



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 9, No. 5 Pendleton, Oregon May 2011

Noah Strycker, Antarctic Penguins, & More....

By Alice Hepburn, Guest Reporter

THE BIRD CLUB'S SPECIAL GUEST speaker on Thursday, May 12, 2011 was Noah Strycker. Noah is a gentle, 25-year-old, young man who is an enthusiastic and talented birder. He is a native of Oregon and a graduate of Oregon State University with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife. Aaron Skirvin introduced him as an illustrator, photographer, associate editor of the ABA's Birding Magazine, and writer of numerous articles on birding and birders. He has tracked birds on four continents. His most recent label is that of author - "Among Penguins: A Birdman in Antarctica".

Noah spent three months, November 2008 – February 2009, at Camp Crozier in Antarctica studying the Adélie Penguin. After welcoming us to Antarctica, Noah shared with us the conditions under which he, and two companions, lived – a small (very small) hut for cooking and three sleeping tents. All the essentials for living were reachable from nearly any spot in the hut. Noah and his fellow adventurers had to bring everything they were going to need for the next three months.

Camp Crozier is an isolated, small facility consisting of one hut located about 70 miles from McMurdo Station, the main U. S. settlement and staging area for Antarctic research. Noah and his companions were taken via helicopter from McMurdo to Camp Crozier. The weather conditions were so changeable the chopper pilot who brought them virtually hovered, booted them and their possessions out, and took off fast back to McMurdo. During their stay at

Camp Crozier, the penguin researchers quickly learned that lenticular clouds would signal a wind storm coming up within five hours and everything had to be battened down. The wind can often howl to 50-60 mph and above. A stiff, 100+ mph wind storm shredded Noah's expensive Scott tent, which he was able to replace with another tent.

The hut at Camp Crozier was almost one mile and a 45-minute walk from colony of nesting Adélie Penguins. One mile of nothing but ice and rock: barren, bleak, the end-of-the-world.

Not only was the landscape austere, there were few "creature comforts" for the researchers at Camp Crozier. They had no fresh food – no salad or fruit – only those things which could be allowed to freeze. Noah confided to us that he often had fantasies of



Noah Strycker with young Adélie penguin chick. Noah conducted research on Adélie Penguins for 3 months in Antarctica before sharing his adventures with the Bird Club.

biting into crisp lettuce. Human waste had to be stored and packed back out with the campers in the chopper (where it thawed well before reaching its destination.) There were no facilities for washing clothes, bodies, anything. There was no phone. There was, however, a very clear, high speed Internet connection thanks to a repeater located on nearby Mt. Terror. Judging by the handsome, well-kempt young man before us, it's not hard to understand why even Noah's own mother failed to recognize the shaggy, bearded, mountain man who came home three months later.

Now some words of introduction about the Adélie Penguin. Adélies have lots of personality. They are sweet-tempered, curious, high-energy, the "wind-up toys of the animal kingdom". They range in color from the well-known black and white to occasionally all black or all white. The all white don't survive very long as they fall prey to the penguin's few enemies.

The colony had penguins as far as the eye could see, and together they produce a sound, and smell that can be detected all the way back to Camp Crozier! Noah was responsible for staring at them all day long looking for the ID bands for tracking them. Staring at penguins all day can be a very "Zen" activity, according to Noah.

The adolescent birds grouped together in gangs and, finding themselves with no responsibilities, they travel around fighting, flirting, chasing the researchers, and generally looking for trouble—typical teenagers! They would slide on their bellies down the snow-covered hills, climb back up, and do it again and again.



Adélies have lots of personality. They are sweet-tempered, curious, high-energy, the "wind-up toys of the animal kingdom".

The adult birds build and tend nests of small rocks which they frequently fight over and steal from one another when they can. Chicks all hatch at roughly the same time and the once calm, tidy atmosphere very quickly turns to chaos. Parents and babies recognize one another by sound and the noise is

deafening. There are usually two chicks to a nest and they are always hungry. Parents take turns getting food and protecting the young.

