



Pendleton Bird Club

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Presentation on Birds in Indian Culture

Louie Dick gave us a fascinating presentation on the role of birds in Indian culture at our April 8 Pendleton Bird Club meeting. We were quite fortunate to have this widely-respected Tribal Leader come and speak to us.

In a long career of public service, Louie has served on the Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, including a stint as Vice Chairman. He also has served as a Leader in the Longhouse. Currently, he is Chair of the Tribes' Natural Resources Commission and is a long-standing member of the Tribes' Water Commission.

In the Pendleton community, Louie has long been a familiar figure during Round-Up, riding his horse and carrying his staff of eagle feathers. Over the years, Louie frequently has reached across cultural barriers to share his knowledge and insights about Tribal culture with many in the non-Indian world.

He opened his presentation to us by talking about Tamanwit, or "Creator's Law". Using a circle, he illustrated how all things are connected – from people to the earth; from religion to water; and from language to "those that fly"; among others.

He then began explaining how various indigenous birds connect to the other elements on the circle, such as those appearing in the names of some of his family members. He had not talked long, though, when one of "those that fly" joined us right there in the room. A bat appeared from nowhere and zipped around the room, whizzing back and forth over our heads, perhaps to remind us that not all of "those that fly" are birds or perhaps simply because we woke the poor thing up. Louie calmly continued with his presentation, while Lynn Tompkins, Jane Holmes and I eventually were able to help the bat find its way back outdoors. This little adventure caused us to miss some of Louie's presentation, but even so we were able to hear several

interesting and wide-ranging stories. At one point, Louie brought out his staff and told us how one of his sons had made it for him. He showed us the eagle feathers hanging from it, and explained a little bit about who and what each of the feathers symbolized.

He then described to us this old, round stone structure he had seen as a boy on Kanine Ridge on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. A person would place the carcass of an animal on the branches that covered the structure to entice an eagle to land there. After attracting an eagle to the food for several days, the person would hide under the branches and inside the structure, so that when the eagle landed and began eating the bait, the person would reach up and grab the eagle (quite a risky task!), pluck a flight feather and a couple of other feathers, and release the bird.

Nowadays, of course, Federal law protects raptors and strictly regulates possession and ownership of their feathers. Louie described the current process for receiving Federally-distributed eagle feathers, which didn't sound nearly as challenging or exciting as the old ambush-and-pluck approach.

The time seemed to pass very quickly as Louie shared many more stories with us. He told us how it was that the Crow and Raven had gotten their black coloring and how the Magpie kept some of its white feathering – and how that story relates to our present understandings about Mad Cow Disease. He talked about how owls sometimes can be somber messengers of bad news. And, he told us an especially intriguing story about a marauding warrior from a Tribe across the Snake River who had the agility and spirit of a hummingbird.

We all appreciated Louie's sharing so much with us about birds in Indian culture. In particular, I think we all enjoyed the way he spoke not only to our heads, but to our hearts.

Contributed by Rebecca Hiers

Calendar of Events

Evening Meetings – No evening bird club meetings until October 14, 2004. Instead, we will have two scheduled field trips each month through September.

Impromptu Field Trips – In addition to scheduled field trips, we will have short early morning and late afternoon, weekday or weekend, impromptu field trips within 30 miles of Pendleton to see and hear local breeding birds – warblers, bluebirds, hummingbirds, Veery, Catbird, Grasshopper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, hawks, waterfowl, shorebirds, etc. These trips will be announced through email a few days in advance.

Field Trip to Battle Mt. and Albee Bluebird Trail **Saturday, April 24, 2004**

Meet at Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE corner) at 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch. Trip could be cancelled if we have inclement weather (snow or rain/wind).

North American Spring Migration Count **Saturday, May 8, 2004**

Everyone, from beginners to experts, welcome to join in the fun! Contact Aaron Skirvin, Umatilla County Coordinator, 276-1948 or skirvins@uci.net.

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge **May 14 - 17, 2004**

Field Station lodging may be unavailable. Contact June Whitten at 276-9019 for information and lodging options.

