



# Pendleton Bird Club

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## **Raptor Rally at the December Bird Club Meeting**

Lynn and Bob Tompkins spoke to an audience of 27 birders at the December 11 Pendleton Bird Club meeting. Lynn and Bob operate and manage the Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center located about 5 miles south of Pendleton. Their mission is to rescue, rehabilitate, and release injured wild animals, especially birds, back into their natural habitat.

This year, the Center has received about 180 injured animals, the highest number since the Tompkins started the Center in 1992. Nearly 95 percent of the animals they take in are birds, and about two-thirds of the birds are raptors. Lynn explained that raptors are birds of prey, and they have powerful, sharp talons for catching and holding their prey and large hooked beaks for dismantling it.

Most birds taken in at the Center are helpless nestlings/fledglings or have collided with cars or wires or other objects. But, occasionally, they rehabilitate birds that come to them under more unusual circumstances. One such case is "Angus", an immature male American Kestrel that sat on Lynn's hand as she told his story. Last spring, when he was a young fledgling, Angus was captured in the John Day area and turned over to the Center after landing on a barbecue grill and attempting to eat a hamburger cooking on the grill. He was uninjured by the grill incident, but Lynn believes he was

someone's escaped "pet" since he had already imprinted on people, rather than kestrels. As Lynn pointed out, another clue to Angus's prior captivity is that kestrels do not normally recognize hamburger as food. He had foot and leg injuries probably related to a poor diet. Angus is healthy now but not releasable because he thinks he's more people than kestrel and his chances of survival in the wild are very low.

Lynn introduced "Ruby", an adult female Red-tailed Hawk, to the audience. The Center received Ruby 10 years ago after she had been hit by a car. Lynn told us female raptors are larger than males, and Ruby weighs just under three pounds, almost a pound heavier than males. Since Ruby is unable to fly well, she cannot be released and travels with the Tompkins to schools and other events where she thrills children with close-up views.

Lynn showed us "Hootie", one of the 39 Barn Owls the Center rescued and rehabilitated this year. The Center housed 31 (a record number) young Barn Owls at one time this spring. Most had come from nests built in large haystacks in the Irrigon and Boardman areas. Hootie came to the Center last spring as a young bird and was already imprinted on people and is not releasable. He, too, travels with the Tompkins and Ruby the Red-tail, as an "educational" bird.

Blind in one eye, but otherwise healthy, "Sage", a 9-year-old male Great Horned Owl, is a veteran of the Center's education circuit. As a

nestling in 1994, Sage fell out of his nest, but attempts to replace him were not successful. He is also imprinted on people and not releasable. Although Sage is fairly docile, Lynn alerted us to the fact that Great Horned Owls are one of the most powerful and aggressive of raptors. You would not want to get so close that a wild owl could grab you with its talons. Lynn explained that an adult Red-tailed Hawk like Ruby can lift and carry one-half to one pound of prey. However, an adult Great Horned Owl can carry up to three times its body weight, and Sage weighs about three pounds.

If you were to find an injured raptor, Lynn explained that you can carefully catch it, but you can not legally keep it without proper permits. Raptors are difficult to care for and take a lot of time and effort to maintain in healthy condition. If you find an injured raptor along a highway, for example, you can try to capture it by placing a coat, towel or blanket over the bird, being very careful to keep away from its talons. Place the wrapped bird in a secure place (a box for example) and contact your nearest wildlife agency or, if in this area, the Center.

The Center provides a wonderful service to the community, since so many animals are found injured or sick each year. In an average year, a little less than half of the animals rescued survive to be released. Over the years, however, many raptors, song birds, and other animals have been given a second chance at life in their natural habitats because of the dedicated, caring work of Lynn and Bob at the Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center.  
*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

## **Umatilla County** **Christmas Bird Count**

Here are the details for the 17<sup>th</sup> official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count scheduled for **SATURDAY, January 3, 2004**. This local count is part of the national 103<sup>rd</sup> annual Audubon Christmas Count. Christmas Bird Count history and lots of information can be viewed at the Audubon website

([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) and click on link to Christmas Bird Count).