The opportunistic Skua, a predatory gull-like bird, has discovered that it's easier to peck the fish out of a penguin chick's belly than it is to hunt for the fish in the ocean, so parent penguins have to be ever vigilant of attack - Skuas are aggressive birds who will dive-bomb even humans.

As the chicks grow, they turn from downy, black, very soft, stuffed

animals to gray and not so cute. As if on cue, they will all suddenly head from the nesting area for the open water but stop just short of jumping in. No one wants to be the first to plunge in. Finally the number of penguins standing on the ledge reaches its capacity and one will fall in, causing all the rest to

immediately follow.

There is always a chance that that one could fall prey to a leopard seal but, seeing it is safe for the rest, they all jump in after. (Leopard seals are the top of the Antarctic food chain eating everything including one another.)

Normally living on the ice shelf as much as 50 kilometers from the open water, when the ice breaks up in the summer Adélies can be seen

hopping from one ice chunk to the next. Rather clumsy on land, Adélie Penguins are graceful and swift swimmers who exhibit porpoise-like behavior in the water. Much has been said about global warming and its possible affects on Antarctic life.



The Adélie Penguin lives inland from the Ross Sea, the last place to get sea ice. Their numbers are stable or possibly even increasing. Other penguins such as the Emperor are not doing as well.

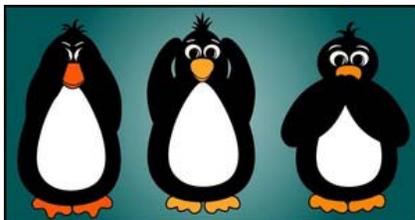
Noah Strycker has had other birding adventures: in Kimberly, Australia (the climatic opposite of Antarctica) studying the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren, whose habitat is being eaten by camels, wild cows,



*Noah signing his book for club member
Lorna Waltz.*

and others; on the Farallon Islands off the coast of California observing predation by great white sharks on elephant seals and marveling at the fall migration of songbirds which frequently get disoriented in the fog and land on the islands in exhaustion; in Costa Rica where he tallied 128 species of birds including the Collared Aracari, which he reports bites, and a Barred Forest-Falcon which showed itself on Noah's 25th birthday.

This spring and summer, he plans a major birding trek along the Pacific Crest Trail, 2665 miles from Mexico to Canada. Noah's adventures can be followed on his blog at <http://noahstrycker.com>.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Field Trip

**AN EVENING WITH THE
HUMMINGBIRDS
AT MCKAY CREEK**

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Meet at 6 p.m. at

Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)

**For more information contact Aaron Skirvin:
541-215-0761 or umatbirder@yahoo.com**

Bird Club Field Trip

**UKIAH AND TOWER BURN
BIRDING**

Saturday, June 11, 2011

Meet at 6 a.m. at

Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)

**For more information contact Aaron Skirvin: 541-
215-0761
or umatbirder@yahoo.com**

Bird Club Picnic

Saturday, July 23, 2011

Meet at 7 a.m. at

**Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE
Corner) for birding at Tollgate and
Summit Road.**

**Or meet at Emigrant Springs State
Park at 1:00 p.m. for the picnic.**

**For more information contact Aaron Skirvin:
541-215-0761 or umatbirder@yahoo.com**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday, October 13, 2011

TRAVELS OF THE BURROWING OWLS AT THE UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT

by Mike Gregg

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Oregon Field Ornithologists Annual Meeting in Pendleton, June 17 -19

GREAT NEWS: PENDLETON is hosting the Oregon Field Ornithologists' (OFO) Annual Meeting on Friday evening June 17 through Sunday morning, June 19. This is a wonderful opportunity for local birders to meet new friends/birders from around the state and from Washington as well. The event will be held at the Pendleton Center for the Arts, both Friday and Saturday evenings. Event organizers have lined up two outstanding after-dinner speakers, Mike Denny on Friday evening and David Johnson on Saturday evening. Mike has spoken to our group at least 3 times in the past few years, including the April Bird Club meeting. An expert birder and renowned conservationist, Mike always captures the audience with his pointers and humor on bird behavior and life histories. David Johnson is an expert on owls, oversees the Burrowing Owl study at the Umatilla Chemical Depot, and is the keynote speaker on Saturday evening. His talk will be on owls of the Pacific Northwest. You won't want to miss either of these presentations.



