

Kákya Táymut

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

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Grasshopper Sparrow Chosen For Club's New Logo

It's official! Pendleton Bird Club members gave high honors to the Grasshopper Sparrow as the bird to represent the club's new logo. The logo will be designed to feature "our" sparrow, to be used in the letterhead of the *Kákya Táymut* newsletter, on the web site and to be embroidered into patches to be proudly worn on caps, sweatshirts and field vests by binocular-bespectacled birders of Umatilla Co. The bird was chosen from four uniquely qualified candidates: **Mountain Bluebird, Lazuli Bunting, Ferruginous Hawk, and Grasshopper Sparrow.**

The club's October meeting (held after a long summer of birding trips, adventures and outings) was especially fun. This being an election year (and everyone knows that means "anything goes") four bird club members gave spirited presentations on why "their" bird should be chosen as the club's logo bird. Jane Holmes passionately argued that the Mountain Bluebird would have been the *perrrrfect* bird because it is the color of our local skies and surrounding mountains, plus it would have looked bright and *sooo* pretty on the logo. June Whitten spoke eloquently for her candidate specie — the Lazuli Bunting, comparing it to the jewel 'lapis lazuli' and implied the bird would be even prettier on the logo. Jack Simons advocated for the Ferruginous Hawk and had the audacity to say that his bird (with its wingspan equal to the width of a sheet of plywood — Jack is a former wood shop teacher) could beat up, rather, *eat*, the other three candidates for lunch!

Then, along came Dave Herr, advocate for the Grasshopper Sparrow. Dave said that when he lived in western Oregon, there was a mystique about eastern Oregon and the unique birds found there. If you wanted to see a Grasshopper Sparrow, you went to Umatilla County. He informed us that, "this election is clear-cut and that you have a choice: You can vote for charismatic mega-fauna, selecting a

showy, colorful or large bird, or you can select a bird, perhaps not as conspicuous, but one that truly represented Umatilla County."

The GRSP is identified as an inconspicuous, dumpy, short-tailed bird with a large bill and flat-headed appearance. Its black eye stands out from an unmarked buff colored face. Although the GRSP does like to eat grasshoppers, it was named for its insect like stridulated song. The normal song is a *tsick, tsick, tsurrrrr*. Because this spectacular LBJ (little brown jobber) is truly unique to and therefore representational of Umatilla County, it won by a landslide.

Dave Herr is a highly respected birder among our group and we would like him to know that the GRSP did not win because of the Grasshopper Sparrow "gift table" at the back of the room (which was mentioned repeatedly during his speech), nor even for the bowl filled with Susan B. Anthony dollars free for the taking if anyone could clearly see to vote Dave's way! Now that is what an election needs more of — a genuine passion about an issue or candidate!

After all of the fun (and suspense) of voting for our logo bird, we enjoyed a presentation on field guides useful for both birding in the field and armchair birding. June Whitten, world traveler that she is, shared several field guides and maps specific to many of the countries she and husband Duane have visited. She also shared an interesting book of birdsongs set to notes on a musical scale. Dave brought with him many audio tapes and CDs to help us train our ears to identify species by songs and calls. Aaron Skirvin shared several field guides for both beginners and skilled birders and highly recommended "Sibley's Birding Basics" for birders of any level of expertise. The conclusion to all of this sharing is that "one can never have too many field guides."

The next step is to design our new bird club logo. Dannell Tapley, June Whitten, Connie Betts and Jack Simons have volunteered to be on the logo design committee. We look forward to seeing the uniquely qualified Grasshopper Sparrow honored on the Club's new logo.

Contributed by Jane Holmes

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Field Trip

Saturday, November 6, 2004

McNary Wildlife Area

**Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the
NE Corner of Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot**

Trip leader: Aaron Skirvin, 276-1948

Turkey "Hunt"

Saturday, November 20, 2004

**How many Wild Turkeys can we find
in Umatilla County?**

Dave Herr is the head "hunter"; see his article on the Turkey "Hunt" in this newsletter.

BIRDS OF McNARY PARK

Presented by Craig Corder

at the

December Bird Club Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, December 9, 2004

Pendleton First Christian Church

**(On Main Street across from the
Pendleton Arts Center)**

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count

Tentative date is January 1, 2005

Contact Kevin Blakely, Count Compiler
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BIG SIT GETS RESULTS!!

