



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

# Kákya Táymut

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



Volume 9, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August 2011

## *Bluebird Nesting Box Project Enters Its Ninth Year*

*By Jack Simons*

**P**ENDLETON BIRD CLUB STARTED ITS bluebird nesting box project in 2003 which makes 2011 the eighth year of the project. Initially two locations were selected for the boxes, one at Poverty Flat adjacent to Interstate – 84 above Pendleton and the other site near Highway 395 from Battle Mountain Scenic Corridor to Albee Rd. then south to the town of Ukiah. Currently the Club only monitors the Albee Rd. site which has 32 nesting boxes. A more detailed description of the two sites can be found on our website at <http://pendletonbirders.org/Club Projects Link Page.htm>

The purpose of creating a Bluebird Trail was 1) to increase secondary nesting sites for the local Bluebird population, 2) to stabilize or increase declining bluebird populations in selected areas and 3) to increase public awareness of the importance of maintaining natural habitat for healthy bird populations. Unlike woodpeckers, bluebirds cannot excavate a nesting hole; however, they will readily nest in a woodpecker hole or nesting box. Up until recently, these secondary nesting sites were most

often found in dead or decaying trees. However, the cutting of dead trees by the public for firewood has significantly reduced nesting tree sites thus making it difficult for Bluebirds to successfully reproduce.

Club members may recall that last year (2010) was not a very favorable year for second hatch bluebird nesting along the Albee Bluebird Trail. Recall also that we had a cold, wet spring (a La Niña year). Fast forward to 2011 (another La Niña year with a cold, wet spring) and we see a similar pattern in nesting success. Basically, the first hatch totals were similar for both years but the second hatch totals were down considerably from 2009 (an El Niño year) which had a milder spring. It appeared that second hatch nesting success might be related to the abundance of food. Bluebirds forage mostly on insects so any reduction in the insect population would affect nesting success and the numbers clearly indicate a reduction in the total number of eggs laid and chicks fledged for the second hatch in 2010 and 2011 compared to 2009 (see Table 1 and Table 2).

	Eggs Laid	Eggs Died	Chicks Hatched	Chicks Died	Chicks Presumed Fledged	Species Per Nestbox		Occupancy Rate
						Western BB	Mt. BB	
<b>First Hatch</b>	162	17	133	30	115	28	0	88%
<b>Second Hatch</b>	51	16	41	2	32	12	0	38%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>147</b>			<b>63%</b>

*Table 1. First and Second Hatch Totals for 2011*

The data we collected to monitor the Trail was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. This year I noticed something on the spreadsheet that I had not previously seen which may or may not help explain why certain nest box locations are more likely to see better nesting success during the second hatch. Reducing the magnification of the spreadsheet allowed us to see areas of nesting failure vs. nesting success. For instance, there is one long stretch of nest boxes on the Trail where 6 consecutive boxes failed

to produce a single fledged chick during the second hatch, then the next 4 consecutive boxes produced 12 fledged chicks, then the next 3 consecutive boxes failed to produce any fledged chicks. Why would there be a section of the Trail that is conducive to chick survival compared to adjacent areas that have no chick survival? I suspect the 4 boxes that successfully produced chicks were adjacent to an area where insect activity was high enough to support chick production but that is only a guess.

First Hatch	Eggs Laid	Eggs Died	Chicks Hatched	Chicks Died	Chicks Presumed Fledged	Species per Nestbox:		Occupancy Rate
						Western BB	Mt. BB	
2009	159	19	129	18	116	31	0	100%
2010	154	10	139	25	111	32	0	100%
2011	162	17	133	30	115	28	0	88%
2012								0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>342</b>			<b>96%</b>

Second Hatch	Eggs Laid	Eggs Died	Chicks Hatched	Chicks Died	Chicks Presumed Fledged	Species per Nestbox		Occupancy Rate
						Western BB	Mt. BB	
2009	99	25	58	17	57	21	1	71%
2010	30	5	26	9	17	7	0	22%
2011	51	16	41	2	32	12	0	38%
2012								0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>106</b>			<b>43%</b>

<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>448</b>			<b>70%</b>
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*Table 2. Albee-Ukiah Bluebird Trail Totals From 2009 – 2011*

Looking at Table 2 you will notice that first hatch totals are amazingly consistent the past 3 years with no significant differences between the number of eggs laid, chicks hatched and chicks presumed fledged. Apparently – no matter what the weather was – first hatch birds had a better chance of taking wing than did second hatch birds. Note that our little Bluebird Trail is closing in on 500 chicks fledged the past 3 years (currently 448 or approximately 150 per year), so we will likely break through the 500 barrier in 2012.