In addition to the two dinners and guest speakers, the event features several local field trips to Tower Burn, Upper Umatilla River, Tollgate, and the Chemical Depot. To register for the meeting, you must fill out the registration form that is on the OFO's website: www.oregonbirds.org. You don't have to be a member of OFO to attend the events, but you must register. Register soon to reserve your place at the dinners and on the field trips. If you want to go on the field trip to the Chemical Depot (it's highly recommended) you must sign up well in advance and go through a security check. The procedure is described on OFO's website. If you've never been on the Depot, this would be a great time to visit and learn about the wildlife there.

May 7, 2011 Alternate Trip: A 75-Species Day!

Submitted by Connie Betts and George Ruby

SINCE THE GREAT GRAY OWLS are not using the nest sites at Spring Creek this year, the Great Gray Owl Bird Club field trip had to be revised. Saturday, May 7th, Aaron Skirvin led George Ruby, Dave Herr, Connie Betts, Lyle and Nancy Brown, Duane and June Whitten, Virginia Storey, Margie Gaboury, Jill Wyatt, and Ann Wyatt on a very productive Nesting Owls "Plan B" route. After meeting at Safeway, three vehicles traveled down river through Rieth to Mud Springs Canyon Road, birding along the way. Short stops along the river revealed Great Blue Herons using the old rookery at Horseshoe Curve and White-throated Swifts near Yoakum.



Long-eared Owl chick, Aaron Skirvin, May 2011

Crossing the Umatilla River and driving up Mud Springs Canyon Road to Alkali Canyon Road and on to Nye Junction, the group observed three different

species of nesting owls. The first was a Long-eared adult with at least two babies in the nest only 20 feet off the road, then three separate sets of Great Horned Owls including adults and young, and ending with five Barn Owls inside the sand shed at Nye Junction, for a total of 19 owls.

From Nye Junction, the return trip included a stop at McKay Reservoir where Aaron spotted two adult terns. They were either Forster's or Common, but



Northern Shoveler. Photo by Rose Scott.

they got away before the group had good enough views to identify the terns. Other water birds included Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and Cinnamon Teal.

ded 75 species of birds with excellent weather early and ending with a thunderstorm at the reservoir. Along with the three owl species, highlights included four first-of-the-year birds for the county: Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Spotted Sandpiper. Other notable birds were a dark phase Swainson's Hawk, Lark Sparrow, Horned Lark, Sage Thrasher, Gray Partridge, Long-billed Curlew, Lazuli Bunting, Western Kingbird, Say's Phoebe, and a nesting Ferruginous Hawk in Jack Canyon.

Thank you, Aaron, for guiding a very successful outing and introducing us to a new local birding route. I, George, also appreciate the new birding vocabulary words: "branchers" (young owls unable to fly, sitting on branches near the nest) and "wire birds" (various species that pose patiently on fence wires or overhead wires for ease of identification).



How to Grow Birds

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community."

Aldo Leopold

Marilyn Cripe writes....

IN 2004, WE PIONEERED A NEW home site. Our small home was moved from a location adjacent to a riparian area on the Umatilla River where we had enjoyed wildlife for many years. The new site was barren – nothing but dirt, rocks and weeds. No birds! By the next spring, it became a vital necessity to become a gardener! Knowing only that I loved wildflowers and native plants, but not knowing where to purchase them, I had to trust a normal nursery to get the garden started with trees and shrubs to provide cover, shelter and food. After the plantings, we just added water for the birds and they began moving in!

Choosing the correct plants is easy these days with so many websites offering advice. One such website is www.helpfulgardener.com. The first source of native plants that I found was Sandy Ott and her "Go Wild"



nursery in Pendleton. Now Ruth Whittaker and the Umatilla Tribal Native Plant Nursery is a great resource also.

