As expected this time of year, fewer bird sightings are being reported. This is due to at least two reasons. First of course, there are fewer birds around to report and second, many folks, myself included, just don't get out birding as much during the winter months. However, several great birds have been found this report period so read on.



Bird Sightings

Traveling to Pendleton for a conference in mid-November, Wayne Hoffman reported several of his Umatilla County bird sightings. November 14, he watched 4 **Red-tailed Hawks** cross the Columbia River from Washington to Oregon, soaring on the updraft off the face of McNary Dam. All 4 continued on south once they reached the Oregon side of the river, so he assumed they were migrating. He also flushed a sub-adult **Golden Eagle** from just off Butter Creek Road. He found a **Prairie Falcon** near Pilot Rock and a pale phase **Rough-legged Hawk** along Cold Springs Creek.



Western Scrub-Jay. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) and June Whitten (June) birded along the Columbia River November 20, in blustery weather. June reported one **Western Scrub-Jay** near the fish viewing station, a few **Ring-billed** and two **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. In the Columbia River below the dam there was one **Eared**, one **Horned** and a couple of **Western Grebes**. There was also one **Common Loon** fishing in the river, and a flock of 27 **Snow Geese** flew up the Columbia River.



June reported they saw lots of hawks during their travels and surmises mice and voles must be plentiful this winter.

The following day, June and Aaron braved the wintry weather and drove the Coombs, Mud Springs and Alkali Canyon roads and then to Nye Junction and on to Ukiah. As they stopped to check out a herd of elk off Cape Horn they found **12 GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCHES** along the side of the highway. June reported they spotted lots of birds of prey during the day including **39 Red-tailed Hawks, 17 Rough-legged Hawks, 27 Northern Harriers, 15 American Kestrels, 2 Prairie Falcons, 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **4 Northern Shrikes**. They found numerous **Wild Turkeys** out of Ukiah going up Camas Creek. On their return trip home they were surprised to see at least **63 Tundra Swans** at the Pilot Rock sewer ponds. On November 21, Dan Baum, driving west from Echo almost to the Butter Creek Road, spotted a flock of **12 Tundra Swans**.

Looking out his window on November 24, Jack Simons saw a **Hermit Thrush** in his yard, which is located near the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission. This is the first time he has seen this species on his property. Jack reports that with the cold weather during the week of Thanksgiving, he was feeding lots of sparrows, **House Finches** and an occasional **Spotted Towhee**.

June and Aaron found good birding on November 28, in spite of cold breezes and a few light snow flakes. Driving out Tutuilla, Shaw, and Schoolhouse roads, Highway 395 to Nye Junction and then down Alkali, Mud Springs and Coombs Canyon roads, they found many birds of prey including **38 Red-tailed, 7 Rough-legged** and **2 Coopers**

Hawks, 27 Northern Harriers, 11 American Kestrels, 1 adult Bald Eagle and **2 Northern Shrikes**. During their travels they found many large



Northern Harrier. Photo by Dave Herr

groups of **Ring-necked Pheasants**, a lone **Chukar** on a shed roof near Nye Junction and several coveys of **California Quail**. There was a **Barn Owl** in the trees along the south end of Schoolhouse Road and a **Short-eared Owl** along Alkali Canyon Road.

There have been a number of other owl reports this period. Walking his dogs along the Umatilla River behind his home, Jack

Simons happened to check a burrow in the river bank where Belted Kingfishers nested in the past. When he looked into the burrow, Jack was surprised to see something staring back at him. Taking a couple pictures, Jack was able to verify a **Barn Owl** was roosting in the burrow. He wonders if perhaps the owl will use this location for nesting next spring. Barbara Clark reports she and Andrew have been hearing a **Great Horned Owl** at their home near the McKay Dam. On December 3, a **Great Horned Owl** posed in a tree near Cayuse long enough for Craig

Kvern to take its photo. Dolly Robison has been hearing a **Western Screech-Owl** calling near her home in Hermiston. Craig Kvern has been seeing up to **8 Short-eared Owls** periodically east of St. Andrews Mission along Niktyoway Road and at least **5 Short-eared Owls** near Coonskin Creek, which is located just east of Cayuse. Craig also reported that he occasionally hears a **Western Screech-Owl** calling from the trees near



Spotted Towhee. Photo by Heal Hinds.

his home in Adams.

In early December, Dolly Robison found a **Great Egret** along Stage Gulch Creek where it runs through Stanfield. Normally one or **2 Great Egrets** spend the winter along this creek.



Connie Betts birded the Pendleton Community Park and the surrounding neighborhood on December 1. She found over **50 Mallards** along McKay Creek. In the park she found 4 **American Robins**, 4 **Morning Doves** and “lots” of **European Starlings** and **Dark-eyed Juncos**. Sadly, she also found a dead **Great Blue Heron** along the creek. Checking his back pasture on December 1, Jack Simons found 4 **Red-tailed Hawks**, 1 **American Kestrel**, and 1 male Northern Shoveler eating duckweed on a pond. However, his most interesting sighting was a male **Varied Thrush**. Jack reported the thrush was on the dike road behind his pasture, turning leaves over looking for bugs. This was the first **Varied Thrush** he had seen around his property in 3 years.



