



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

November

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Fabulous Spring Birding Along the Texas Coast

TERRY AND KAY STEELE WERE guests of the Pendleton Bird Club on November 10. Terry took the audience on a wonderful tour of the Texas Gulf Coast during spring migration. Starting at South Padre Island, located at the southern tip of Texas, the trip continued along the coast to High Island, which is located about 30 miles NE of Galveston.

South Padre Island is a well-known birding location complete with a boardwalk into a wetland and various beach views for shorebirds such as Piping Plovers as well as numerous Laughing Gulls and terns. Terry did warn: Do not go to South Padre Island during college spring break. It is an absolute zoo and packed with irresponsible college youth. (Duane and I made just that mistake thinking spring break was the next week. There is a long bridge from the mainland to the island and it had a traffic jam second-to-none. There was no way to turn around, of course, so we were forced to inch across the bridge. Then traffic control wouldn't allow us to turn south to access the island but forced us to turn north. So, at the very first opportunity we turned around, crossed the bridge again,

and reached the mainland with a sigh of relief! Birding South Padre Island would wait for another day.)

Terry's next stop: Laguna Atascosa, a huge national wildlife refuge with an extensive road system. The coastal area is excellent for godwits and curlews, and



Roseate Spoonbill. Photo by Jacob S. Spendelow, Tringa.org.

other areas have Bobcats and some of Terry's favorite snakes. Laguna Atascosa is well-known for Aplomado Falcons, which were seriously endangered by the 1990's due to DDT causing their eggs to have soft shells. A captive breeding and release program is restoring the Aplomado Falcon to some of its former range.

Continuing along the coastal area, Terry went to several locations, including Port Mansfield and Brazos Bend State Park, with great birding. This area is home to many birds; some of the more memorable were Reddish and Tri-colored Egret; Little Blue Heron, which is white until maturity; Yellow, Clapper, and King Rails; Least and Royal Terns; Roseate Spoonbills; White and Glossy Ibis; and numerable shorebirds at the famous Bolivar Flats. Port Aransas,

near Rockport, is a wintering area for Whooping Cranes and a good place to view Mottled Ducks. Now, possibly the highlight of the trip is reached at High Island, which isn't an island at all, but just a higher area (about 38' above sea level). It is well-covered with huge trees, small trees, and sufficient brush for cover for the birds. This is the first place sighted by spring-migrating birds which have flown some 500 miles from the Yucatan Peninsula across the Gulf of Mexico. The habitat at High Island is, no doubt, a welcome sight for the tired birds.

The Houston Audubon Society owns much of this property and strives to preserve the area as naturally as possible while adding some small ponds and drip-water features. Terry told us that fresh water is vital



Royal Tern. Photographer unknown. http://www.biodiversity-nevis.org/migratory_birds.htm

to the migrating birds, both to drink and to wash the salt from their feathers, which had accumulated during the long ocean crossing. Visitors pay a fee to enter High Island and then have access to the many trails and bleachers to view the birds using the water features.

Terry lamented how much he hated to wish for a storm in the gulf – and yet how much he wanted one! When the birds have stormy weather crossing the gulf, the ones that make it, arrive at High Island totally exhausted and some literally fall to the ground. Until they can rest, drink, and eat they are easily viewed at very close range. Terry's wonderful photography showed fantastic views of a great variety of warblers (Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Magnolia, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Hooded, Black-and-white, Worm-eating, American Redstart, and Chestnut-sided), vireos (Warbling, Philadelphia, Red-eyed), and thrushes (Swainson's, Hermit, Gray-cheeked, and Veery) to name a few. Whether one

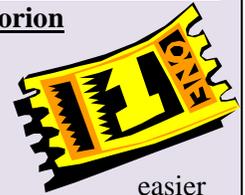
wishes for a stormy crossing or not, it will happen at times anyway. The tricky part is to time a visit to coincide with a storm event in late April or early May.

Terry's outstanding photography, his knowledge of birds and natural science, and his style of presenting a program all add up to a thoroughly enjoyable evening along the Texas Coast!

