



# Pendleton Bird Club

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NEWSLETTER Volume 2, No. 2 Pendleton, Oregon February 2004

## **February Meeting**

“What’s that bird?” was the question of the evening at the Pendleton Bird Club’s February 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. We all enjoyed an “ID challenge” and learned to recognize more species as we viewed slides of birds during the program we called Photo and Slide Show and Tell. Craig and Judy Corder shared slides of Snowy Owls they have photographed, one near Rew Elevator and another seen east of McNary. We were all amazed to see the slides Craig took in 1981 in Wallowa County of flocks of Snow Buntings numbering in the thousands.

The Pendleton Bird Club’s new website, [www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org) was unveiled at this meeting. Jack Simons is the webmaster of the site and deserves our highest praise. The site is professional, impressive, informative... and you just need to see for yourself!

The February meeting was a potluck enjoyed by thirty five members in attendance. It was decided unanimously by those present that we will have field outings during the warmer months of May through September in lieu of indoor meetings. Not to be missed though is our upcoming April 10<sup>th</sup> meeting when Louie Dick will present *Birds in Indian Culture!*

## **Field Trip to McNary Wildlife Area**

Robo-Gull was the most unusual find of the day, January 31<sup>st</sup> as twenty-seven Pendleton Bird Club and guest birders came together to spend a cold but beautiful day birding along the edge of the Columbia River at McNary Wildlife Area. Actually, Robo-Gull, identified as an immature Ring-billed Gull, found us. It flew around us

making several passes so that we could view the telemetry unit that was attached to its back at the mantle. An antenna stood about eight inches high extending straight up from the gull’s back giving us all reason to pause and hence the dubbing, Robo-Gull. Comments were flying: someone suggested the poor gull must be ostracized from its pals, being so different; someone else implied it could be a terrorist gull; and someone else wondered if it could tune in to OPB on that thing.

We had members and guests from Pendleton, Hermiston, Tri-Cities, Boardman, Walla Walla, and Baker City. The first ID challenge of the day was determined to be an immature Bald Eagle. It perched in a tree for almost 45 minutes as we watched nearby. There were almost as many opinions as there were birders present. The group also got a great look at a second immature Bald Eagle as it flew low overhead.

Dave Herr, our trip leader, had stealthily spread bird seed before our arrival under shrubs along the pathway where on our last field trip we viewed Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow, among others. This time there was only a couple of Song Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, and Black-capped Chickadees at the seed. Dave seemed somewhat disappointed after all of his efforts, but then he led us to a pond with enough varieties and close up views of ducks to make up for what we lacked in sparrows. For 15 to 20 minutes, the birders sorted through about 500 ducks on a small pond. About half of the ducks were gorgeous Wood Ducks. Other species included

Mallard, American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, and Hooded Merganser. Everyone got excellent looks at these waterfowl from distances between 30 and 50 yards. Dave also identified a female Ruddy Duck, an uncommon winter bird in Umatilla County.

A few of the birders traveled to Hat Rock State Park on their way home to look for a Eurasian Wigeon first reported two weeks ago by Craig and Judy Corder. With a little luck and patience, the group found one male Eurasian out of a group of 200 American Wigeons. As an adult Bald Eagle flew over the river at Hat Rock, an immature landed in a tree 100 feet from us. We wondered if the eagle had returned to finish eating the carcass of a Canada Goose that lay at the pond's edge. Four fly-over Tundra Swans were another highlight of the day. A total of fifty-two species were identified, including a Merlin flying over the intersection near Safeway before we left Pendleton.

The skies were as beautiful on Saturday as the creatures flying through them, and the sun definitely shone on the Pendleton Bird Club's trip. We appreciated the sunshine that warmed us at the end of the day and were fortunate as by evening a cold wind was blowing mixed with rain and snow. Brrrr

### Calendar of Events

#### Pendleton Bird Club Field Trip

Saturday, March 20, 2004

Join in the fun for a day of birding at the Stanfield Meadows and Echo Meadows Areas and the Irrigon Unit of the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge.

Meet at the NE corner of Pendleton's Safeway parking lot at **8:00 am, March 20<sup>th</sup>**.

We should see early spring migrants, waterfowl & possibly small shorebirds.  
Trip leader is Craig Corder.

#### Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, April 8, 2004 7:30pm

First Christian Church  
Pendleton, OR  
(Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

Louie Dick presents  
*Birds in Indian Culture*

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Wildlife Rehabilitation Seminar

Basic Laboratory Techniques for the  
Wildlife Rehabilitator

Blue Mountain Wildlife will host the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual wildlife rehabilitation seminar **April 10, 2004**. This year's focus will be on basic laboratory techniques for the wildlife rehabilitator. The morning session, slides and lecture by Dr. Jeff Cooney, will be held in the Fellowship Hall of the First Christian Church in Pendleton. Lunch will be provided at the Hall to give us an opportunity to get better acquainted and share information. We will spend the afternoon at Pendleton Veterinary Clinic practicing a variety of laboratory procedures and techniques.



Topics covered will include fecal flotation, direct fecal smears, blood smear preparation and staining, estimated WBC and differential counts, hematocrit, total protein, identification of blood parasites, basic necropsy techniques, positioning avian species for radiographs and evaluating avian radiographs.

#### **Registration Information**

Cost for the 1-day seminar, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. April 10<sup>th</sup> is \$35.00 and includes lunch. A spouse may attend and share handouts for an additional \$5.00. Advanced registration is requested by April 3rd to ensure an accurate count for lunch. There is a maximum of 30 spaces available in the hands-on laboratory. Early registration is encouraged. Make check

payable to: **Blue Mountain Wildlife**. If space is available late registrants can pay at the door, but will be charged an additional \$10 fee. For more information contact Lynn Tompkins, 541.278.0215 or [raptor@uci.net](mailto:raptor@uci.net).

### Murmurs of Spring

It is now mid-February and Mission Ponds are awakening from its icy winter slumber. Gone are the sheets of ice that marked the long, cold month of January. Gone too are the nasty ice flows on the adjacent Umatilla River that forced waterfowl to retreat to the shoreline for safety. Though winter continues to exert its grip, a change in the behavior of some of the birds at the ponds is readily evident.

Red-winged Blackbirds are sitting atop cattails and willows while serenading the countryside with their familiar *kon-ka-reeeee* song. Soon to follow will be the territorial displays of the males as they show off their distinctive red shoulder patches. Waterfowl are either paired up now or competing for a mate before the “season of renewal” begins. Thousands of migratory birds will use Mission Ponds as a stop-over in the next few months before moving further north. Some will stay to nest at the ponds.

While the blackbirds are busy telling the world that spring is not far off, it is the change in behavior of the Canada Geese that catch my attention this time of year. Having previously gathered in large flocks during the winter months, mated pairs of geese have now separated from the main flocks to reestablish their courtship bonds. These bonds can last up to 20 years — the outer limit of the life span of a Canada Goose.

Having been hunted since mid-October through most of January, the geese learned to fly high and land on the ponds well after sunset. Though hunting is not permitted on the ponds, geese tend to be naturally wary, probably one of the reasons they live as long as they do.

Inexplicably, this wariness almost disappears as soon as the hunting season ends. It's as if they are logged onto the ODFW web site where the hunting calendar is displayed in some strange, encrypted goose code telling them when it is safe to drop out of the stratosphere. In the past

three years I can recall seeing numerous flocks of 20 or more geese flying a scant 15 yards overhead just two weeks after the season closure. When this happens, my wife and I know that the time is short before our two “resident” honkers (Gabby and Geezer) make their annual appearance.

We aren't sure how long Gabby and Geezer have been coming to our little pond in the pasture but this year marks their fourth consecutive year with us. The original land owners told us they saw them two years prior to our arrival so that makes six years that we know for sure. Why do these two geese prefer our little pond to Mission Ponds? Free Food!!

This year Gabby and Geezer set a record by showing up at sunrise the morning *after* the hunting season closed — must have been really hungry! They were standing a couple of feet from the pump house door where we keep the sacks of grain (who says geese are stupid?) and flew off as I approached. They returned to feed later that same morning. It was then that I noticed Geezer (a magnificent 12 pound gander) walking with a limp. This may have been the result of a natural injury or, perhaps, an unfortunate encounter with a hunter.

In years past these two geese jealously guarded “their” pasture by chasing off any geese that dared to land “on the wrong side of the fence”. Apparently geese know all about fence lines because geese landing in our neighbor's pasture were never harassed. But any geese landing in our pasture would meet the wrath of Geezer's 5 foot wing span. Of interest, on numerous occasions I have noticed that if another mated pair landed in their territory it was always the smaller female goose who was the victim of Geezer's fury. The strategy seems to be, Chase off the opposing female and you don't have to fight the other big guy who is just as big as you....