S.U.R.E.'s Annual Umatilla River Cleanup **Saturday, May 22, 2004**

The event will start at Stillman Park (SE 4th and Byers) at 7 a.m. with bird walk along the River Parkway in Pendleton. For more information, contact Betty Klepper at 276-8416.

Field Trip to LaGrande Area **Saturday, June 12, 2004**

Tentative field trip to Ladd Marsh and other areas in Union County. Joanne Britton will be our trip leader. For more information contact and **RSVP** June Whitten (276-9109) by May 21.

Field Trip to Upper Umatilla River

Birding at Thornhollow and Corporation

Saturday, June 26, 2004

Dave Herr, Trip Leader, 276-6413

Field Trip to Tollgate Area

Saturday, July 10, 2004

Repeat of last year's trip to the same area, where we will see many of the species that inhabit the higher elevation forests in Umatilla County.

Field Trip to Battle Mt. and Ukiah

Saturday, July 24, 2004

Bird Club Picnic at Battle Mt. State Park

Field trip ideas? If you have a birding place you would like to share with club members, please contact June Whitten, Dave Herr, or Aaron Skirvin to schedule a club field trip there.

Bluebird Trail Encouraging

It is still early for birds to be nesting in the Blue Mountains. However, it appears that both Western and Mountain Bluebirds are considering new homes this spring. The price is right! The landlord's only requirement is viewing rights, hopefully seeing their nest, eggs, and chicks.

The Pendleton Bird Club has started two bluebird trails, with 19 nest boxes in the Battle Mountain, Albee, Ukiah range and 7 boxes in Poverty Flats area west of Deadman Pass. Early in April various pairs of bluebirds were observed near several nest boxes. One pair of Mountain Bluebirds appeared to be claiming ownership of a box on the Albee Road. Two other boxes in that vicinity had partial nests in them. Each nest box site is documented, and each box is numbered on the bottom. We are planning to make a data sheet to record information for each box. If the box isn't used this season, we may try to move it to a more desirable location. The following items, along with dates, will be documented as definitely as possible:

1. What birds, if any, used the nest box? (There will, no doubt, be some boxes used by birds other than bluebirds, such as swallows, wrens, chickadees, or nuthatches).

2. How many eggs were laid?
3. How many chicks hatched?
4. How many chicks fledged?
5. Was the box used for a second nesting this year?

So far, we have two volunteers, Terry Mayberry and Don Rudy, to help monitor the boxes at Poverty Flats. We would also appreciate volunteers to help with the Battle Mountain, Albee area.

The Pendleton Bird Club is planning a field trip to the Battle Mountain and Albee/Ukiah vicinity on April 24. This will be a great time to learn about bluebird nest boxes, where they are located, and how to document the required data in the least intrusive manner for the birds.

Finally, remember in the fall a most important step will be cleaning out the boxes for a fresh start next spring.

Contributed by June Whitten

Great Weather and Birds – April 10 Field Trip

Sunshine - ponds - water - water fowl - birds who live and love near the water. Twelve members of the Pendleton Bird Club took advantage of these elements on April 10 to visit the Mission ponds and Wildhorse Golf Course ponds, under the leadership of Jack Simons.

At the west Mission pond, binoculars and scopes were trained on Killdeer, a Great Blue Heron imitating a big stick, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Green-winged Teal, Canada Geese, Greater Yellowlegs, and the always present American Coot. Male Red-winged Blackbirds displayed their vivid epaulets, vying for the attention of the dark brown and streaked females. Violet-green Swallows swooped over our heads. One Yellow-headed Blackbird flew to the edge of the pond. Basking in the warm sunshine on two snags in the pond, one turtle sat on each snag just above the water's edge. A male Northern Shoveler produced a breath-taking reflection as he sat very still in the calm water.

Moving east along the pond, we added Buffleheads to the list. By the way, our very diligent list keeper was Haval Norman who recorded a total bird species count of 44: great job, Haval. Song Sparrows serenaded from the cattails, and June Whitten spotted a Marsh Wren in the cattail patch. We watched for a reappearance of the wren, but it proved as illusive as the three Virginia Rails heard but not seen.