By June Whitten

Raffle/Auction Fundraiser at the December 8 Meeting

DOOORS FOR THE **DECEMBER 8** meeting open at 6:30 pm. to allow people to bring in and place their items for the annual fundraiser before we begin the evening's festivities at 7:00 pm. **The meeting will be held at the Pendleton Presbyterian Church, 201 SW Dorion Ave.** The meeting will feature a raffle and live auction to raise money for club needs like funding the website and purchasing software to make it easier and more efficient to generate and transmit the monthly newsletter, provide honoraria for guest speakers, meeting room donations, memorials, etc.



Raffle tickets will be available for \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00. Some items will be placed for live auction, and Sandi Hinds has graciously offered to serve as our auctioneer again this year. Be thinking about what you want to contribute to this annual event!

Home-made items like

- bird houses,
- jewelry,
- bird feeders,
- cakes and cookies,
- jams and jellies,
- paintings, trinkets.

How about store-bought

- sacks of bird feed?
- blocks of suet?
- calendars?
- books about birds or birders?
- T-shirts?
- bird centerpieces for Christmas?



posters? bird games?
bird puzzles?
coffee mugs featuring birds?

Put your thinking cap on and get started on any items that you would like to bring! Invite a friend who would enjoy a fun evening with folks who love birds and birding!

Contact Jeanne Jenson (276-7510) for additional information. A club announcement will be made prior to the meeting with additional contacts and updates available.

Calendar of Events

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday, December 8, 2011

PENDLETON BIRD CLUB ANNUAL RAFFLE AND AUCTION

Pendleton First Presbyterian Church
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton

Christmas Bird Count

Friday, December 30, 2011

See article in this newsletter for details
or contact Aaron Skirvin 541-215-0761,
umatbirder@yahoo.com

Umatilla County Winter Birding Big Day

Midnight to midnight, Sunday, January 1, 2012

Count as many bird species as you can in one day
in Umatilla County, then report your species list
to Aaron Skirvin at umatbirder@yahoo.com

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck Dinner

6:30 p.m., Thursday, January 12, 2012

FOURTH ANNUAL HUMOUNGOUS ID CHALLENGE (All new, more challenging, exciting format!)

By Jack Simons

Pendleton First Presbyterian Church
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday, February 9, 2012

ON SAFARI IN KENYA & TANZANIA

By Dave Herr

Location to be Announced

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, Friday, December 30, 2011

HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR THE 25th official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is scheduled for **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2011**. This local count is part of the national 112th 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 (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>).

During our count last year on January 2, 2011, 20 bird counters, including 4 feeder watchers, saw 69 species of birds, and tallied a total of 8,580 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 December 30, 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 December 30, 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 FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2011!!!

By Aaron Skirvin

Bird of the Month – Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

IS THE PEREGRINE FALCON THE fastest bird on earth? That answer will depend on when its speed is clocked. In a stoop, or dive, the Peregrine has been clocked at 200 miles per hour and not many birds in the world can rival this speed. One falconer actually skydived from an aircraft along with trained Peregrines to get an up-close reading and arrived at the 200 miles per hour figure. However, in a head-to-tail chase after a Rock Pigeon, for example, 50 miles per hour is about the best speed the falcon can attain and the Rock Pigeon may get away!



Bird of the Month

Peregrine Falcons take many birds for food, but they do eat mice, rats, squirrels, and bats as well. Their favorite birds are shorebirds, waterfowl, seabirds, and



ptarmigan. Peregrines probably prey on doves and pigeons more than any other bird. Some interesting studies have shown a high frequency of Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Soras in the Peregrine's diet; and in some areas they take nothing but Rock Pigeons and in yet another, they took everything but Rock Pigeons.





Peregrine Falcon. Photographer unknown.
<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/peregrine-falcon/>

In spite of their great speed and agility, Peregrine Falcons are not successful in every capture attempt. Statistics show the success rate is about one catch out of four attempts. Like most raptors, Peregrines regurgitate pellets consisting of undigested hair, feathers, bones, and bills usually once daily early in the morning. They also swallow small stones to clean out their stomachs and promote digestion.