The Pendleton Bird Club participated in the "Big Sit" on October 10. Eleven members spent part or all of the day at the two designated circles at McNary Wildlife area. It was a perfect sunny, fall day and a perfect time to relax and enjoy the Columbia River, the wildlife ponds, and the birds.

The "Big Sit" is sponsored by "Bird Watcher's Digest," The New Haven (CT) Bird Club, Swarovski Optiks, Wild Birds Unlimited, Eagle Optics, and For the Birds. This was the twelfth annual "Big Sit," which has participants from all over the world. The rules stipulate that birds must be seen or heard from a seventeen-foot circle. There are even ways to win, other than having fun, eating cookies, visiting with fellow birders, and watching birds. One category is for the most birds seen from a circle. So far, that count is eighty-nine, (but not from Oregon). That prize is "Bragging Rights" for the circle. The second prize is "Bragging Rights" for the most birds turned in for a state. The third category is a real prize of \$500 contributed by Swarovski Optiks for the "Golden Bird." The "Golden Bird" is randomly drawn from all of the species turned in by every registered circle. If it is turned in by more than one circle, another drawing is held to determine which circle gets the \$500 to spend on bird related projects, such as our Web-site or Bluebird Trail. In 2003, the White-tailed Hawk was drawn as the Golden Bird. That certainly was not from Oregon either, but a Texas bird.

The circle named Scoters, located along the Columbia River about three-quarters of a mile downstream from McNary Dam, observed a total of thirty-eight species. These included ducks, herons, hawks, gulls, plus a few songbirds and a calling Virginia Rail. The circle named Jaegers (closest to McNary Dam) observed twenty-three species, including a Mew Gull. Many of the species seen were the same in the two circles. Unfortunately, the only scoter (seen by Craig and Judy Corder) was upriver several miles and could not be counted in the circles. In addition, a Pacific Loon was sighted from both circles and made a great addition to the list. However, there was one small problem with this loon — he thought he was a 'Washington Loon', stayed in Washington waters, and refused to become an 'Oregon Loon'. There was no problem counting him from within the circles, but it would have been nice to add a Pacific Loon to our Umatilla County

List. Maybe the next one will become an Oregon Loon!

Participants were Bob and Dannell Tapley, Nancy Brown, Aaron Skirvin, Judy and Craig Corder, Dave Herr, Jack Simons, Neal Hinds, and June and Duane Whitten.

Contributed by June Whitten

November 20, 2004 Wild Turkey Hunt

To get into the Thanksgiving spirit, the Pendleton Bird Club is going to hold a Wild Turkey Hunt. What are we going to do when we find one? Well, count it of course. On this field trip we will explore some of the Blue Mountains' foothill roads looking for Wild Turkeys. On a similar field trip last year in Walla Walla County, members of Blue Mountain Audubon found over 400 Wild Turkeys. We probably will not find that many, but can we find over 100? As well as Wild Turkeys, we'll be searching for other birds wintering in the area. Meet at the NE corner of the Safeway parking lot at 8:00 am, Saturday November 20. To reduce the number of vehicles and save gas, we'll carpool as much as possible. **Any questions, contact Dave Herr at 276-6413 or dsherr@oregontrail.net.**

UMATILLA COUNTY FALL 2004 MIGRATION COUNT

It's been over a month ago now (September 18) that Pendleton Bird Club members conducted the 2004 Fall North American Migration Count in Umatilla County. For our fall count, twelve birders in six teams, plus one feeder counter, drove the backroads, hiked through forests and fields, and scoped the reservoirs, ponds, and rivers throughout Umatilla County searching for and tallying as many birds as possible in one day.

The first teams out in the morning started counting birds about 7 a.m. The last team to call it quits (Bob and Dannell Tapley) ended their birding about 7:00 p.m., except for Dolly Robison who continued counting until about 10:30 p.m. Dolly's "owling" adventure produced results, too – 2 Great Horned Owl, 1 injured Barn Owl, and 2 Common Poorwills. Common Poorwill is a summer visitor and probable breeding species in the county, but they are difficult to find mainly because of their nocturnal habits.

Russ and Connie Betts recorded 33 species on their drive up the Umatilla River from Mission to Summit Road and over to I-84, carefully negotiating the very rough road up to Ruckle Jct.. Dave Herr spent part of the morning counting a total of 30 species of birds along the river from Rieth to Echo. Two teams (Craig and Judy Corder and Neal Hinds in one team and Dolly Robison in the other) found good birding in the west county, recording 83 species for the day. Nancy Brown spent about an hour watching her Hermiston feeders and tallied 7 species. June and Duane Whitten and Aaron Skirvin birded McKay Reservoir, Yellow Jacket Road, Ukiah, and Gurdane/Vinson, recording 86 species. Bob and Dannell Tapley counted birds in the Upper McKay Creek and Coombs Canyon area and found 23 species.