Circling to the back of the Mission ponds, we caught a glimpse of a flying Wood Duck. In this area are several Wood Duck nest boxes. Dave Herr set off to investigate a box but suddenly retreated because an American Kestrel flew out. A Ring-necked Pheasant was chased off by a territorial Killdeer. We took a short hike to the Umatilla River to look for Jack Simons' pair of otters, but they were nowhere to be found. Aaron Skirvin spotted a pair of Tree Swallows. A pair of California Quail scurried across the trail. American Robins, Mourning Doves, European Starlings, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Black-billed Magpies crisscrossed the sky. Blackbirds chased an Osprey, which later was spotted diving into the water, and emerging with a small fish.

On the way back to our vehicles, Dave Herr took a stick and tapped the sides of some of the Wood Duck boxes, with hopes of spotting a Screech Owl. No go. The turtle count had gone up to four on one snag and two on the other by the time we made the return trip.

Northern Flicker, American Crow, Common Raven, and Dark-eyed Junco were other birds of the day.

At the Wildhorse ponds, we found two male Ruddy Ducks with very blue bills. The exciting find was a male Blue-winged Teal. Yellow-headed Blackbirds, in full display, love to sing loudly. Many, many, many American Coots dotted the greens. A pair of Gadwall, Mallard and Pied-billed Grebe finished out the resident species. Bob Tapley walked to the far side of the east pond to find a better vantage point for photography, and he found an American Coot nest in the cattails.

Those with acute hearing reported White-crowned Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, Say's Phoebe, Western Meadowlark, and a House Finch, which was eventually seen sitting on the top of a small pine tree many yards off.

Contributed by Connie and Russ Betts

Renewals and Homecomings

Warm, mild temperatures the past month forced green buds to open early on the many willow and cottonwood trees at Mission Ponds. Adding to the color change are tufts of green adjacent to the ponds. Some of the young tender grass germinated after winter sowing by the landowners. Soon to follow will be wildflowers, offering their seductive nectar to butterflies migrating to northern breeding grounds. Spring has finally come to Mission Ponds!

Conspicuously absent now are the large flocks of waterfowl that used the ponds as a safe haven during the long winter months. At last count four pairs of

Canada Geese — defying the urge to migrate — have settled in for ‘nesting rights’ on the ponds. Visitors can expect to see 20 or more goslings by mid-June if nesting success is on par with last year. Throw in an additional 30 or more Mallard ducklings and our little oasis in the desert should be a lively place in a few months.

High soil moisture and winter snow pack in the ‘Blues’ filled both ponds earlier than normal. The west pond benefited the most with water flooding the north shore almost to the edge of the dike. Hundreds of Mallards, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal used the flooded flats to forage on seeds which floated to the surface making for easy pickings. However, very little rain fell in March and the flooded flats retreated early before the arrival of migratory shorebirds. Killdeer and Greater Yellowlegs were seen before mid-April but no peeps or snipe.

Looking back at January’s record cold — what a transformation! Less than 90 days ago Mission Ponds was locked in ice with 10 inches of snow on the ground. Lifeless trees stood silhouetted against leaden skies as raptors sat motionless on the tallest snags waiting for their next meal. Their presence was made known by the feather piles under the trees from bird kills. In stark contrast, now the winter raptor population has migrated north while summer’s population has yet to fully arrive leaving a relatively safe haven for waterfowl, upland game and song birds. For raptor fans — fear not — they are on their way!

Club member Aaron Skirvin reported the season’s first Swainson’s Hawk on April 11, and I have seen several American Kestrels staking out dead snags adjacent to the ponds. Pendleton’s own harbinger’s of spring — old friends, really — returned from their southern sojourn to again claim the big nest atop the telephone pole along Mission Road (1/4-mile east of the Hwy 11 intersection). Of course I am referring to the pair of Osprey that has been using that nest site since I first saw them in 2000. Can anyone recollect seeing them prior to that year? In addition to this pair (we really should name them — they are practically family at this point) there is a single Osprey on a nesting pole 2 miles further east on Mission Road. This nest is 300 yards out in the field so you have to look for it. Nearby is a second nest atop a pole which harbored a Canada Goose earlier in the year . . . could get interesting later on.