At this time, no major changes have been made in where or how we conduct our count (the participant fee remains at \$5 per birder if they are older than 17 years of age and each participant will receive a CBC issue of *American Birds*). **The Area Coordinators have already volunteered (or been volunteered) and other interested participants should contact them directly for count day coordination.**

**Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek and Riverside)  
Paul Daniello (966-0156, hm; 278-4623, wk)

**Area 2** (Umatilla River, Mission -Cayuse)  
Bob Gritski (278-2987, hm)

**Area 3** (McKay Reservoir and Birch Creek)  
Howard Browers (USFWS, 509-545-8588 ext. 28, wk)

**Area 4** (Patawa Creek, Coyote Creek and upper Tutuilla Creek)  
Dolly Robison (567-3642, hm; 278-6471, wk)

**Area 5** (St. Andrews, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats)  
Aaron Skirvin (276-1948, hm)

**Area 6** (Spring Hollow Creek and upper McKay Creek)  
Dave Herr (276-6413, hm; 278-3869, wk)

Bird enthusiasts can also choose to do stationary feeder counts if you have an active location. All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the bird count data. Last year we had 28 participants (six kids) that saw a total of 7,940 birds (66 species). Abby's Pizza (formerly Klondikes) on Southgate Street in Pendleton has reserved the back room for us at 4:30 pm that evening. Please feel free to contact Kevin Blakely (276-2344, wk; 276-5249, hm) if you have any general count day questions or specific questions about the areas or feeder counts. **GO BIRDING... SATURDAY, January 3, 2004**  
*Contributed by Kevin Blakely*

## Calendar of Events

### Pendleton Bird Field Trip

Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003

**Bundle up in wool or fleece & bring your thermos filled with warm drink! Bird club members will enjoy a second field trip this winter to McNary Wildlife Area.**

This area should be rich in winter sparrows, waterfowl, & wildlife.

Meet at the NE corner of Pendleton's Safeway parking lot at **8:00 am, Jan. 31.**

We should arrive at the McNary Wildlife Area (just below McNary Dam) at 9 am.

Trip leader is Dave Herr (276-6413)

### Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, February 12, 2004 **6:30 pm**

Please note: This meeting will begin one hour earlier than normal as it will be a Potluck!

Please bring a dish of your choice, plus plates & silver for your own family members.

Program for the evening is Photo and Slide Show and Tell. Bring some bird slides and/or photos to share with the group.

### Festival of Trees – Bird Tree

The Pendleton Bird Club joined with S.U.R.E. to produce a decorated tree for St. Anthony Hospital Foundation's Festival of Trees. The tree, called "For the Birds", brought \$450 at the auction and received many positive comments. The funds will be used for automatic external defibrillators for our community.

June Whitten and Betty Klepper headed up the effort. It got started in October and was done on such short notice in response to a special request from St. Anthony. If we ever do another one, we need to decide early on what we want to do and spread the work out a bit more.

Work parties at June's house included Connie Betts, June and Duane Whitten, Betty Klepper, Jeannie Jensen, Lorna Waltz, and Dannell

Tapley. These were fun times with goodies provided by June and lots of conversation. June used her artistic and bird knowledge to design most of the bird-feeding items, including pine cones filled with peanut butter-raisin-nut mix, suet in little baskets with little bows on them, gelatin-seed mixtures, and beautiful strings of white popcorn, golden raisins, and red cranberries. Russ Betts joined the crew to help get lights and decorations on the tree.

Jeannie brought in a tree skirt of flannel with red cardinals on it. Lorna put a copy of "Birds of Oregon" under the tree. Dannell dreamed up some neat little cardboard bird houses covered in bird seed, made some lovely note cards featuring birds to go under the tree, was our chief bow tier and decorator of items for the tree. Connie contributed hand-painted gourds featuring local birds, collaborated with Dannell on the ornament for the top of the tree, created a hand-made book for bird observations, and bought a hummingbird calendar for under the tree. Betty donated a ceramic bird house, two mugs with native birds on them, and seed in bells and sacks for the tree. Aaron Skirvin put a copy of Sibley's Western Birds under the tree and also a tape of local bird songs. Jack Simons made a bird house to go under the tree. Jane Holmes brought a tube feeder filled with seed.

We also got lots of help from others outside of the club. The S.M.I.L.E. program at Washington School made a whole box of peanut butter pine cones for us. Susan Doyle gave us a cute bird's nest hand-puppet and decorative bird houses to go under the tree. Wal-Mart, Albertson's, Safeway, and PGG provided items for decorations and for gifts under the tree. Armchair Books donated a CD of bird songs to go under the tree.