Actually, since we did not monitor the number of fledged chicks from 2003 to 2008,

we could estimate the totals for those seven years at approximately 1,050 (150 per year X 7 years = 1,050), thus our trail has given wing to approximately 1,500 fledgling bluebirds in nine years – *GO BLUEBIRDS!*

*So what is in store for 2012?* Too early to forecast but you can expect the weather to be a player again. As of mid-August, 2011 the US Climate Prediction Center reported that the odds for the coming winter are a tossup (50/50 chance) for a La Niña year or a No Niño year. Care to place your bets?



# Calendar of Events

## 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

## Bird Club Meeting

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

### BIRDING UP THE TEXAS GULF DURING SPRING MIGRATION

by Terry Steele

Pendleton First Presbyterian Church  
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton

## Bird of the Month

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER**  
*(Pluvialis squatarola)*

*By June Whitten*

**T**HE FALL MIGRATION OF SHOREBIRDS is underway. The first southbound migrating shorebirds (usually Western Sandpipers) pass through Umatilla County in late June. There is a continuous migration of shorebirds through late November or early December, when the last migrants (usually Dunlin) leave Umatilla County. From the birder's point of view, this year is very different than most. In Umatilla County, with the exception of Memorial Marsh at Cold Springs NWR, there was virtually no mudflat habitat to attract shorebirds in June, July, and early August. Due to the heavy rains during the spring and early summer, the two main shorebird stopovers, McKay and Cold Springs reservoirs, are still too full of water to provide much in the way of mudflats.



*Bird of the Month*

During fall migration, Black-bellied Plovers pass through Umatilla County from September to November. A few Black-bellied Plovers migrate northward through Umatilla County in May each year, but they are few and far between and very difficult to find.

At 11.5 inches long, the Black-bellied Plover is the largest plover in North America. It is striking in its alternate (breeding) plumage with a black face, throat, and breast; a white wing stripe and rump; and variegated black and white feathers on the back. Their basic plumage is much duller; brown-mottled back and head with a grayish-white belly. The best identification marks, especially in basic plumage, are the black wing-pits (the axillary feathers on the underside of the wing), which show well in flight. They are the only plover with a hind toe on the foot, but it is very small and seldom seen.



Its cousins, the Pacific Golden-Plover and the American Golden-Plover, are similar in appearance and may be hard to distinguish in the field in basic



*Black-bellied Plover (Juvenile Jul – Nov). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

plumage. True to their names, the Golden-Plovers have spangled yellow-gold in the feathers on the back and wings. They are smaller, 10.5 inches, and have smaller bills, but, when the plovers migrate through Umatilla County, they are seldom in their alternate plumage making them sometimes difficult to tell apart unless a nice close-up view is provided.

The typical feeding pattern of plovers helps to distinguish them among mixed flocks of shorebirds.



*Black-bellied Plover (adult nonbreeding). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

The plovers tend to stop-run-peck or take food-run-stop. While many shorebirds do continuous probing for food, the plovers continue to stop-run-stop. They have a distinctive way of tipping



forward and down when pecking for food on the ground surface.

Black-bellied Plovers may be found on all of the continents, except Antarctica, but only in migration or during winter. In England, they are known as Grey Plovers. They all nest in the dry Arctic Tundra of Alaska and Canada. They feed on insects and some invertebrates during the breeding season and usually spend the rest of the year on coastal beaches and estuaries, where they feed on bivalves and crustaceans. They often shake a small clam or worm in the water to remove the mud.

The nest is a scrape on the ground, lined with lichens, grasses, and twigs. One to five pinkish, greenish, or brownish eggs with dark spots are laid and incubated about 27 days. The chicks are covered with down and feed themselves within 24 hours. They remain in the Arctic nesting grounds for at least 45 more days, until they fledge and can fly well enough for the long migration trek.

The call of the Black-bellied Plover is somewhat reminiscent of a curlew. It is a rather high “pee-a-wee,” which is repeated several times.

In Umatilla County, the best place to find Black-bellied Plovers is Cold Springs NWR, and this year late September or October will probably be the most likely time to observe them. The number of plovers can vary considerably from day to day. Some days, as many as 20 Black-bellies might be seen; other days none or only a few may be present.

*Some of the information for this article came from [www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-bellied\\_Plover](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-bellied_Plover)*

## *Part 3 – “New Publication: Birder’s Guide to Umatilla County, Oregon”*

*By Barbara Clark*

**I**N ADDITION TO THE MAPS, BIRDING ROUTES, AND LISTS of birds to be seen in the birding regions of Umatilla County, the new guidebook provides information about precautions and safety that go along with the wonderful sport of bird watching. When you get the book, you will read about when to be prepared for mosquitoes, ticks, rattlesnakes, cougars, bears, and the very few, but growing, population of wolves in the county.