American Goldfinch, Mourning Doves and Ring-necked Pheasant are the most abundant species to utilize the garden year around. Approximately 50 bird species have actually visited. Every feathered visitor brings joy to our lives! It is such an honor to

be weeding or watering and hear the gorgeous songs, calls and wings! It is such fun to know that when the golden currents bloom, the hummingbirds will return! We enjoy sharing the bird garden with fellow birders too. For those of you who will be on the field trip June 2 to see the hummingbirds on McKay Creek, it would be very easy for you to visit as we are just five miles downstream from the Minthorns.

Little League Heronry Growing!

Submitted by June and Duane Whitten

THE GREAT BLUE HERONS have occupied 13 nests across the Umatilla River from the Little League Park in Pendleton. As of May 16, there were at least 14 juvenile herons of various ages. Several are almost adult-size and are moving along the branches and going into other nests. When an adult comes in with food, it seems whoever is standing in the nest gets some food!

There are also nests with quite small babies and at least two nests had adults on the nests and no way to tell if there were small babies there or not. It seems probable that some of these later hatches are second attempts at nesting. It certainly has not been the best spring to raise babies! The Umatilla River is extremely high again and, no doubt, makes for very poor hunting for the adult herons. Fish and amphibians are the preferred food for the baby herons, but they seem to be surviving quite well now, so perhaps mice and voles will suffice until the river is again lower. One good thing, the mice and vole population must be very good based on the high number of raptors in the county.

The herons are easily viewed from Pendleton's River Parkway just across the river from the Little League Park. The Parkway receives heavy use from people walking, running, or biking. While watching the herons, it is fun to see the reaction from those passing by. Some have been watching them all spring, while others are amazed to see the herons



just over the river in the trees! And, some people are quite surprised to hear the correct name for them: Great Blue Herons!

April – May Bird Sightings

WHAT A GREAT TIME OF YEAR for birding. FOY birds (“First Of Year”, i.e. the first sighting of a species for this year) are being reported almost every day. There are also a couple of local phenomena of special interest this spring. Many folks are reporting large numbers of **Lazuli Buntings** at their feeders. The beautiful male birds started to show up in our area around May 1, and now there are many reports of flocks of over 50 male and female buntings at feeders. At the May Bird Club meeting Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) explained this species breeds higher in the foothills and Blue Mountains. However, because of the heavy snow pack and late spring this year, they are staging in the lowlands waiting for spring to arrive. Another species being reported in higher than usual numbers is **Short-eared Owls**. Aaron attributes increase of owls to the large number of voles and mice present this year.

*Did You Know?
According to the Sibley
Guide online, in 2010 the
American Ornithologists
Union split the North
American population of
Winter Wrens into two
separate species –the
Eastern Wren and the
Pacific Wren*

In mid April, Dolly Robison reported the **Say's Phoebe** that has nested for the last several years at the US Forest Service warehouse compound near Washington School in Pendleton had returned. Dolly also reported seeing 5 **American White Pelicans** circling over the Umatilla River near the compound. April 20,

Ron Louderback was able to get some lovely photos of FOY **Bonaparte's Gulls** in breeding plumage along the Stanfield Meadows Road.

On April 22, Aaron spent the afternoon checking **Burrowing Owl** nest sites at the Umatilla Chemical Depot. Aaron reported finding lots of owls including one banded bird. He noted that most of the burrow complexes he checked the last 3 times he was there have **Burrowing Owls**. In his travels around the Depot he found the FOY **Barn Swallows**, and at the

rock cliffs along the Rieth road, the FOY **White-throated Swift**. Neal Hinds has been doing a lot of birding at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. He notes he had been seeing an average of 35 species, but on April 23, he had over 50. Some of the highlights included a **Turkey Vulture**, 2 **Townsend's Solitaires**, a juvenile **Great Horned Owl** and a **Lincoln's Sparrow**.