All-in-all we had fun doing this project and gave something back to our community too. It also was good publicity to let folks know about the new bird club. *Contributor: Betty Klepper*

### On Gossamer Wings

Conditions at Mission Ponds are dynamic this time of year. Fall rains and underground seepage

are responsible for higher water levels at both ponds. This in turn has attracted larger waterfowl populations — both diving and puddle ducks as well as Canada Geese.

The cold weather responsible for moving more waterfowl into the area has also pushed many local species out of the area — including the three Great Egrets who hung in there until the last week of October (when the water in our bird bath froze solid). I hope you had the chance to see these special visitors before they departed to warmer climates. Gone too are the energetic shorebirds which were so plentiful in September — Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, numerous sandpiper species, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Killdeer.

Whether you are a winter-hardy mallard fresh from the Arctic Circle or a “peep” intent on Mexican cuisine, all migratory birds migrate for one reason: survival.

Some birds (waterfowl, for instance) migrate in late summer/early fall well before cold weather settles in. Examples include Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler and Ruddy Ducks.

Bitter cold, snowy weather can stimulate cold-hardy species such as Mallard, Canada Geese, Goldeneye and Bufflehead. When major cold fronts pass through a region, resulting bird migrations can be spectacular.

You may recall a mass migration of waterfowl in the Midwest in 1995. Doppler radar recorded this “grand passage” when an estimated 90 million ducks and geese took to the air on a single night. So dense were these flocks that air traffic controllers could not distinguish birds from aircraft.

Though Mission Ponds may not hold huge waterfowl populations, the Columbia River/Basin can attract and hold hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese in a typical winter. Most of the waterfowl at Mission Ponds use it for loafing and as a resting site before heading out to the grain fields to eat.

If you get a kick out of hearing raucous hen mallards bantering back and forth, come out to Mission Ponds some night to listen to the “high balls” and “chuckles” of content, grain-fed mallards. When the mallards are “in” I can hear

their calls as I lie in bed at night. To a birder or old duck hunter, Beethoven never sounded sweeter.

On the rare occasion during the winter when you do not hear this playful chorus, you know the ponds are frozen over. This may happen from one to three times each winter causing birds to move into large open bodies of water or rivers.

It is during these cold periods when I have seen the pond’s largest migratory visitor — the graceful, powerful Tundra Swans. With a wing span of almost 6 feet and weighing almost 15 pounds, these birds are larger than any of the Canada Geese that visit the ponds.



One of my most cherished memories concerning these rare visitors occurred one cold, foggy morning a few years ago. Pendleton had been socked-in with low fog for over a week with temperatures hovering around 30 degrees day and night. The heavy frost had turned the normally brown landscape a surreal white.

As I looked eastward that morning I remember thinking that the light looked paler in that direction, suggesting the fog might loosen its grip on our winter wonderland. The sun’s warm glow began to filter through the fog as I walked up the dike road in the direction of the pond. That’s when I heard a bird call that resembled a goose but wasn’t quite a goose.

A moment later, back lit by the sun’s glow, six huge magnificent white birds came out of the mist no more than 30 yards away. The *whoosh, whoosh, whoosh* of their powerful wings was the only sound I could hear. For a split second, I was alone with mysterious visitors from the Far North — Tundra Swans. As quickly and silently as they had appeared, they retreated on gossamer wings back into the fog from which they had come.

Since that encounter I have looked forward to their annual fall (and spring) stop-overs at the

ponds. No telling where their final destination lies, but we should feel grateful they have chosen our little ponds to rest their weary wings.

Whether the fall migration is spectacular or subtle, the dynamics at Mission Ponds will continue to delight and surprise birders who have the opportunity to visit the ponds this time of year.

**Worthy Trivia** — Aaron Skirvin spotted three unlikely visitors at the ponds on November 11<sup>th</sup> — River Otters! This is the second time this year we have seen otters at the ponds. And, on November 13<sup>th</sup>, I spotted 5 or 6 salmon chasing each other in the shallows of the Umatilla River opposite the northwest corner of the big pond. This makes the third consecutive year salmon have spawned in the stretch of river from Pendleton Ready Mix to the Mission Bridge. If you have the time, do walk the dike road to get a glimpse of the salmon building their spawning beds. If you're lucky, the eagles will be prowling about....  
Happy Birding! *Jack Simons*

### **Birds Need Energy in Winter!** **A Suet Recipe**

This suet recipe can easily be cut in half as it makes a large amount.

