



Pendleton Bird Club

NEWSLETTER Volume 2, No. 5 Pendleton, Oregon May 2004

The Joys of Springtime at Malheur

Is there any place you would rather be than Eastern Oregon in the springtime? Eleven people were eager and excited to be right here for a long weekend at Malheur! Add beautiful scenery, deer, antelope, coyote, marmots, squirrels, chipmunks, 148 species of birds, lots of camaraderie and you had eleven VERY happy campers!

One of the most interesting birds we encountered was a partially albinistic (or leucistic) male American Robin at the Ukiah-Dale Wayside. His head was mostly white, his nape and back were white marbled with some dark, and his tummy was robin-red. The bird had a normal-plumaged mate, complete with nest and babies, so he was not an outcast. Were any of the babies albinistic? We could not see them well enough to answer that question yet.

Duncan, who operates the Field Station at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, observed a female Mockingbird a week prior to our arrival. She apparently left before our arrival as we never saw her. Duncan rather 'burst our bubble', however, when he said he thought of catching and releasing her where he knew a male was singing. In the end though he decided that he probably couldn't catch her and it would be illegal. His comments inspired us to contemplate transplanting a few species for Umatilla County's sake (Red Crossbills at Starr Campground; several pairs of Canvasbacks on the Center Patrol Road; and, numerous Sage Thrashers).

At least two Bobolinks were singing and visible in the Ukiah meadow with additional males seen on the Center Patrol Road near P Ranch at Malheur. This is

another species that is diminishing due to its long migration route to Argentina and the continued use of harmful herbicides in that country.

Early Saturday morning (5:30 am) we went to Malheur Headquarters. The trees were alive with Western Tanagers, Wilson's and Yellow Warblers. Also present were Western Wood Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds. Sunday, we added Black-chinned Hummingbird and Townsend's Warbler. Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Franklin's Gull, White Pelican, and Common Tern were observed on the pond at headquarters. Saturday was a bit showery but we easily drove the Center Patrol Road and saw lots of ducks, geese, White-faced Ibis, Sandhill Cranes, and 5 Trumpeter Swans. A mother Common Merganser tried unsuccessfully to hide her eleven tiny ducklings from us.

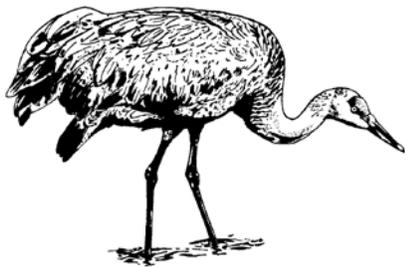
Sunday morning at Headquarters brought us a much sought-after warbler and probably our trip bird! A female Black-and-white Warbler was doing her nuthatch-like feeding low to mid-level on the cottonwood trees. All of our group (plus about twenty others) got a good look at her as she probed in the bark for insects. The Black-and-white was an Oregon bird for all of us and a lifer for many. This warbler was seen again on Monday morning as were a pair of Black-throated Sparrows on the South Butte near the Field Station.

Sunday was a lovely, sunny day. We enjoyed a tour to Diamond with many stops along the way. First stop (Hawk Alley on the Princeton Road) produced

several Swainson's, a few Red-tails, a Prairie Falcon, and one Ferruginous Hawk. Closer to Diamond a pair of Sandhill Cranes were closely watching their two golden colts (babies), a first for most of us to see baby cranes! Lorna Waltz, Dannel and Bob Tapley spotted another pair of cranes, also with two colts on their return trip Sunday afternoon. White-faced Ibis and Wilson's Phalaropes were very abundant in this area.

The quaint and delightful Diamond Hotel is now open with rooms and meals. We made a few purchases in the gift shop as the management was kind enough to allow us to use the restroom and have our lunch on their interesting, screened sun-porch. Next trip we may make a dinner reservation at Diamond. However, those of us who could stay until Monday, had a wonderful dinner at the Frenchglen Hotel. It is an outstanding place — scenic, historic, friendly people, and great food!

