



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

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Fall Shorebirding in Umatilla County

This is the season for shorebirding in Umatilla County. The first southbound shorebirds show up locally in late June or the first week of July. Numbers and species diversity will increase in August as more birds are moving south. McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge, located along Hwy 395 about 5 miles south of Pendleton, is a good place to look for shorebirds from late July through September. However, Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge, located about 4 miles east of Hermiston, is the shorebirding hotspot in Umatilla County from August through October and attracts more individual and more species of shorebirds than McKay Creek NWR.

When in Umatilla County in the fall, shorebirds are attracted to mudflats. Those few years when McKay Reservoir does not fill in the spring, mudflats can be exposed when the first fall migrants begin moving through the area in late June. Most years, the reservoir fills, and as the water level draws down, mudflats begin showing in late July. Cold Springs Reservoir's mudflats start to be exposed in early August. However, the small ponds at the southeast corner of Cold Springs NWR usually show some mud by late June each year and attract a few migrating shorebirds. The really

good shorebird habitat at Cold Springs is the exposed mudflats of the reservoir itself.

Because of high water levels in both Cold Springs and McKay Reservoirs in late spring 2008, the mudflats at these reservoirs will not become available to shorebirds until August. At McKay Reservoir, you can access the first mudflats along the McKay Creek channel from the southeast side of the reservoir. As the reservoir continues to draw down through the summer and early fall, the west side road offers the best access to the mudflats.



American Avocet (fall plumage). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

To get to the good shorebird habitat at Cold Springs, park at parking lot D (pick up a brochure at the entrance to Cold Springs NWR to find the location of parking lot D) and walk northward on the gated roadway to the reservoir. The northern part of Cold Springs Reservoir is closed to public access, and the closed area is shown on the brochure. If you walk out onto the mudflats, look for the boundary of the

closed area, which is marked by an indistinct row of metal fence posts that extends into the reservoir. At times, there can be several hundred shorebirds that include up to 14 different species.

If you have a chance to do some local shorebirding this late summer and fall but are not sure about



shorebird identification, take along your favorite field guide and the following guide to the shorebirds of Umatilla County. Bird identification takes practice, which means looking at lots of birds in the field. Now is the time to study your field guide to prepare for the up-coming fall shorebird migration.

GETTING STARTED WITH SHOREBIRD IDENTIFICATION: FALL SHOREBIRDING IN UMATILLA COUNTY

Smaller than Killdeer

1. Peeps = Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Baird’s Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper – Dark, often black legs; long, tapering, down-curved bill; brownish gray back, often with rufous on scapulars. Common to Abundant.

Least Sandpiper – Greenish or yellowish green legs; short, slightly down curved bill; back often brownish; brownish streaks on upper breast. Common.

Baird’s Sandpiper – Black legs and bill; slightly but noticeably larger than Western and Least Sandpipers; brownish breast; juveniles have buffy head; wings noticeably longer than tail. Uncommon to common.

Semipalmated Sandpiper – Dark or black legs; short, blunt bill (though some overlap in bill length with Western Sandpiper); grayer back than Western Sandpiper, usually no rufous on scapulars. Rare, but annual, and can be difficult to distinguish from Western.



Western Sandpiper (fall plumage). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.



Red-necked Phalarope (fall plumage). Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

2. Spotted Sandpiper – A little larger than the peeps; pale legs; spotted (breeding adults, only sandpiper with spotted breast and belly) or white beneath (juveniles and winter adults); constantly teeters/bobs; white streak on shoulder. Uncommon

3. Semipalmated Plover – Killdeer-like, but much smaller; one dark breast band; small bill. Rare to uncommon.

4. Sanderling – Black legs; black, straight bill; very pale white and gray (salt and pepper pattern); black spot at wing bend. Rare, but annual, mainly at Cold Springs NWR.

5. Dunlin – Black legs; longish black, downturned bill. Plain gray-brown back. Often in flocks and rare before mid-October, arriving after most other shorebirds pass through.