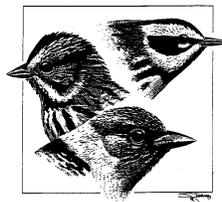
#### **INGREDIENTS**

2 cups crunchy peanut butter  
4 cups quick cooking oatmeal  
2 cups lard (or rendered beef suet)  
4 cups corn meal  
2 cups white flour  
2/3 cup sugar

#### **DIRECTIONS**

Melt peanut butter and lard in a large pan over low heat. (Do not use shortening or oil, only lard) Add remaining ingredients. Raisins, chopped nuts, or other dried fruit may be added. Press the mixture firmly into square freezer containers, cover well, and freeze. To fit a suet feeder, the mixture may be chilled in a flat pan and then cut into correct size before freezing. Or, the mixture may be put on pine cones with a wire hanger for easy feeding.

*Contributed by June Whitten*



### **November - December Bird Sightings**

As we transition into the winter months fewer birds are being reported, but there are still a lot of interesting birds being found.

On November 22, June Whitten reported an immature **HARRIS'S SPARROW** at her feeder. This mid-western bird is only occasionally found in Umatilla County during the winter. Craig Corder heard a report of 50 **Snow Geese** at Cold Springs Reservoir on November 22, but the report could not be verified. Occasionally **Tundra Swans** (which are present at Cold Springs) are mistakenly reported as **Snow Geese**. On the same day, Jane Holmes, birding at McNary Wildlife Area found a **Merlin** and seven **Hooded Mergansers**. Also on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Jack Simons reported his first **Bald Eagle** sighting of the season along the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission. Jack said the number of eagles should increase when the river starts to rise and more salmon begin spawning. Although not in Umatilla County, Mike and MerryLynn Denny reported that on a Blue Mountain Audubon Field trip held November 22, more than **300 Wild Turkeys** were found in Walla Walla County. Mike wonders what effect this explosion of the **Wild Turkey** population might have on native grouse. On November 23, Aaron Skirvin and June and Duane Whitten found a **SWAMP SPARROW** at the McNary Wildlife Area. This is another eastern sparrow that occasionally spends the winter in Umatilla County. They also reported that the **RED-NECKED GREBE** was still present at the Umatilla Marina.

Checking the Cold Springs Reservoir on November 26, Craig and Judy Corder found a **NORTHERN GOSHAWK**, 25 **Tundra Swans**, 250 **Dunlin** and over **10,000 Canada Geese**. On November 27, I (Dave Herr) visited the McNary Wildlife Area in an effort to

relocate the **SWAMP SPARROW** reported earlier. I was unable to find the **SWAMP SPARROW**, but did find a **Merlin**, probably the same one Jane Holmes reported. On November 30, both the Corders and the Dennys were able to relocate the **SWAMP SPARROW** at McNary Wildlife Area. Craig also reported finding several **Golden-Crowned Sparrows** and two **WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS**. Last year six **Greater Yellowlegs** spent the winter along McKay Creek near the footbridge at McKay Park. On December 7, Jean Wood found five **Greater Yellowlegs** in the same location. Could these be the same birds that spent the winter last year? On the same day, Aaron noted several flocks of **Western Bluebirds** near Iskuulpa Creek (Squaw Creek), east of Cayuse. Also on December 7, Craig Kvern saw at least 6 **Short-eared Owls** in a field two miles south of Cayuse. Craig Corder conducted a bird survey at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge on December 10 and reported 25 species, including 38 **Tundra**

**Swans, 37 Least Sandpipers** (high number for winter in Umatilla County), and 160 **Dunlin**. Grey Elliot reports that the **BLUE JAYS** he first found at his feeder November 4<sup>th</sup> are still being seen.

Now is the time to start looking for other winter visitors. Craig Corder noted that **Common Redpolls** have been sighted in Richland Washington, and he wonders who will be first to find them in Umatilla County. A number of **American Tree Sparrows** were found in Union County December 7, and this is another species we should be looking for. Hopefully we will find both these species and a lot more on the January 3, 2004 **Umatilla Christmas Bird Count!**

*Thanks for all your reports and please continue to send your bird sightings to Dave Herr at 276-6413 or by e-mail, [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net)*

*Newsletter Editor: Jane Holmes  
[holmesj@eoni.com](mailto:holmesj@eoni.com) or Daytime: 541-276-3469.*



## *Pendleton Bird Club*

Jane Holmes, Newsletter Editor  
424 N.W. Bailey Ave.  
Pendleton, OR 97801