This year was different though. Within days of their initial appearance our two resident honkers showed up with six of their buddies! Since geese often travel in family units we suspected this may have been Gabby and Geezer's brood from last year's hatch at Mission Ponds. Adding to the confusion, however, yesterday we counted

*sixteen* geese on our little pond so we aren't sure what is going on. Apparently the word is out — FREE FOOD!

The resident nesting goose population at Mission Ponds seems to be growing. Last year I counted at least five nesting pairs with 20 – 25 goslings in-tow. Three years ago I recall counting only 3 – 4 nesting pairs.

It is not unusual to see a brood in the Umatilla River across the dike road from Mission Ponds after the hatch is underway in April and May. Why the parents walk their goslings to the river is a mystery but it seems to be the final destination for most of the goslings that hatch on the ponds. By the end of summer, there will be very few goslings on the pond but dozens (sometimes in one large, flightless flock) on the river. You can bet the parents are always nearby looking out for danger.

The resident goose population in the Pendleton area seems to be growing too. This would put it on-par with the increase in resident goose populations across the United States. Resident Canada Geese now outnumber migratory Canada Geese, with population estimates in the millions for resident birds. This appears to be the result of milder winters the past twenty years as well as abundant year-round food supplies. The collective thought amongst these new-age honkers seems to be, "Why migrate thousands of miles each year if you don't have to."

While this change in behavior may provide birders more opportunity to see Canada Geese during the year, golf course managers and Parks & Recreation personnel have had to contend with a more onerous issue — goose poop! And, in enough quantity to make the birds a nuisance as well as a health concern at certain locations across the country.

Nuisance or not, I will never tire of the melodious *hronk, hronk* of a mated pair of Canada Geese heralding the arrival of spring on a country pond. How many spring seasons has that sound echoed off the icy waters of ponds and marshes across the North American continent? One hundred thousand? Five hundred thousand? Two million? Could there be a more

joyous, cheerful precursor to the coming of spring? I doubt it.

For me, their melodious call *is* spring. The fact they have adapted and flourished to man-made changes in their environment is a testament to their survival — a modern day 'call of the wild'. Got a problem with goose poop? Count your blessings.....

**Mark your calendar** — waterfowl have begun their annual migration north. That makes it an especially good time to check out the birds visiting Mission Ponds. Here is a sample of just some of the birds you might see at Mission Ponds during Feb. & Mar. — Canada Geese, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, White Pelican, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Red-winged Blackbird, Raven, Black-billed Magpie, Ring-necked Pheasant and Western Meadowlark. *Author: Jack Simons*

### **Changing Seasons: Bird Arrivals & Departures**

February and March mark the end of winter and the beginning of spring bird migration in Umatilla County. Now is the time to begin watching for the earliest migrant birds, such as the species listed below.

Cinnamon Teal – In late March, the earliest migrant Cinnamon Teal can be found in ponds and flooded fields in the Stanfield/Hermiston area.

Long-billed Curlew – Each year, these large shorebirds arrive on their breeding areas in the Stanfield/Echo area in mid-March.

Killdeer – A few Killdeer spend the winter in the County, but a noticeable influx of spring migrants arrive in the last half of February. By late-February, some Killdeer are establishing their nesting territories.

Say's Phoebe – A few individuals of this hardy flycatcher may occasionally over-winter in Umatilla County. Most, however, migrate out of

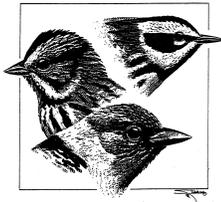
the county in the fall, and then begin to return in late February and early March.

Violet-green Swallow – This is the first swallow to arrive in the County each spring. The earliest birds pass through at the very end of February or first week of March. Locally breeding birds arrive about March 20.

American Robin – During most winters, Robins are scarce in Umatilla County. Look for flocks of migratory robins moving through the county beginning in early February and extending to March. Some of these flocks can contain over 200 birds.

Yellow-rumped Warbler – This warbler is an abundant breeder and spring and fall migrant in Umatilla County. A few spend the winter, particularly in the riparian habitats in the Hermiston/Umatilla area. By mid-February, some Yellow-rumps begin moving through the county, with peak of migration in April.