All in all, the teams reported a total of 121 species and 9,277 individual birds – impressive results for one day of birding in the local habitats. Thanks to all who helped make our count a success. The results of your efforts:

Pied-billed Grebe 5, Western Grebe 47, American White Pelican 66, Double-crested Cormorant 63, Great Blue Heron 17, Black-crowned Night-Heron 8, Turkey Vulture 3, Canada Goose 370, Wood Duck 175, Gadwall 33, American Wigeon 62, Mallard 108, Blue-winged Teal 2, Cinnamon Teal 8, Northern Shoveler 47, Northern Pintail 6, Green-winged Teal 20, Lesser Scaup 3, Common Merganser 4, Ruddy Duck 15, Osprey 5, Northern Harrier 11, Sharp-shinned Hawk 6, Cooper's Hawk 3, Swainson's Hawk 5, Red-tailed Hawk 59, Ferruginous Hawk 1, Golden Eagle 2, American Kestrel 126, Prairie Falcon 1, Ring-necked Pheasant 21, Wild Turkey 11, California Quail 252, Virginia Rail 1, Sora 1, American Coot 45, Sandhill Crane 217, Semipalmated Plover 5, Killdeer 44, Greater Yellowlegs 5, Spotted Sandpiper 1, Sanderling 2, Western Sandpiper 45, Least Sandpiper 3, Baird's Sandpiper 2, Pectoral Sandpiper 8, Phalarope sp. 1, Bonaparte's Gull 2, Ring-billed Gull 586, California Gull 9, Herring Gull 1, Sabine's Gull 1, Common Tern 40, Rock Pigeon 140, Mourning Dove 300, Barn Owl 1, Western Screech-Owl 1, Great Horned Owl 2, Common Poorwill 2, Vaux's Swift 4, Belted Kingfisher 7, Lewis's Woodpecker 1, Downy Woodpecker 1, Hairy Woodpecker 4, Northern Flicker 63, Western Wood-Pewee 3, Western Flycatcher 1, Say's Phoebe 35, Western Kingbird 1, Loggerhead Shrike 2, Warbling Vireo 1, Gray

Jay 4, Steller's Jay 10, Clark's Nutcracker 5, Black-billed Magpie 391, American Crow 45, Common Raven 26, Horned Lark 47, Violet-green Swallow 71, Barn Swallow 142, Black-capped Chickadee 21, Mountain Chickadee 22, Red-breasted Nuthatch 6, Rock Wren 2, Bewick's Wren 8, House Wren 3, Golden-crowned Kinglet 3, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 3, Western Bluebird 46, Mountain Bluebird 19, Townsend's Solitaire 5, Hermit Thrush 5, American Robin 164, Sage Thrasher 1, European Starling 1499, American Pipit 5, Cedar Waxwing 108, Orange-crowned Warbler 3, Yellow Warbler 7, Yellow-rumped Warbler 253, Wilson's Warbler 1, Western Tanager 2, Spotted Towhee 16, Chipping Sparrow 117, Vesper Sparrow 12, Savannah Sparrow 38, Fox Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 149, Lincoln's Sparrow 8, White-crowned Sparrow 380, Golden-crowned Sparrow 7, Dark-eyed Junco 83, Red-winged Blackbird 245, Western Meadowlark 241, Brewer's Blackbird 1407, Cassin's Finch 20, House Finch 127, Pine Siskin 116, American Goldfinch 56, Evening Grosbeak 2, House Sparrow 172.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

Slack Time at Mission Ponds

Though we are fond of reminding club members that "there is always something going on around Mission Ponds", this is the time of year when bird activity goes into what I call "transition mode". Nesting activity has long since ceased and summer's hectic pace to consume every bug or berry has diminished. Bird activity continues at a much slower pace as the end-of-summer migration wanes and the big winter migration has yet to start. Thus....Slack Time.

There is a look or feel at the ponds that make them different this time of year — it's not quite summer but not quite fall, either. The cottonwood trees have lost their luster and now sport drab coats of yellow and brown leaves, signaling an end to another growing season. I remind myself that we will need a hard frost to turn the remaining green leaves a bright, cheery yellow — something we can associate with fall and a true changing of the seasons.