Similar in size to a Killdeer

1. Killdeer – White beneath; white collar; 2 black breast bands; orange rump and tail. Common to abundant.

2. Pectoral Sandpiper – Yellowish legs; overall brownish color (except belly); heavily streaked breast down to white belly. Uncommon.

3. Solitary Sandpiper – Legs olive-greenish; **prominent white eye-ring** (our only sandpiper with **prominent eye-ring**); white-dotted wings and back; occasionally bobs/teeters. Uncommon to Rare.

4. Stilt Sandpiper – Legs very long and yellow-green; longish bill that is slightly downturned at tip. Body smaller than Killdeer, but long legs gives appearance of being larger.



5. **Wilson's Phalarope** – Yellowish or grayish legs; gray and white body; needle-like black bill; swims, wades, and forages on mud. Uncommon to Rare.

6. **Red-necked Phalarope** – Black patch around and behind the eye; usually swims; short, needle-like bill; brownish or brownish-gray, with buffy or whitish stripe on each side of back.

Larger than Killdeer

1. **Greater Yellowlegs** – Long yellowish or orangish legs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; long, bill, about 1.5 times the width of head; bill thick at base and often two-tone, appears slightly upturned. Uncommon to Common.

2. **Lesser Yellowlegs** – Long yellowish or orangish legs; smaller than Greater Yellowlegs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; thin, straight, blackish bill, a little longer than the width of head. Uncommon.

3. **Black-bellied Plover** – A tall, long-legged plover, noticeably larger and taller than Killdeer. Gray and white plumage, with black axillary (wingpit) feathers, which are noticeable in flight. Uncommon but annual at Cold Springs NWR; occasional at McKay Reservoir.



Wilson's Snipe. Photo by Rose Scott.

4. **American Golden-Plover** – Fall plumage more brownish otherwise similar to Black-bellied Plover. Slightly smaller than Black-bellied and lacks black axillaries. Rare, but probably annual.

5. **Long-billed Dowitcher** – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; white back (in flight); solid dark cap. Uncommon to Common.

6. **Wilson's Snipe** – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; whitish stripes on back;



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

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

**Program and Location
To be Announced**

whitish streak on crown. Uncommon.

7. **American Avocet** – Long, blue-gray legs; faded rusty (in fall) head; black and white body; up-turned bill. Rare in fall.

8. **Black-necked Stilt** – Very long reddish legs; black and white body and head; straight thin black bill. Rare in fall.

Other shorebirds rarely seen (or that might be seen) in the fall at Cold Springs and McKay Reservoirs: Long-billed Curlew (wrong habitat), Marbled Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (not yet confirmed in Umatilla County), Short-billed Dowitcher, Red Knot, and Ruddy Turnstone.

Shorebirds Known to Breed in Umatilla County

Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Phalarope. (Upland Sandpiper may still breed in Umatilla County near Albee/Ukiah.)

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

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

Bird of the Month—WILLOW FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax traillii*)

Willow Flycatcher is fairly common in Umatilla County, and, gratefully, is relatively easy to identify! What makes them easy when *Empidonax* flycatchers are notoriously difficult to identify? The main thing is their wonderful, usually-easy-to-hear “FITZ—bew” call, which is diagnostic. And, they call quite



Willow Flycatcher. Photo copyright Mike Danzenbaker.

regularly, especially upon arrival in the county for the breeding season in early to mid-June. As they establish their territories, the “FITZ—bew” call is heard over and over again. The other *Empidonax* flycatchers occurring in Umatilla County, notably Western, Dusky, Hammond’s, Gray (rare) and Least (very rare) are quite different from Willow Flycatcher in voice, appearance, and habitat.