Our bird list was enhanced at Krumbo Reservoir with a Common Loon, Western Grebe, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, and many Eared Grebes. One Eared Grebe left an unforgettable impression as it came very close to us by the boat dock. His black head, golden "ears", silvery wings and bright rufous underparts were spectacular. One of the more common birds of the Burns and Malheur Refuge area was Cinnamon Teal, with 56 males and 27 females recorded on Sunday. Yellow Warblers were everywhere. Sandhill Cranes seemed especially abundant with one determined bird obstructing the road for a while. We had to wait until he made up his mind which way to go.



Mammals of note were a baby antelope, less than a day old. He was carefully watched over by his mother and a nanny. When the adults were several yards apart, he tried his legs and discovered he could run laps between them. Finally worn out, he laid down to rest just when the adults wanted to move him along the hillside. The other interesting mammal was found at the Joaquin Miller Forest Service Campground on the way home. Large nest boxes with fairly large entry holes placed at eye level intrigued us enough to investigate. As Aaron peeked in one box and tapped on it, a flying squirrel nearly collided head-on with him! Further investigation showed that at least three boxes were occupied by flying squirrels and, likely, had babies in them.

The Malheur trip is so much fun. We hope more of you can join us next time. The rules are simple:

1. Wait your turn for the bathroom.
2. Eat whatever is served.
3. Get up early and bird all day.
4. Help each other: See the birds, prepare the food, clean the quarters.
5. ENJOY

Participants were Aaron Skirvin, Fern Oliver, Allan and Marilyn Jio, Betty Klepper, Dannel and Bob Tapley, Lorna Waltz, Connie Zahl, June and Duane Whitten.

Post Script: Quote from Connie Zahl while driving to Krumbo Reservoir: *"When the world population doubles, I'll move here and there will be one person."*

Contributed by June Whitten

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 LaGrande Area

Saturday, June 12, 2004

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 (276-9019) by May 27.

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

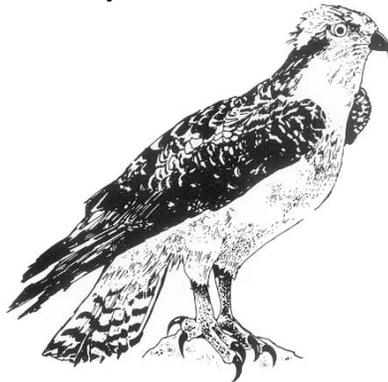
Bird Club Picnic at Battle Mt. State Park

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.

The Fishin's Great!

Word is the fishing's great in the Pendleton stretch of the Umatilla River. And who should know better than our feathered friends whose very existence depends on fish? Two major avian predators — Great Blue Heron and Osprey — have decided that the Pendleton vicinity has the potential to provide sufficient sustenance to warrant new nest construction in the area.

By now you may have seen the two new additions to the heronry "condominium" near the Little League ball park at the River Parkway's east end. We are delighted to report that now a pair of Osprey have constructed a nest on a utility pole between Stillman Park and the Elk's Lodge (SE 4th St.). Unfortunately, the nest is impossible to see from the Parkway at that location because of the well-developed tree canopy. You can, however, get a great view of the nest from the Main Street bridge. Look on the north side of the river about 1/4-mile upstream from the bridge. The nest is located atop the utility pole supporting the cable that crosses the river at SE 4th Street.



I first observed the nest in late March when it was still under construction. Presently, the mated pair appear to be sitting on eggs. Two weeks ago I saw one of the fish hawks pull a nice sized fish from the river in the turbulence below the old diversion structure immediately upstream from Main Street. The bird returned to a perch near the nest to enjoy its hard earned meal.

The new nest brings the total number of breeding pairs of Osprey to four the Pendleton vicinity. Previously known nests are located on the river with one nest at the mouth of McKay Creek; another near the prison; and, a third adjacent to Highway 30 on the east end of town.