Plant life at the ponds look tired and anemic, too. Even the cattails, which were green and stood straight and tall for Red-winged Blackbirds to

display last spring, are starting to dip earthward as if to say, "Enough all ready....time for a nap."

The early waterfowl migrants such as Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal have largely migrated south leaving local populations of Wigeon and Mallard to loaf in the warm afternoon sunshine. Canada Geese sometimes roost at the ponds between visits to nearby wheat fields. Gone too are many of the shorebird migrants. Common Snipe are more prominent now, although Aaron Skirvin reported seeing seven Greater Yellowlegs one day at the end of September.

This morning (October 15th) I spotted a Great Egret and a Great Blue Heron perched in a dead cottonwood at the SW corner near the main gate. Perhaps the egret was a remnant of the flock of eight (*Yes! Eight egrets!*) I saw on the morning of October 9 perched in the cottonwoods in the NW corner. They were likely migrating southward, hopefully after a successful breeding season in eastern Washington. Each year we seem to see more of these majestic wading birds. Maybe the word is getting out that Mission Ponds is a pretty neat place to stop-off for a snack or snooze.

Another pleasant surprise this morning was the presence of four Red-tailed Hawks in the river bottom adjacent to the ponds. There was at least one adult and possibly three juveniles so my assumption was they may have been a family group. Swainson's Hawks have also been frequent visitors during the summer months. More raptors are showing up now that the fall migration is on the move. PBC members visiting the ponds might expect to see Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon or even a Peregrine Falcon.

Perhaps the most unusual sighting (which was seen for almost three weeks in September and early October) was that of a large flock of Turkey Vultures. Not just 2 or 3 circling high overhead mind you — but 14 or 15 roosting in my back pasture! Quite the sight seeing a dozen vultures holding their wings outward to absorb the sun's warmth in the cold early morning air. So prominent were these bruisers that one day my neighbor Pat asked me, "What are all of those eagles doing back there?" It broke my heart to have to tell him that those "eagles" were actually vultures.

Normally I'll see a couple of vultures during the year but when this flock stayed for weeks I became curious and took the dogs down to the river bottom

to see what we could find. Half joking to myself that maybe we would find a dead rhino, I was humbled by what we did find: In a 400 yard stretch of river bottom we found 10 dead deer — either on the shoreline or actually lying in the water. My first reaction was that some shameful idiot had used them for target practice but a few phone calls to the Tribal Police confirmed the deer were likely victims of a disease called Blue Tongue.

Blue Tongue (also called catarrhal fever) is a cyclic viral disease of sheep transmitted by a tiny insect called a midge. Other ungulates such as goats, cattle, buffalo and elk are susceptible, thus become carriers of the disease (and sometimes die). Humans are not susceptible to the disease but, just the same, I think I might “pass” on the offer to eat venison from the local deer population right now.

Why did all of the deer die near water? One of the symptoms of Blue Tongue is a high fever which tends to concentrate infected animals around cool water sources. Animals die as a result of loss of condition and emaciation; reddening and hemorrhages of the coronary band (above the hoof) causing lameness; and, sometimes pneumonia. The term ‘lingering death’ comes to mind as I think of the suffering that occurred as this scenario played out.

Although it seems cruel, this is one of Nature’s many ways to deal with a population that is out of balance. White-tailed deer are resilient and I suspect we will see the local population at or near normal levels within a year or two.

On the other hand, there are now 15 happy and content Turkey Vultures headed south to their wintering grounds with full bellies thanks to a tiny insect less than an eighth of an inch long. Knowing the vultures now have a better chance of surviving winter’s wrath, I remind myself of the expression, “To the victor the spoils.” (literally in this case).

Life, as always, is a balancing act....even in Slack Time.

Contributed by Jack Simons

September-October Bird Sightings

Clearly the most interesting phenomenon this report period has been an (eastern) **BLUE JAY** “invasion” into the Pendleton area. Last winter, Grey Elliot and Tina Jackson had 2 **BLUE JAYS** spend the winter near their home near Thorn Hollow. On October 1, 2004, Grey reported 1

BLUE JAY at their feeder. On October 5, Joy Jaeger reported 2 **BLUE JAYS** at her cabin near Albee. On October 7, Tina Jackson reported 3 **BLUE JAYS** at their feeder, and Betty Klepper had one **BLUE JAY** at her home in Pendleton. The next day Tina reported 4 and possibly 5 **BLUE JAYS** at their feeder. On October 9, I (Dave Herr) had 1 **BLUE JAY** visit my feeder, and Jean Wood reported seeing 2 **BLUE JAYS** eating crab apples at McKay Park on October 18. **BLUE JAYS** have now been reported in many Eastern Oregon locations. Birding in Dayton, Washington on October 16, Mike Denny found 9 jays in a flock. It will be fun to follow this invasion of the **Steller’s Jay’s** eastern relative, as we move into winter.