Willow Flycatchers prefer low, wet, brushy habitat. Alder Flycatchers (*Empidonax alnorum*) also prefer this habitat and are nearly impossible to tell from Willow Flycatchers by appearance. The scientific name for Willow Flycatcher is *Empidonax traillii*, as both Willow and Alder were once considered one species and were called Traill’s Flycatcher after a Scottish physician and zoologist, Dr. Thomas Stewart Traill (1781—1862).

So, how can Willow Flycatchers be easy to identify? The emphasis is on Umatilla County, since Alder Flycatcher has not been reported locally; indeed, there is only one accepted record of Alder Flycatcher in Oregon. But, if you visit the Canadian Provinces, southern Alaska, or the northeastern states in early June or July be aware that the flycatcher that appears to be Willow will most probably be Alder. Again, gratefully, the call is different,

although the tone is similar. Alder Flycatcher says something like “reeBEEa” or “f-BEE-o”, where the “FITZ—bew” call of the Willow is accented on the first syllable.

Willow Flycatchers nest across the United States and their range may overlap with Alder in some of the northeastern states. Both species are neo-tropical migrants and are apt to be mostly silent in migration and on their wintering grounds. If one is seen under these circumstances, it is probably safer to call it Traill’s Flycatcher!

Willow Flycatchers are about 5.75 inches long, have brownish-olive upperparts, with an olive wash on the breast. The throat is quite white, another way to tell them from other *Empidonax* flycatchers, except Alder. The belly is also whitish, two wing bars may be beige to white, and the eye-ring is often indistinct, which may cause some confusion with the Western Wood-Pewee. They do most of their “fly-catching” from low brush or branches often near a bog, stream, or pond.

The nest is cup-shaped, usually only a few feet from the ground and often in brush or a small willow tree. The normal clutch is 3 or 4 buffy eggs spotted with browns. The eggs are incubated for 12-13 days and the babies fledge when they are about two weeks old. The diet of both babies and adults is almost exclusively insects. Small amounts of fruit may be taken by adults.

There are many good locations for Willow Flycatchers in Umatilla County. Some sites to look and listen for them include the lush riparian area along the Umatilla River between Cayuse and Thornhollow, Iskuulpa Creek, East Birch Creek, South Fork Walla Walla River, and Owen’s Creek between Albee and Ukiah.

Contributed by June Whitten

Grebe Roundup Nets 12 Birds

Reprinted from *Intercom*, Vol. 31, No.7, 2004

It was the perfect location to take up residence this summer – running water, cool breezes, shelter from the rain and an endless supply of tasty morsels on which to snack. Perfect for the 15 Western Grebes that found a way into McNary’s [dam] fish bypass channel inside the dam. Not so perfect for the juvenile salmon traveling through the channel to the downstream side of the dam that often became the entrée of choice on the grebe’s bypass buffet.

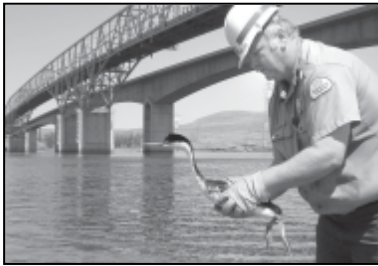


“No one’s sure exactly how many fish they were eating, but that channel was their only source of food,” said Rex Baxter, District fish biologist. “Fifteen grebes can eat a lot of fish over the course of a couple of months.”

Walla Walla District personnel from the headquarters, McNary and Ice Harbor dams netted and relocated 12 of the birds during round-up efforts Aug.10.

A representative from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Wildlife Services) joined the capture-and-release team as they used nets to capture the grebes, transferred them to burlap bags for transport to a release site downstream of the dam. The birds were removed in accordance with a USDA permit allowing the District to deter predatory birds from hunting juvenile salmon.

“Everyone worked well together,” said Brad Eby, McNary fish biologist. “It didn’t take long for us to figure out a routine to keep the birds moving into positions where they could be netted.”