The Ospreys have begun their daily morning / evening flights to Mission Ponds looking for an easy meal. It shouldn’t be long before we see fuzzy little heads poking above the nest as we drive into town. I don’t know about you, but I can’t pass the nest nearest to town without glancing out the window to sneak a peek

at the chicks. With a car pull-out conveniently positioned 100 feet from the nest (and at eye level) it makes for some great photo moments.

Speaking of old friends, I happened upon two of my favorites the other day down in the river bottom directly opposite west Mission Pond. There, frolicking in shallow water on the north shore of the river were two river otter. A closer inspection revealed their “frolicking” to actually be “mating” thus I suspect this stretch of the river will soon host a family of otters. Believe it or not, river otters were spotted in the west Mission Pond twice last year. Not sure what they were doing there but I suspect the local Osprey population may have some competition.

Baby osprey; baby otters; baby geese — nothing like a Homecoming to renew one’s spirit and bring a smile to a winter-weary face. Happy Spring Birding!

Contributed by Jack Simons

White-crowned Sparrow Migration

The annual spring migration of White-crowned Sparrows is now under way in Umatilla County. Many thousands of White-crowns pass through the county in April each year, with numbers of sparrows peaking during the last two weeks of the month. Putting out bird seed may attract some of the migrant sparrows to your feeder.

Time to Put Out Hummingbird Feeders

On April 10, the first hummingbirds of the year were reported in the Pendleton area. These earliest hummers are usually Rufous and Calliope, and they are readily attracted to hummingbird feeders. You can make hummingbird food by dissolving 1 part cane sugar in 4 parts water. Hang the feeder several feet off the ground (to prevent house cats from reaching the birds) in a place where you have a good view so you can enjoy watching the birds. Clean the feeder regularly and refresh with new sugar water.

March - April Bird Sightings

What a great time to be out birding. New migrants are arriving every day and mornings are now filled with song. As I write this, the Pendleton Bird Club’s (PBC) Umatilla County year list is up to 165 species and species are being added nearly every day. Please send me your sightings so we can report them in the next newsletter and add any “first year sightings” to our year list.

While returning from the PBC March 20 field trip, Bob Tapley reported finding several **Western Kingbirds** near Wildhorse Creek along the Helix highway. Early kingbirds have been reported from several locations in

eastern Washington and Oregon. On March 21, Aaron Skirvin reported finding a number of good birds on a trip from Pendleton to Ukiah. Of special interest were a **Vesper Sparrow**, **Loggerhead Shrike**, **Williamson's Sapsucker**, and **Tree Swallow**, with **Savannah Sparrows** setting up territories in the grassland habitat. At Battle Mountain he found **three BROWN CREEPERS** and at the Ukiah sewage ponds a **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE**. Both these species are difficult to find in Umatilla County. The same day I had four **Northern Saw-whet Owls** respond to my calling at Battle Mountain. I also found two **WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKERS** near Albee and a **SAGE THRASHER** along the Alkali Canyon Road. On March 24, Aaron and Jack Simons were able to relocate one of the **WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKERS** I reported. They also found **31** woodpeckers of four different species at Battle Mountain.

On March 26, Aaron took an early morning drive up the old Cabbage Hill road and found **16 Wild Turkeys** and six **Fox Sparrows**. The same day Craig and Judy Corder reported a **Canyon Wren** near Wallula Gap. Also on March 26, Jack Simons reported an Osprey flying over the Umatilla River near Mission.