April 23, Aaron and June Whitten (June) birded the grasslands west of Pilot Rock. Some of the species found included **Vesper** and **Savannah Sparrows**, **Dusky Flycatcher** and a **Short-eared Owl**. They found the FOY **Rock Wren** along Highway 74 and nesting **Ferruginous Hawks** at Jack Canyon along Highway 395 south of Pilot Rock.

The following day Aaron did some birding in the southern part of the County. Some of the species noted included **Western** and **Mountain Bluebirds**, **Chipping Sparrow**, migrating **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, a **Coopers Hawk** and **Prairie Falcon**. April 24, Joy Jaeger took a great photo of a male **Western Bluebird** looking in the window of her Poverty Flats cabin.

While working in her bird garden along Upper McKay Creek April 27, Marilyn Cripe found a female **Black-chinned Hummingbird** sipping nectar from a golden current. Looking out her window later in the day, Marilyn noticed an **American Robin** chasing a slightly smaller bird. Grabbing her binoculars she identified it as a **Sage Thrasher**, a new bird on her Rocky Horse Ranch property. Neil Hinds made a great find when he spotted and photographed a **MARBLED GODWIT** at Cold Springs refuge April 30. This species is seldom seen in Umatilla County.

May 1, was probably the peak of the **White-crowned Sparrow** migration through our area. However, most of the migrant White-crowns have now moved on. Connie Betts had a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** in her yard May 2, and one showed up at my (Dave Herr) feeders a few days later. May 2, Joy Jaeger reported the hummingbirds had returned to



Bird Sightings

her Poverty Flats cabin. She had a male **Calliope** and several female **Rufous Hummingbirds** visiting her feeders. A couple of days later, Joy reported she has a flock of **Cassin's Finches** coming to a sunflower feeder at the cabin. Barbara Clark also reports

hummingbirds have returned to her yard and sent a picture of a **Wild Turkey** that is roosting in her backyard near McKay Reservoir. May 3, Ron Louderback found the FOY **Wilson's Phalarope** at Mann's Pond (Stanfield Meadows Road) along with **Black-necked Stilts**, **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** and fewer than normal **American Avocets**. May 4, Aaron

reported that Don Gillis spotted a **Burrowing Owl** perching near one of the artificial burrows the Bird Club helped install at Wanaket.

The area will be checked periodically by the CTUIR staff to determine if any of the artificial burrows are used this year.

May 5, Virginia Storey reported lots of interaction between **Great-blue Heron** adults and their chicks at the heronry across the river from the Pendleton Little League Park. May 6, Bruce Mayfield spotted the

FOY **Lewis's Woodpecker** near his South Hill home in Pendleton. Birding at Cold Springs Memorial Marsh May 7, Neal Hinds found 13 FOY **Long-billed Dowitchers**, a **Wilson's Phalarope** and several **Western Kingbirds**. Aaron reported on May 8, there were a couple dozen **Least Sandpipers**, a **Solitary Sandpiper** and a **Semipalmated Plover** at the Athena Sewer Ponds. Joy Jaeger had lots of activity in here Pendleton front yard May 7. There was a male **Downy Woodpecker**, **Lazuli Buntings**, **White-crowned**

Sparrow, **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and an unexpected **Orange-crowned Warbler**.

May 13, I took a drive along the Alkali/Mud Canyon route west of Pilot Rock and found **Savannah** and **Vesper Sparrows**, but missed **Grasshopper Sparrows**. Of most interest was the number of **Short-eared Owls** I saw along the route, at least 10. On May 13, Steve and Joy Jaeger tried to drive to their cabin above Albee, but found there was still too much snow. However, on the trip they spotted a "V"



Western Bluebird, male. Photo by Joy Jaeger.



of **Snow Geese** and at the West Birch Creek crossing a **Lewis's Woodpecker**. Birding McKay Reservoir and the area west of Pilot Rock, June and Aaron tallied over 80 species. Some of their more interesting finds included **House Wren**, **Forster's Tern**, **Loggerhead Shrike** and four owl species: **Barn**, **Great Horned**, **Short-eared** and **Long-eared**.