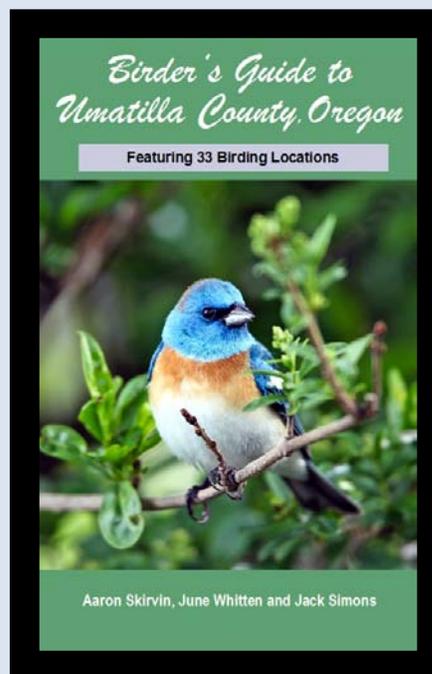
Traffic safety is another issue that every bird watcher confronts. The “Birders Guide to Umatilla Count, Oregon” reminds the reader that even on secondary gravel roads vehicles may be traveling at “unsafe high speeds of 50+ miles per hour”! To be safe, birders on any road in the county need to “leave enough room for another vehicle to safely pass your stopped vehicle”.

Weather conditions throughout the year can vary greatly from extremely hot temperatures in summer to below freezing and icy conditions in winter. The authors recommend being prepared at all times. What may start out as a short birding drive in the county may become much longer if a flat tire should occur. The message is: be prepared with drinking water in any season and other necessities as the seasons dictate.

When it comes to bird-watching safety, unless you are traveling in the larger towns or along I-84, the authors have come up with the rule of thumb that cell phone coverage is not available. Therefore, all the more reason to be adequately prepared for an emergency while in the mountains, in the canyons, or on the side roads.

Another rule of birding is respect for private lands. The book notes, “Most of Umatilla County is privately owned, including the lands within the boundaries of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. In most cases, the only public lands are the road rights of way. If you are unsure whether the land next to the road is public or private, the best practice is to do your birding from the public road, rather than risk trespass on private land.”

This concludes the 3 part series on “Birder’s Guide to Umatilla County, Oregon”, the recent publication by Aaron Skirvin, June Whitten, and Jack Simon. The guide offers the reader options for seeing over 300 species of birds that reside in or pass through Umatilla County. 300 species is a significant representation of North American birds, a number of which can be seen through the window from the comfort of your easy chair at home. Others will require a ride through the countryside and some might mean a fieldtrip with one of the authors. Copies of the book are sold at Armchair Books in Pendleton and from the authors who will be available for book signing at the October meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club.



## Bird Behavior: Don't Foul Your Own Nest

*Submitted by Joy Jaeger*

**W**ITH SEVERAL OCCUPIED BIRD nesting boxes so close at the cabin near Poverty Flat and mountain place near Albee in the Blue Mountains, I observe bird behavior every chance I get. I have seen both Western Bluebirds and Violet green Swallows raise families at close range.

After the eggs hatch and parents are feeding the babies I have seen them just lean in and deposit the food into one of the gaping mouths inside. Sometimes they go all the way in and bring out what looks like bird "poop" and then fly away. I have read that the parent birds of some species remove these fecal sacs to improve nest sanitation and deter predation (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fecal\\_sac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fecal_sac)). I never see a pile near the nest box, although after the young birds fledge, the inside of the box may be a mess with stuff encrusted on the inner walls.

This year for the first time, there was a pile of "poop" on our deck just below the Violet-green Swallow nest box. I discovered how this happened when watching the box one day. A fair-sized rear end (probably going to leave nest soon) backed out of the nest box hole and "plop!" added a deposit to the pile below and then went right back in. I guess this is the bird version of toilet training.

## Burrow Masters 2011 at the Umatilla Chemical Depot

Hermiston, Oregon

September 12-15, 2011

**N**ATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY will be held at the Umatilla Chemical Depot this year between September 12 – 15 and the Director of the Global Owl Project, David Johnson, has requested volunteers to help install artificial burrows for Burrowing Owls. Since Pendleton Bird Club has been involved with this "shovel-ready" project for a number of years, we thought club members might like to add to their knowledge and burrow building skills by lending a hand to this valuable project. The project has been remarkably successful with 61 nesting pairs in 2011 (up from 3 – 4 pairs in 2008).