Mark Halupczok, Ice Harbor Natural Resource Management wildlife biologist releases a grebe downstream of the dam

Grebes – gull-sized, pointed-beak waterfowl with red eyes and black, grey and white markings – hunt fish by

diving and swimming under the water. Sometimes, they enter a turbine intake and swim into the bypass channel. Once inside the dam, there is little room for flying. The only way out by water is through the fish bypass system to the Juvenile Fish Facility, Baxter explained. “Some folks working the fish separator occasionally see grebes flow from the bypass tubes into the separator,” Baxter said. “The birds quickly fly away.” “We haven’t had any new birds enter the channel,” said Eby during a telephone interview Sept. 8. “Any birds left in there when we dewater the channel this winter will be captured and released to the river.”

by Gina Baltrusch

Photo by Gerry Turner, USDA (Wildlife Services)



Crow Stashing Behavior Update

In regards to the stashing behavior of crows, our scavenger pen houses a crow and magpie along with the turkey vultures. Every day food is stashed in at least one of the two bath pans in the pen. I'm not sure who is stashing, but suspect it is both the crow and magpie. We recently acquired a Steller's Jay who also likes to stash food, although, so far, not in water, but any crack or cranny it can find. It will even dig a hole with its beak, and then scrape dirt over the item. The stashed item is often retrieved later in the day. I suspect stashing is a *corvid* trait.

Contributed by Lynn Tompkins, *Blue Mountain Wildlife*

June – July Bird Sightings

It is now mid July and the beginning of a typical Pendleton summer. Generally during this period, birding slows down since many young birds have fledged and many folks are on vacation. However, a number of unusual birds have been reported this period including **Great-tailed Grackle**, **Band-tailed Pigeon** and **Boreal Owl**. Read on for more details.

On June 27, Connie Betts reported seeing a **Say’s Phoebe** in a neighbor’s yard in SW Pendleton and suspected there is a nest in the area. Connie’s suspicions were confirmed when she saw a juvenile



Western Screech Owl. Photo by Duane Whitten.

Say’s Phoebe bathing in a birdbath on July 3. She also reports there are several young **Western Screech-Owls** in her neighborhood and noted several young **Northern Flickers** recently fledged. June 24, Connie had a **Townsend’s Warbler** briefly visit her yard.

In late June, Dolly Robison reported two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** trying to set up housekeeping in her Hermiston back yard. She reported much cooing, preening and chasing between the two birds. She related the male is slightly larger than the female with a heavier look to his mark over the shoulders, while the female is more petite and her mark thinner. Dolly is not sure what type of nest this species makes, but is anxious to discover if nesting occurs.

Eurasian Collared-Doves are clearly becoming established in the area. July 12, Dr. Tom Weeks reported a pair of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** had taken up residence in his back yard on the North Hill in Pendleton. Bette Husted continues to have a pair visit her yard in the Sherwood area in Pendleton, and she is quite sure they have at least one fledgling. Although, I (Dave Herr) have been expecting for some time to see **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in my neighborhood on Mount Hebron in Pendleton, I finally found one yesterday (July 20).



Black-headed Grosbeak. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

Also in late June, Neal Hinds found a **GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and during the same period Eugene Hunn (birder from Seattle) reported finding a **BAND-TAILED PIGEON** along the South Fork Walla Walla River. Although these species have been reported previously in the county, both sightings are quite rare.

Jack Simons was wondering what birds were stripping green chokecherries from the trees behind his home. On June 29, Jack discovered the “iron-clad-stomach-birds” were **Black-headed Grosbeaks**. He notes, he “would not eat one of those things.... under any circumstances!”

Duane Whitten has been monitoring several hawk nests at the Pendleton Country Club. He reported two **Red-tailed Hawks** fledged about the first of July and within the next two weeks **Swainson’s Hawks** fledged.

With Neal Hinds’ sighting of a **Great Egret** on July 1 at Cold Springs NWR, it can now



be said that Great Egrets have been reported in Umatilla County every month of the year.