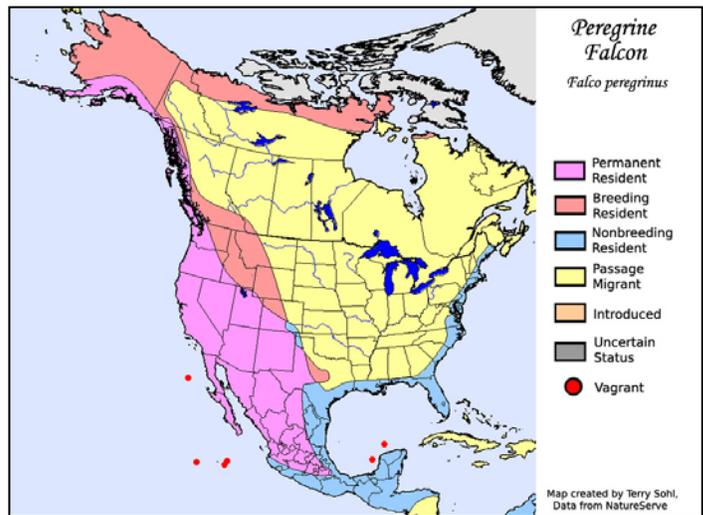
The average Peregrine is about 18 inches long. The female is up to twenty percent larger and twice as bulky. The adults are slate gray on the back and wings, buffy underneath with some dark barring, and barred under the wings with a barred tail as well. Juveniles are browner all over and heavily streaked with brown on the belly. The black cheek patch is more prominent in the adults but is present, smaller and brown, in juveniles.

A few decades ago, bad things happened to the North American population of Peregrines. By the 1970's, they were extremely endangered. Persecution of Peregrines by use of shotguns and poisoning took a big toll on their numbers as they were branded as "chicken hawks." It is now illegal to kill a Peregrine, or any raptor, by any method. The shooting of these falcons was probably not enough of a threat to cause

extinction, but add DDT to the mix, and the Peregrine very nearly became extinct due to the eggs being so soft-shelled they never hatched. Today, thanks to extensive captive breeding and release programs and ban on the use of DDT, the Peregrine is coming back in good numbers.

In North America, Peregrines breed in the Arctic and the mountainous areas of the northwest. They have year-round ranges on both the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, as well as winter ranges along both coasts and Mexico. They have proved adaptable and highly successful all over the world, with many now nesting in urban areas. Chick mortality rate is quite high, especially in urban areas where vehicles and rivers often prove fatal to the fledglings. If the youngsters survive their initial flight, the next two to three weeks will determine whether they will survive to undertake migration.

The Peregrine's preferred nesting site has traditionally been on high, rocky cliffs. Here a scrape is made in a protected slot or shelf. Three or four cinnamon to whitish colored eggs are laid and incubated by both parents with the female taking the major portion of the duty. If the hatch is perfect, all chicks emerge on the same day. If one hatches a day or two later, it runs the risk of being a runt and not getting enough food to survive. The newly hatched chicks dry out



Peregrine Falcon range map from
http://sdakotabirds.com/species/maps/peregrine_falcon_map.htm

quickly into white, fluffy nestlings and are soon raising their heads to beg for food. By 40 days, the chicks are almost fully feathered and begin to flap their wings and stand on the edge of the nest preparing for their maiden flight. The parents continue to



provide food for the fledglings for another month or so. The young become more efficient at flying and obtaining their own prey and are on their own about five weeks after fledging.

The range map of Peregrines is expanding as they gradually return to populate the areas where they were formerly most common. In Umatilla County, Peregrines are rather rare with a small number usually reported annually, but the number of reports is increasing each year. Mostly, they are seen between October and April, but at least one pair is known to breed in or near Umatilla County. Although they are widespread across Umatilla County, the best locations to find Peregrines in Umatilla County are the areas below McNary Dam, Cold Spring NWR in the fall, and along Stanfield Meadows and Echo Meadows roads.

Submitted by June Whitten

Some of the information for this article was obtained from "The Backyard Bird," Peregrine Falcon by Dr. David Bird

October - November Bird Sightings

IT LOOKS LIKE WINTER WEATHER IS here, but there are still some exciting birds being found, and this year it looks like there will be a high number of raptors overwintering in the area. Maybe this is an indication some rare northern birds will visit this winter.