Contributed by Paul Daniello

Farewell to Winter

Spring marches on at Mission Ponds. Notably, the water level has actually increased thanks to good spring runoff from recent mountain rains. That should bode well for the 22 goslings that have hatched thus far from three pairs of Canada Geese. There should be a smaller, later hatch if this is a normal nesting season so we may see 30 goslings by the end of summer.

I counted 16 goslings back on April 23, then Aaron Skirvin counted 20 goslings two days later with one "herd" containing 12 babies. Later that week I counted 14 goslings in that same group. Since the average clutch size for a Canada Goose is 4 to 6 eggs, how could a goose even *incubate* 14 eggs?

Canada Geese will adopt orphaned goslings, so something may have happened to the original parents. Not that it seems to matter at the moment. An evening stroll up the dike road to the pond often reveals all of the goslings grazing together on grass and insects at the north end of the pond in what can only be described as a "communal herd".

Absent thus far are Mallard ducklings. Not sure if they are hiding back in the tules or the hatch was not successful, but I have yet to see the first duckling this spring. Not to fret though, plenty of water, food and cover and mallards will re-nest several times if a fox or skunk raids their nest, and you can be certain these predators are always about. At last count, I spotted 1 adult fox with 3 babies (with my 2 dogs hot in pursuit) at their den 1/4 mile west of the ponds. I've lost track of the number of skunks I've run into this spring, with one encounter being enough for a year's worth of excitement.

With the high number of predators here in the river bottom, I've often wondered if this has anything to do with the low pheasant and quail population. With

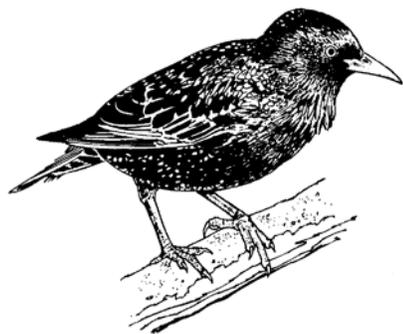
perfect habitat for nesting upland gamebirds, the place should be crawling with these two species, but it is not.

Sunday morning, May 16th — Fed the horses and scattered cracked corn for our resident free-loading bird population on our front pond. Yesterday, I counted 7 Canada Geese, a pair of Mallards, a pair of Wood Ducks, a pair of Mourning Doves and a few Red-winged Blackbirds lounging around, pecking at the grain when they felt the urge. The thought crossed my mind, “Why aren’t these guys on their nests like normal birds during the spring? They probably wake up, yawn a few times then someone says, ‘Hey, what da say we cruise over to Jack’s, grab a few beers and get some grub.’” Free-loaders, indeed! Wait ‘til hunting season.....**JUST JOKING!!!**

Forgot to grab my binocs, so had to return to the house before heading up to Mission Ponds with dogs in-tow. When I got there I decided to sneak into the big cottonwood thicket at the northeast corner. Sometimes a Great Horned Owl will hang out there to snooze away the daylight hours. But no owl this morning, so I decided to just stand in one spot for 10 minutes to tally how many birds I could see / hear.

Nothing real exotic came my way, but still a pretty good mix: Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Great Blue Heron, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Yellow Warbler, one of the *Empidonax* Flycatchers (not sure which one), Vaux’s Swift, Violet-green Swallow, American Coot and Black-headed Grosbeak.

Before leaving I looked a second time for an owl and spotted a large, dark bird about 20 feet off the ground in a cottonwood only 30 feet away. Had to be an owl so I put my glasses on it but saw no markings — just dark feathers. The bird’s head was obscured by leaves until it peeked out from behind its hiding place to reveal a red eye and a red head — a Turkey Vulture! Well that was a first! And a great way to end a quick trip to Mission Ponds. Conspicuously absent from my sightings? Starlings! What a nice way to end the trip.