On September 18, during the Fall Migration Count, Pendleton Bird Club birders were able to find 121 different species. Details of the count can be found in a separate newsletter article. Birding below McNary Dam September 19, Mike and MerryLynn Denny found the **SABINE’S GULL** reported earlier as well as 31 **Common Terns** and 1 **Forster’s Tern**. On September 20, Mike had an interesting sighting. He found a **Baird’s Sandpiper** on a road near Tollgate. This area is above 5000 feet in elevation! On September 21, Neal Hinds had a great find at Cold Springs. Along with a small flock of **Black-bellied Plovers**, Neal found a single **MARBLED GODWIT**. Jack Simons added **Townsend’s Solitaire** to his Mission Ponds list on September 23. Along with the **BLUE JAYS**, **Turkey Vultures** have been present in the valley in large numbers. Normally these birds are hard to find near Pendleton, but Jack Simons has been seeing several behind his home between Pendleton and Mission. On September 25, Aaron Skirvin counted 13 **Turkey Vultures** near Jack’s home. Jack believes the vultures are concentrated because of an unusual deer die-off near the river. Craig and Judy Corder and Neal Hinds found an **AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER** as well as several **Black-bellied Plovers** at Cold Springs on September 30. They were also lucky enough to watch a **Peregrine Falcon** catch a **Long-billed Dowitcher**.

On October 2, June Whitten and Aaron found 6 **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** at Emigrant Springs State Park. Birding Cold Spring October 4, June, Duane and Aaron were able to locate the **AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER** as well as **Black-bellied Plovers**, **Long-billed Dowitchers**, **Pectoral Sandpipers**, **Least Sandpipers** and 1 **Semipalmated Plover**. Along with the **BLUE**

JAYS she reported earlier, on October 5, Joy Jaeger was able to photograph a **Black-backed Woodpecker** near her cabin. On October 7, Neal Hinds reported seeing as many as **4 AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVERS** at Cold Springs. On October 8, Bob Tapley saw **3 Evening Grosbeaks** at his feeder in Pendleton. This was a first time he has seen this species at his home. On October 9, Jack Simons reported seeing **8 GREAT EGRETS** at Mission Ponds. This is an amazing group of egrets for Umatilla County! On the same day I made several visits to Cold Springs to look for the golden-plovers, but was unsuccessful. I did see **145 Long-Billed Dowitchers** along with the other expected shorebirds. Later in the day a **Peregrine Falcon** was sitting on a rock at the NE end of the reservoir. On October 10, Judy Corder found a **SURF SCOTER** in the Columbia River east of Hat Rock as well as **2 Common Loons**. On October 15, Aaron, June and Duane Whitten found a juvenile **SURF SCOTER** at Indian Lake. They also found a juvenile **Northern Shrike** near Ukiah and several **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** near Emigrant Springs. Birding at Cold Springs October 14, Craig and Judy found 24 species including **Least, Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlin** and

Long-billed Dowitchers. Also on October 14, while driving one of the two raptor routes the Pendleton Bird Club will census this winter, Aaron, June and Duane counted a total of **90 hawks**. On October 17, Rose Scott reported a **SURF SCOTER** at McNary Ponds. On October 18, a hunter reported seeing **12 SNOW GEESE** flying over Cold Springs. David Wayne reports that he has been seeing a **Great Horned Owl** perched on a power pole near Stillman Park almost every evening this fall. The bird perches near the new Osprey nest and provides excellent views. He has also seen a male and female **Northern Flicker** (red-shafted) along the Umatilla River.

This fall there have already been numerous sightings of mountain birds at lower elevations in Eastern Oregon. **BLUE JAYS** have shown up in Pendleton, so let's see what other interesting birds are found during the next month. Please continue to report your bird sightings to me (Dave Herr) at 276-6413 or dsherr@oregontrail.net

Contributed by Dave Herr

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