This year the goal will be to install 44 new burrows. A back hoe will be used to do the heavy work while volunteers will use shovels to back-fill burrows. Team leaders will instruct and share their expertise on a wide range of topics dealing with Burrowing Owl ecology and conservation strategy.

**Contact:** Don Gillis, Natural Resources Manager, Umatilla Chemical Depot, 78798 Ordnance Rd, Bldg. 55, Hermiston, OR 97838.

Email: [donald.gillis@us.army.mil](mailto:donald.gillis@us.army.mil)

Phone: 541-564-5420.



## July – August Bird Sightings

By Aaron Skirvin

**T**HE BREEDING SEASON FOR MOST species came to a close during this reporting period.

And, the hot days of August can make bird finding more difficult since the birds are less active during the day and less vocal. Even so, observers reported some good birds during the last month.

Memorial Marsh at Cold Springs NWR was the only shorebird hotspot, but it produced many shorebirds; a few Western Scrub-Jays were reported near Hermiston; a Sandhill Crane was seen at an unusual location along the Umatilla River; owls and sparrows were reported in good numbers; and the uncommon and elusive Great Gray Owl put in an appearance.



Dave Herr spent a few hours at Memorial Marsh, Cold Springs NWR, on July 24 photographing birds, including a **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Lesser** and **Greater Yellowlegs**, and the first-of-the-year **Red-necked Phalarope**. While kayaking at Indian Lake on July 24, Diana LaSarge saw a family of **Spotted Sandpipers**, an **Osprey**, and a juvenile **Great Blue Heron**.

Craig Kvern spotted a **Northern Goshawk** near Indian Lake on July 28. Although they are year-round residents in Umatilla County, only a few goshawks are reported locally each year. Lyle and Nancy Brown kept track of a pair of nesting **Ospreys** in Hermiston this spring. On July 29, Lyle got a photograph of the nest with one adult and **four** well-grown juvenile **Ospreys**. Also on July 29, I (Aaron Skirvin) did some evening birding west of Pilot Rock. Bird sightings included about 20 **Short-eared Owls**, a family of **5 Burrowing Owls** (along Stock Drive Road), and 2 **Common Poorwills**.



Visiting Memorial Marsh at Cold Springs NWR on July 30, Neal Hinds found numerous species including an **Eastern Kingbird**, a fledgling **Marsh Wren**, **Solitary Sandpiper**, **Wilson's Snipe**, and **Virginia Rail**. The same day, I saw 2 **Loggerhead Shrikes**: one along Adams Road and the other along Kosmos Road. Also on July 30, Dolly Robison saw a **Western Scrub-Jay** in her Hermiston yard, which is near the intersection of Townsend and Diagonal roads. Mark Rhodes and Dolly have reported seeing one or two jays in this area since early June.

June Whitten and I found an adult **Bald Eagle** at McKay Creek NWR on July 31. Sightings of Bald Eagles in Umatilla County from May through September are rare, but increasing, with Indian Lake the most likely place to see a Bald Eagle in the summer. During the last weekend of July, Joy Jaeger reported finding young **Western Bluebirds**, **American Kestrels**, and **Townsend's Solitaires** on her property NE of Albee. Returning to Pendleton on August 1, Joy and Steve Jaeger saw a flock of about **40 Common Ravens** along USFS Road #5412. Every August, Jack Simons sees Turkey Vultures near his home along the Umatilla River just west of Mission. This year he spotted the first **Turkey Vulture** on August 7, and on August 10, there were **18** vultures soaring over his back pasture.

On August 8, I spotted a **Peregrine Falcon** at Mann's Ponds along Stanfield Meadows Road. The same day, a hummingbird flew into Mary and Gene Hallman's home on the North Hill in Pendleton. After a few hours in the house, there was a happy ending when the hummingbird exited through an open window. I drove out to Gurdane Road on August 11 to look for sparrows, and the birding highlights included 2 **Grasshopper**, 3 dozen **Vesper**, 3 **Brewer's**, 5 **Lark**, 2 **Savannah**, and 2 **Chipping Sparrows**, 2 **Sage Thrashers**, several **Say's Phoebes**, 1 **Barn Owl**, 1 immature **Golden Eagle**, and 2 family groups of **Gray Partridges**. The same day, Craig Kvern and Ron Lee saw one adult **Bald Eagle** at Indian Lake. Also on August 11, Dolly Robison saw a pair of **Eastern Kingbirds** along



*Northern Goshawk in flight. Copyright Arthur Grosset*

Bingham Road near Iskuulpa Creek and a very unexpected sighting of a juvenile **Sandhill Crane** along the Umatilla River near Thornhollow.