*Contributor: Aaron Skirvin*



### **January - February Bird Sightings**

Although most of the snow was melted by the first of February, birding during this period was slow, with fewer birds being reported. However even in the middle of winter, some good birds were found. Perhaps the best thing about birding in January and February is thinking about all the great birds that will be migrating into the area during the next few months.

On January 18, Craig and Judy Corder reported **2 Ruddy Ducks** and **2 EURASIAN WIGEONS** at the Hat Rock State Park ponds. The following day Aaron Skirvin, Jack Simons and I (Dave Herr) birded around the McNary Dam area. Aaron spread out birdseed and immediately attracted numerous **White-crowned Sparrows**, **6 Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **2 Fox Sparrows** (including one very dark bird), and one **WHITE-THROATED**

**SPARROW**. We also found a **PEREGRINE FALCON** hunting in the wildlife area. This is probably the same bird Craig has been seeing around Hermiston. During this report period several folks have reported seeing one **Greater Yellowlegs** at McKay Park. I located the bird on January 29 and Aaron saw it February 1. The January 31, Pendleton Bird Club (PBC) field trip to McNary wildlife area was well attended and the report for that outing can be found elsewhere in the newsletter.

On February 1, Aaron birded south from Pendleton to the Albee and Ukiah area. At Battle Mountain State Park he was able to locate a **Clark's Nutcracker**, a drumming **Pileated Woodpecker**, a **Hairy Woodpecker** and **2 Golden-crowned Kinglets**. On this trip he also found 3 adult **Bald Eagles** and 3 adult **Northern Shrikes**. The same day I birded along the Umatilla River between Reith and Echo. My best finds were **2 HARRIS'S SPARROWS** near the Barnhart Quarry. I also found a flock of **1000 Ring-billed Gulls** along the Umatilla River. On February 5, Russ and Connie Betts visited the McNary Wildlife Area. While there, they watched a mature **Bald Eagle** displace an immature eagle from its perch. They also noted **2 American White Pelicans**, both mature and immature **Double-crested Cormorants**, **7 Black-crowned Night Herons** and the usual duck species. Both **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** were eating the seed left over from our field trip. On February 7, I briefly birded at the McNary Wildlife Area and while there met Bob Tapley. He reported seeing several **Pied-billed Grebes** on the river and we both watched a **PEREGRINE FALCON** perched on one of the power line towers. During the first week in February a **GREAT GRAY OWL** was found at Bennington Lake just east of Walla Walla. On February 8, Aaron, Jack Simons and Jane Holmes drove to Walla Walla to search for the owl. They did not find the **GREAT GRAY OWL**, but did see a juvenile **Northern Goshawk**. Before driving to Walla Walla they were able to find the **HARRIS'S SPARROWS** I had reported earlier. Mike and MerryLynn have been monitoring the **GREAT GRAY OWL** and have also noted a **Barn Owl** and

several **Northern Saw-whet Owls** in the same area. On February 10, Russ and Connie Betts spotted a **Downy Woodpecker** and **Belted Kingfisher** at McKay Park. They also noted **American Robins** have returned to the area.

On February 14, Craig and Judy Corder, Aaron and I visited Grey Elliot to search for the **BLUE JAYS** that have been wintering at his home east of Cayuse. We were able to see both birds (although not at the same time) and it's possible they may stay and nest. On February 15, Aaron located an **AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** near the Pilot Rock Gun Club. The next day Aaron, Jack and I drove from Juniper Canyon to the wind farm in the northwest corner of the county and then along the Columbia River to the McNary Wildlife Area. Our best bird was a **Barrow's Goldeneye**, found in a mixed flock of **Common Goldeneyes**, **Lesser Scaup** and **American Coots** near the grain elevator above the McNary Dam. On February 20, Aaron checked the **Great Blue Heron** nests on the north side of the Umatilla River near Pendleton's Little League Park. He found a

**Great Blue Heron** standing on each nest. Last year young were raised in each nest and hopefully the birds will use the nests again this year.

Large flocks of migrating **American Robins** are already moving through the area and more migrants will be appearing in the upcoming month. In the March 2003, PBC Newsletter, Aaron's article "[Changing Seasons: Bird Arrivals and Departures](#)" will give you an idea what to be looking for (if you don't have a copy of this issue, check the [Newsletter Archives](#) link at [www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)). I would like to keep track of arrival dates for migrating species, so I would appreciate it if you would send me your notes listing the dates you first see new spring arrivals. Give me a call at 276-6413 or send me an e-mail to [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net). Now, time to get out and start looking for new "year birds"!

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