Birding in the Homli area (a couple of miles east of Cayuse) July 2, Aaron Skirvin reported finding several **Veerys**, a **Warbling Vireo**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Yellow-breasted Chats** and many (more visible than usual) **Gray Catbirds**.

A number of people have reported seeing **American White Pelicans** in the area. On July 3, Connie Betts saw 9 **Am. White Pelicans** circling over her home in SW Pendleton and heading north. On July 4, Lorna Waltz spotted 2 **Am. White Pelicans** on the Umatilla River between Main Street Bridge and the

downstream island in Pendleton. During the same period, Jack Simons noted **Am. White Pelicans** flying over the Umatilla River behind his home between Pendleton and Mission.

Although not a bird sighting, Jack Simons had an interesting observation on July 7. While walking his dogs behind his home west of Mission, Jack saw a yearling **BLACK BEAR** stand up about 30 feet away.

Jack’s dogs took off running and treed the bear in his back pasture. Jack called off his dogs, and hopefully the bear has now traveled to more suitable habitat.

On July 7 and 8 I birded in the Homli and Wenix Springs area (near Thornhollow) photographing and recording birds. I was surprised that even though it was July, there was still a lot of singing, especially right after dawn. Most vocal birds included **Red-eyed Vireo**, **Yellow-breasted Chat**, and **Gray Catbird**. I found the standing water along the Wenix Spring trail had almost dried up, but the mosquitoes were really bad. Birding at Umatilla Forks the following day I found **Western “type” Flycatchers** and **Swainson’s Thrushes** the most vocal birds.

Ginger Shoemake reported that on July 9, she, her husband Roger and Joe and Carolyn Corvino were camped at Target Meadows Campground. About 9:00 pm they heard several owls calling. After referring to taped calls on an IPOD, they determined they heard **BOREAL OWLS**. Ginger reported they

heard the owls in the same area the following two nights. Ginger notes although early July, the Tollgate area was still very “birdy”. She reports they found six species of woodpecker including a female **American three-toed Woodpecker**. There were numerous **Hermit Thrushes** in the campground and along the Burnt Cabin trail they found all the “usual” birds including **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **MacGillivray’s**, **Townsend’s** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Western Tanagers**, **Bullocks Orioles** and **Warbling Vireos**.



Red-eyed Vireo. Photo by Dave Herr.

Aaron notes that **BOREAL OWLS** are a great find in Umatilla County. He stated that he is aware of only one other sighting in Umatilla County, one owl heard on October 10, 1987 at Dusty Springs (about 10 miles north of Tollgate). Attempts to relocate the Target Meadows Owls by others were not successful.

July 11, traveling back from Pearson Guard Station, Aaron had an immature **Northern Goshawk** fly across the highway about 100 feet ahead of his car. The morning of July 12, Aaron found 4 **White-throated Swifts** at the nesting cliffs near Rieth. Birding mid-morning at the upper ponds at Cold Springs NWR, Aaron found 11 **Western Sandpipers**, 5 **Least Sandpipers**, 3 **Long-billed Dowitchers**, a **Great Egret**, **Spotted Sandpipers**, 4 **Wilson’s Phalaropes** and one **Greater Yellowlegs**.

July 17, Aaron decided to check Mission Ponds. He was surprised to find an adult **Black Tern** perched on the snag in the west pond. Although this species is sometimes found in the county in May and June, a mid-July sighting is unusual. Connie Betts noted 3 **Common Nighthawks** flying over her home in SW Pendleton the evening of July 20.

In early July the southward shorebird migration begins, and the first southbound Western Sandpipers were seen at the Oregon Coast June 30. Usually McKay Reservoir and Cold Springs NWR are the best place to find migrating shorebirds in Umatilla County. However

Aaron notes that with the high water levels in the reservoirs this year, significant mudflats will not begin to appear at these areas until sometime in August. Although finding shorebirds in the county might be delayed for a few weeks, there are plenty of tricky juvenile birds to identify this time of year. Please continue to send your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or 276-6413.

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