Birding at Memorial Marsh, Cold Springs NWR, on August 13, Neal Hinds photographed a flock of 7 **Red-necked Phalaropes**, an adult **Black-crowned Night-Heron**, **Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Western Sandpipers**, a **Great Egret**, and an **Olive-sided Flycatcher**. Over the weekend of August 13 – 14, Joy Jaeger found **Red Crossbills**, **Townsend's Solitaires** (juvenile were losing their "polka-dots"), all 3 species of **nuthatches**, up to 16 **Mourning Doves**, **Chipping Sparrows**, and **Mountain Chickadees** at her property NE of Albee. Joy reports she is seeing far fewer **Steller's Jays** this year than usual on her property. She doesn't know why there are few jays but wonders if West Nile Virus may have reduced the population.

Barbara and Andrew Clark had very close (within 50 feet!) views of a **GREAT GRAY OWL** near Mottet Campground on August 14. Mottet Campground is a USFS facility located in Wallowa County, just ½ mile from the Umatilla County line and a few miles north of Jubilee Lake. On August 20, Neal Hinds closely observed 3 **Virginia Rails** and 3 **Soras** at Memorial Marsh, Cold Springs NWR.

Residents in the Grecian Heights neighborhood of SW Pendleton reported seeing **Barn Owls** regularly this summer. By mid-July, Jerri Flynn and Janet Jones were seeing 6 or 7 owls on their walks through the neighborhood. June and Duane Whitten saw 2 **Barn Owls** near their home on the evening of August 18 and 3 on August 22. June also reported hearing a **Great Horned Owl** or two hooting in the early mornings.

Connie Betts has been seeing **Common Nighthawks** periodically since early August in her SW Pendleton neighborhood. The highest number she saw was **14 nighthawks** on the evening of August 20. Over the weekend of August 20 – 21, Joy and Steve Jaeger saw 2 flocks of **Dusky Grouse** (one with 10 birds and the other with 6) NE of Albee. June Whitten and I birded in the grassland habitats along Coombs Canyon Road, Mud Springs Canyon/Alkali Canyon Roads, and Gurdane Road on August 21. Sparrows were out in force, and we counted **344 Vesper**, **111 Savannah**, **10 Grasshopper**, **3 Brewer's**, and **1 Song Sparrow**. In addition to the sparrows, we found 2 **Loggerhead Shrikes** along Coombs Canyon Road and a **Prairie Falcon** along Gurdane Road and another **Prairie Falcon** in Jack Canyon just west of Pilot Rock.



*Great Gray Owl. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*

Even though it is still August, fall bird migration is well underway, and in the next few days (around September 1) the first migrating White-crowned Sparrows will arrive in Umatilla County. Most of the Cliff Swallows and Western Kingbirds, both very common breeding species in Umatilla County, have left the area. However, the last week of August and the first two weeks of September are peak migration periods for many songbirds, including sparrows, warblers, and flycatchers. The water levels in McKay Reservoir and Cold Springs Reservoir have finally dropped enough that they are just now showing some mudflats, which will attract migrating shorebirds. In a typical year, mudflats begin showing a month earlier at both reservoirs. When you go out birding, take note of the birds you see, and please report your sightings to Dave Herr at [dsherr1@mac.com](mailto:dsherr1@mac.com) or 541-276-6413.

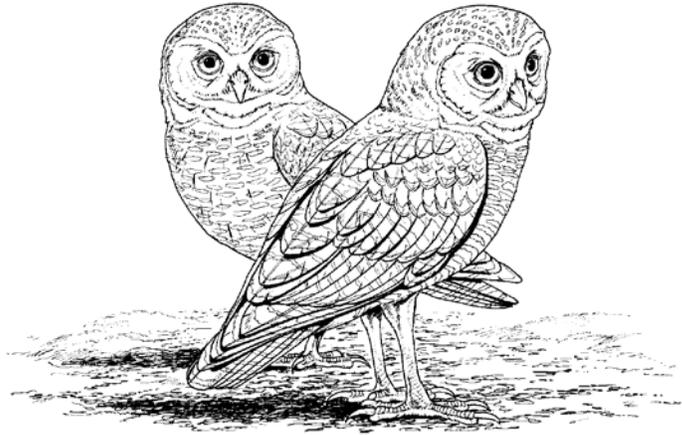


*Common Nighthawk. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.*



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