Birding at the McNary Nature Wildlife area on October 22, Neal Hinds found an immature **Golden-crowned Sparrow** at the parking lot feeding station. Neal reports there was also a **Eurasian Wigeon** at the area. Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) and Diana LaSarge did some birding in the southern portion of the county the same day. Some of their highlights included a family of about 8 **Chukars** and a family of 7 **Gray Partridges** along Bear Creek Road, near Yellow Jacket Road. They spotted a **Golden Eagle** at mile 10 on the Yellow Jacket Road, and another ½ mile along the road, Aaron and Diana watched an immature **Northern Shrike** swoop down and catch a grasshopper. Some



Bird Sightings

of their other sightings included **Clark's Nutcracker**, **Red Crossbills** and a **Rough-legged Hawk** near Ukiah.

October 23, Aaron and June Whitten (June) birded from Pendleton to the Columbia River. June reported **California Quail** were everywhere. There was a late **Say's Phoebe** along South Cold Springs Road, and



Say's Phoebe. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

while on that road they watched a **Prairie Falcon** chasing **Rock Pigeons**. They found two Western Scrub-Jays near McNary Golf Course and four more near the Fish View Room at McNary Dam. The Columbia River hosted several **Herring Gulls**, **Western, Horned** and **Eared Grebes**, an adult **Glaucous-winged Gull**, several **Common Loons**, and hundreds of **American Coots**. In the ponds below McNary Dam, they reported finding the very spectacular **Eurasian Wigeon**, reported earlier by Neal Hinds. While at McNary Wildlife Nature Area, June and Aaron met with Katrina Dielman and Bruce Mayfield who reported seeing 9 **Black-crowned Night-Herons**, as well as two "yellow-shafted" **Northern Flickers**, a **Fox Sparrow**, and a late **Brewer's Sparrow**. Traveling to Cold Springs NWR, June and Aaron reported the **Snow Geese** were out in force, as well as large numbers of both **Cackling** and **Canada Geese**, along with the expected waterfowl.

Kate Ely reported seeing about 80 **Sandhill Cranes** flying low over the Pendleton North Hill on the evening of October 24. Joy Jaeger reports the only new bird she has noticed at her mountain cabin above Albee has been **Clark's Nutcrackers**, although there are still **Red Crossbills** and **Pygmy Nuthatches**



around. Joy reported the Sagers, who live along Yellow Jacket Road, continue to occasionally see **GREAT GRAY OWLS** and have recently seen **Gray Jays** in the area.

Dan Baum drives past Mann's Ponds almost every day and reports on October 26 seeing one **Great Egret**. Mann's Pond is located on the north side of I-84, just east of Exit 182. On October 27 there were 3 and the following day there were 2 in the field between the ponds and Stanfield Meadows Road. On November 5, Aaron and Diana LaSarge saw 3 **Great Egrets** at Mann's Pond. October 28, Jack Simons found 8 **Lesser Yellowlegs** and 1 **Greater Yellowlegs** along the Umatilla River behind his home near Mission. Walking back to his home from the river trail he saw his first of the season **Bald Eagle**. Jack remarked that now he is seeing spawning salmon in the river, and the eagle's arrival is probably not a coincidence. **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs** were also seen by Donna Murdock and Virginia Storey along the Umatilla River in Pendleton during the week of November 6.

October 29, Aaron, June and Diana LaSarge birded south to Ukiah. June reports the bird of the day was a medium-dark **Merlin** eating "brunch" on an electric pole near the intersection of Gurdane Road and Hwy 395. The group found lots of hawks along the way including 23 **Redtails**, 3 **Rough-legs**, 4 **Northern Harriers** and 4 **American Kestrels**. October 29, Neal Hinds was able to photograph 3 grebe species along the Columbia River, which included **Horned, Western and Pied-bill Grebes**.

Checking below McNary Dam on November 3, I (Dave Herr) found **Ring-billed Gulls**, one **Glaucous-winged Gull** and one **Bonaparte's Gull**. There were a couple of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** at the parking lot feeding station. Checking the same area on November 5, Neal Hinds found **White-crowned,**

Golden-crowned, Song, Fox and House Sparrows in this area. He also spotted a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **Western Grebes**.

Last month, Dolly Robison had remarked that she had not been seeing any **Eurasian Collared-Doves** or **Western Scrub-Jays** around her home in east Hermiston. She reports that she has now started to again see both species near her home. In early November, Dan Baum saw at least 3 **Varied Thrushes** in



Great Egret. Photo by Neal Hinds.