On March 28, June and Duane Whitten, Aaron and I birded between Pendleton and Ukiah. We managed to call up three **Northern Saw-whet Owls** at Battle Mountain before daybreak. Later in the morning we found numerous woodpeckers in the area. In the Albee area we found **18 Wild Turkeys**, including two displaying toms, and several **Pygmy Nuthatches**. The best bird of the day was a **SAGE SPARROW** perched on a fence along the Alkali Canyon Road. The same day, Jack and Sharon Simons saw a **Steller's Jay** near their home between Pendleton and Mission. **Steller's Jays** are common further upriver, but this is the first time they have seen one on their property.

On March 31, Neal Hinds found two **Say's Phoebes** near Hermiston. On March 29, Aaron found several dozen **Cliff Swallows** near Rieth and two **Chukars** along the East Birch Creek Road. Also on March 29, Mary Cole reported seeing **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at the Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds.

On a drive along the west shore of McKay Reservoir, Aaron had an interesting sighting. **Wild Turkeys** are becoming quite common in the foothills, but on April 2, Aaron found seven hens along the west shore drive. It would be interesting to know what route the birds took to get to this location. Aaron, birding with a number of other folks on April 3, reported **White-throated Swifts** along the Rieth - Echo highway and several **Tricolored**

Blackbirds at the Mann/Hopper ponds near Stanfield. The same day Shirley Kristler reported that the **Ospreys** had returned to the nest site on the east side of Pendleton. Shirley is able to see the nesting birds with a spotting scope from her home (what a wonderful opportunity to observe these great birds!).

On April 4, Aaron reported finding a singing **Canyon Wren**, **Chukars** and a small flock of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** along East Birch Creek. The same day Craig and Judy found **8 White-throated Swifts** along the Columbia River near the state line. On April 7, June Whitten was able to relocate the **Canyon Wren** and **Chukars** Aaron had reported earlier along East Birch Creek. On April 10, Bob Tapley reported finding several



Great-horned Owl nests with young in the Holdman area. Also on April 10, Malissa Minthorn saw her first **Calliope Hummingbird** at upper McKay Creek and Kate Ely found a flock of **Evening Grosbeaks** in Pendleton. On April 11, Aaron located a **GRAY FLYCATCHER**, a difficult bird to find in the county, along the Mud Springs Canyon Road. Later in the day he noted a **Swainson's Hawk** near his home and a **Common Loon** at the upper end of McKay Reservoir.

On April 13, Brad Bagdon reported that the **BLUE JAY** observed earlier in Athena is still present. The same day, Lorna Waltz saw a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** looking over her feeders. June Whitten reported that a **Calliope Hummingbird** visited her feeder on April 14. Malissa Minthorn now has numerous **Calliope** and **Rufous Hummingbirds** at her feeders and reports that later in the season she will have well over **ONE HUNDRED**. Hopefully the PBC will have one or more field trips to observe her unbelievable gathering of hummingbirds.

Jack Simons reported seeing a **GREAT EGRET** flying over his home on April 15. You may recall that Jack had reported several **GREAT EGRETS** at Mission Ponds last summer and fall, and reported on them in the September and October bird club newsletters. Hopefully they will return again this fall. Saturday, April 17, a **BURROWING OWL** was seen in the northwestern section of the county near the state line. The same day Bob and Dannel Tapley found several **Spotted Towhees** along the old Cabbage Hill road, and

I found one **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** near Umatilla Forks Campground. Sunday, April 18, Aaron and the Corders made separate trips to the Mud Springs and Alkali Canyon area northwest of Pilot Rock, finding a number of great birds. Aaron reported two singing **Grasshopper Sparrows**, a singing **Brewer's Sparrow**, **Western Kingbirds**, **Barn Swallows**, **Great Horned Owls**, a **Prairie Falcon** and two singing **House Wrens**. Craig and Judy Corder found two **Gray Partridge**, one **American Pipit**, a pair of **Prairie Falcons** and single **SAGE THRASHERS** in two different locations. They also noted a **Blue-winged Teal** at Stanfield Meadows.

Don't forget to check the Club's 2004 Umatilla County checklist at (www.pendletonbirders.org) for an update on how many birds have been seen in the county this year. And, please send your bird sightings to me (Dave Herr) by e-mail at dsherr@oregontrail.net or by phone at 276-6413. Good birding!

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