Checking out Memorial Marsh May 14 and 15, Neal Hinds was able to photograph **Spotted**, **Least**, **Western** and **FOY**

Semipalmated Sandpipers, **Red-winged Blackbirds** and **Ruddy Ducks**. Some of the other spring birds he found were **Lazuli Bunting**, **Western Tanager**, **Barn Swallow**, **Bullocks Oriole** and **Black-headed Grosbeak**. Bette Husted reported the first **Lazuli Bunting** showed up in her yard near Sherwood School in



Lazuli Bunting, male, Jack Simons

Pendleton May 5, and by mid-May she had over 25.

She has also seen two **Pine Siskins** and 6 **Evening Grosbeaks** at her feeders. Marilyn Cripe had lots of action in her bird garden at Upper McKay Creek on May 15. She saw her first **Black-headed Grosbeak** of the year and the first ever **Lewis's Woodpecker** in her yard. She also reports lots of **Lazuli Buntings**, far more than she normally sees.

Katrina Dielman has been finding some interesting birds in her North Hill yard in Pendleton. On May 5 she had good views of a pair of **PURPLE FINCHES**. Although more common in the western part of the state, this is a very rare species for our area. On May 8, she had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, a **Yellow Warbler** May 11, and a pair of **Evening Grosbeaks** on May 13. She also reports many **Lazuli Buntings** using her feeders. Rose Scott has also had a lot of action in her yard near the Mission Grain elevators. A **Chipping Sparrow** was a first for her yard. She also reports lots of **Lazuli Buntings** as well as 25 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds**, several **Red-**

winged Blackbirds, a few **Brewer's Blackbirds**, and a couple **Brown-headed Cowbirds**.

Barbara Clark also reports lots of interesting birds visiting her feeders near McKay Dam. She had a flock of **Cedar Waxwing**, **Bullocks Oriole**, **Black-headed Grosbeak** and all three **Hummingbird** species, **Rufous**, **Calliope** and **Black-chinned**.

Barbara also reports the female **Wild Turkey** is still hanging around her neighborhood. May 19, Barbara and Andrew Clark took an extended birding trip that

covered the Ukiah area as well and the grasslands west of Pilot Rock. A few of their sightings included several pairs of **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, 3 species of **Owls** that included **Great Horned**, **Short-eared** and **Barn**, **Say's Phoebe**, **Gray Partridge**, adult and immature **Sharp-shinned Hawks** and both **Eastern** and **Western Kingbirds**.

Many of our migrating birds have returned, but there are still some yet to arrive. And now our local birds are going to be busy nesting and rearing young. This is a fun time to go out and just see how many different species you can find nesting. A number of folks living in the Hermiston and Umatilla Area continue to report seeing **Western Scrub-Jays**. Maybe this year someone will find a **Western Scrub-Jay** nest or perhaps a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** nest. Please keep notes during your birding travels and send your sightings to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or call 541-276-6413

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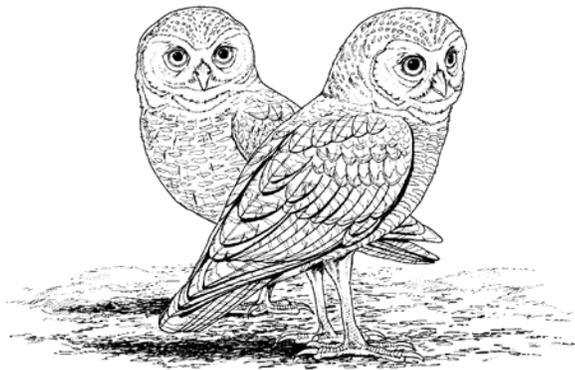
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I thought club members might get a kick out of the flock of Lazuli Buntings photographed by Dave Herr at his feeders on May 18th. Believe it or not, this group represents only one-third of the total number of buntings on the ground when the photo was taken.



Pendleton Bird Club
Pendleton, OR 97801