Varied Thrush. Photo by Connie Betts

Since December 3, Diana LaSarge has been occasionally seeing a **Cooper’s Hawk** “birding” at her feeders in SW Pendleton. During the snows we’ve had lately, Nancy Brown reported she has 4-500 birds at her Hermiston feeders and yard. She is getting a large variety of birds including **Song Sparrows**, **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Brewer’s Blackbirds**, **Western Meadowlarks**, **House Finches**, and **Eurasian Collared-Doves**.

Aaron and June had a great day birding the McNary Dam area on December 4. Their best find was a juvenile **BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** just below McNary Dam. Aaron notes this is only the second record for this species in Umatilla County.

The first record was two birds found by Mike and MerryLynn Denny and John Gatchet below the dam on December 9, 2008. Some of Aaron and June’s other sighting included **Thayer’s**, **Herring**, **Glaucous-winged**, **Mew**, **Ring-**

billed and **California Gulls**, 2 male **Eurasian Wigeons** and 2 **Red-breasted Mergansers**. Birding the same day, Neal Hinds photographed one of the male **Eurasian Wigeons** on a pond at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area.

December 5, Rodger and Ginger Shoemake and Mike and MerryLynn Denny surveyed the Milton-Freewater/Umapine raptor route. On the survey they counted **209 Red-tailed Hawks**, **57 American Kestrels**, **35 Northern Harriers**, **2 Rough-legged Hawks**, one **Ferruginous Hawk**, **4 Cooper’s Hawks**, one **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **2 Great Horned Owls**.

Aaron and June also had a good “hawk day” December 5. Driving to the Mission area from Pendleton about 8:00 a.m., they counted **19 Red-tailed Hawks**. Over the entire morning they counted **69 Red-tailed Hawks**, **14 Rough-legged Hawks**, **31 American Kestrels**, **25 Northern Harriers**, **3 Bald Eagles**, one **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, one **Prairie Falcon** and **3 Northern Shrikes**. They also checked the McNary area where June reported waterfowl was abundant on the McNary Ponds. June reported their total count for the day was 61 species, not bad for a wintery day.



Eurasian Wigeon(right). Photo by Neal Hinds.

December 11, Jack Simons spotted a **Pileated Woodpecker** flying over the Umatilla River about 2 miles east of Pendleton. Driving from Pendleton to Tollgate on December 12, Aaron checked out the newly constructed and operational wastewater treatment ponds at Athena. In addition to some **Mallards** and a few **Canada Geese** at the ponds, he found 2 adult swans,

apparently **Tundras**.

December 14, Barbara Clark report the “usual” winter species are coming to their feeder near McKay Dam. Earlier in the morning Andrew enjoyed



observing two **Bald Eagles** flying over their home and Barbara watched a **Red-tailed Hawk** circle their yard. The same day Jack Simons looked out his sliding glass door and watched a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** fly by at head height with what was probably a **Dark-eyed Junco** in its talons. Jack has now seen a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** make 5 captures at his feeder and notes if it is the same sharpie, it has worked out a hunting system that is working well. Jack also reported that for the previous two days approximately **500 Canada Geese** have been using Mission ponds. On December 17, while driving on Mission Road near Theater Road, Aaron saw a **Pileated Woodpecker** flying toward the Umatilla River. This may have been the same bird Jack Simons reported in the same area on December 11.

There are only a few days left in 2010. So far this year, 250 species have been found in the county.

How many more can we find before the end of the year? On January 1, we will start counting for the 2011 Umatilla County list. Any guesses on how many species we will find next year? Well, although keeping track of County year birds is fun, all your bird sightings are of interest, so please continue to send all of them to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or call me at 541-276-6413.

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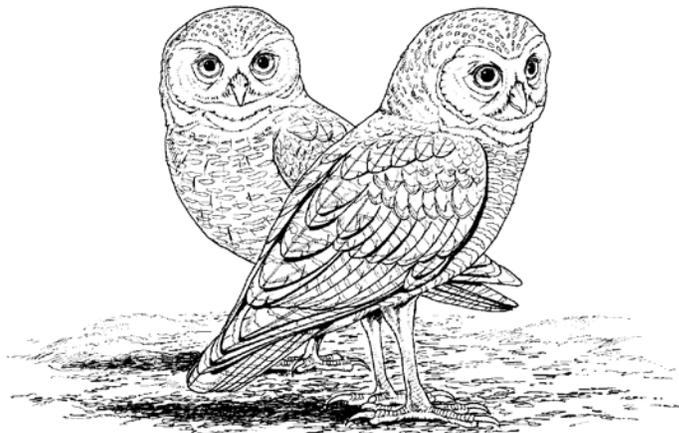
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