Pendleton.

Aaron has been spending time at the Umatilla Chemical Depot looking for Burrowing Owls and in five trips has located **23 owls**. During his November 4 survey, Aaron saw 2 **Gray Partridges** in addition to 7 **Burrowing Owls**. On the November 5 survey, Aaron and Diana LaSarge found 3 owls and a

Loggerhead Shrike at the Depot.

November 6, Ginger and Rodger Shoemake along with Mike and MerryLynn Denny conducted the first run of the sixth winter of the Northern Umatilla County Raptor Survey. They counted a total of **266 raptors**, which included **167 Red-tailed Hawks, 74 American Kestrels, 1 Merlin, 14 Northern Harriers, 5 Coopers Hawks, 3 Sharp-shinned Hawks, a Golden**

Eagle and 1 **Great Horned Owl**.



White-crowned Sparrow. Photo by Joy Jaeger.



November 9, Connie Betts was surprised when she checked her yard near Community Park in SW Pendleton and saw a bird at her suet feeder she could not readily identify. Connie got a photo of the bird, and after some study, she determined it was a female **Bullock's Oriole**. Aaron notes that Bullock's Orioles are fairly common during the breeding season, but most leave Umatilla County for Mexico by early September. This is the latest record of a **Bullock's Oriole** for Umatilla County he is aware of. Connie said this is the first time she has seen this species at her feeders.

On November 10, Tanya Harrison ran the Pendleton-Cayuse-Pilot Rock Raptor survey. During the survey she found 27 **Red-tailed Hawks**, 34 **American Kestrels**, 6 **Northern Harriers**, one **Golden Eagle**, 5 **Rough-legged Hawks**, one **Prairie Falcon**, one **Coopers Hawk** and 5 unidentified hawks. Also on November 10, Ron Lee, Craig Kvern, and Aaron saw 2 adult **Bald Eagles** at Indian Lake.

Sherry Sallee, who lives along the Walla Walla River Road in Milton-Freewater, reports two **hummingbirds** coming to her feeder. Based on a picture she took November 11 and her description, the hummers appear to be **Anna's Hummingbirds**. November 15, June reported that she and Duane saw a hummingbird using their feeder at Grecian Heights in SW Pendleton. Based on the field marks they could see, it was identified as an **Anna's Hummingbird**. Also on November 15, Aaron found 9 **Great Egrets** at the Westland Irrigation District's canal headworks along the Umatilla River near Echo.

November 16, Aaron and Diana LaSarge counted 26 **Red-tailed Hawks**, 6 **Am. Kestrels**, 2 **Northern Harriers**, and 1 **Rough-legged Hawk** along I-84 between Pendleton and the Umatilla Chemical Depot. During the survey, they found 4 **Burrowing Owls** and a late **Say's Phoebe**. While driving back to Pendleton, they watched a **Merlin** chase and catch a

small songbird over Moorhouse Road. Aaron remarked that the poor songbird "did not have a chance against the Merlin."

The **Great Egret(s)** continued at Mann's Pond through November 19, when Jack Simons reported seeing one there. On November 20, Aaron and Diana LaSarge spotted a **Loggerhead Shrike** along Hartle



Great Horned Owl. Photo by Joy Jaeger.

Road near Holdman and 3 **Great Horned Owls** along Hwy 37. Aaron noted that a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes very likely nested along Hartle Road in spring/summer 2011, as they were seen there several times. This bird may be one of the pair or an offspring. Also on the 20th, Aaron found a **Merlin** near his house on the SE Hill in Pendleton. Walking with his dogs along the Umatilla River behind his home, Jack Simons noted that the number of salmon spawning in the Umatilla River has increased, but is still pretty shy of previous runs. During his walk, Jack flushed a **Bald Eagle** from a snag across the river.

Last month I noted I had few **House Finches** at my black oil seed feeders, far fewer than previous years. Others have noted they have seen little decline in local **House Finch** populations, so I guess **House Finches** just have yet to find my feeders. There are lots of raptors in the agricultural areas throughout Umatilla County. And, winter visitors are still migrating into our area, so get out, do some birding and please send all your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr, at dsherr1@mac.com or call 541-276-6413.

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