Contributed by Jack Simons

Umatilla County Migration Count

On May 8, ten birders in five teams, plus two feeder counters, searched throughout Umatilla County to find and count as many birds as possible in one day. The teams, all taking part in the annual North American Spring Migration Count, started counting birds about 6 a.m. and finished their routes by 8:30 p.m. We matched last year’s species total of 141, but found fewer total birds — 8,043 this year compared to 10,694 in 2003. Cliff Swallows again claimed the honor of the most numerous species, with 2,149 birds counted. Remarkably, the number of Cliff Swallows tallied last year (2,141 birds) was virtually identical to this year’s count.

Species we spotted this year but not last year included **Greater White-fronted Goose, Great Egret, Gray Partridge, Bonaparte’s Gull, Long-eared Owl** (on a nest), **Western Tanager**, a few species of **warblers**, and *Empidonax flycatchers*. Spring migration for many species is about a week to 10 days earlier this year than last. The early migration seems to be a state-wide phenomenon and may be related to the very mild March/April weather conditions. The earlier-than-usual neo-tropical migrants made up for species we missed, such as **Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak, Clark’s Nutcracker, Cedar Waxwing, Townsend’s Solitaire**, and others. Unfortunately, windy conditions in the afternoon made it difficult to locate some birds and reduced the number of birds tallied.

Thank you to Dolly and Terry Robison, Florence Collins, Suzzette Jacques, Craig and Judy Corder, Bob and Dannell Tapley, June and Duane Whitten, and Jack Simons for your help in counting Umatilla County birds and making our count a success again.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

April-May Bird Sightings

The flow of migrants through the area has slowed, and now the birds nesting in the area are setting up territories. This means that for the next month, mornings are going to be filled with bird song. I’ve found some species starting to sing pretty early in the morning. The **American Robins** in my neighborhood now start about 4:30 am, but this morning I heard a **Western Kingbird** singing at 3:00 am outside my window - now that’s an early bird!

The first **Lazuli Bunting** report of the year was April 22, from Connie Bett’s yard in Pendleton. Shortly after this date they arrived at Kate Ely’s, Bob

Tapley's, and Paul Daniello's feeders in Pendleton. Jack Simons continues to monitor activity at Mission Ponds. On April 23 he found 16 newly hatched goslings as well as **Redheads**, a **Bufflehead**, a **Northern Shoveler** and **25 Ring-necked Ducks**. On April 24, Mayanna Porter reported 25-50 **Snow Geese** flying near McKay Dam. Also, on April 24, Marilyn Cripe reported a **Harris's Sparrow** at her feeder east of Mission. On April 25, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten birded up the Umatilla River. Some interesting finds included 10 **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, four singing **Winter Wrens** and a singing **Brown Creeper**. The same day they also heard singing **Nashville Warblers**, a **Cassin's Vireo** and a **Yellow Warbler** along Iskuulpa Creek. On April 26, Aaron reported seeing four **Black-necked Stilts** and seven **Least Sandpipers** at Mission Ponds. The same day Aaron reported a large number of ducks and six **Eared Grebes** in breeding plumage at McKay Reservoir.

On April 27, Jack Simons reported seeing 53 **American White Pelicans** flying down the Umatilla River at his home near Mission Ponds. On April 27, Nancy Brown reported a large number of migrants had moved through the Hermiston area. She counted **14** different species during the previous week in one ash tree growing in her yard. On the same day, June Whitten, Bette Husted and Aaron found a **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** in the Columbia River at the McNary Wildlife Area. They also found a **nesting pair of Black-necked Stilts** along the Stanfield Meadows Road.



April 29, Jack Simons flushed a **Great-horned Owl** from a tree near his property near Mission (looking for a gosling dinner?). The same day Aaron reported seeing his first **Bank Swallows** for the year. This was the last swallow species found in the County this year. Also, on April 29, Jean Wood reported a **White-headed Woodpecker**, **Lewis's Woodpecker** and a **Bullock's Oriole** along the North Fork John Day River near Dale.

Jack Simons had the first **Black-chinned Hummingbird** at his feeder May 1. There were lots of great reports on May 2. Paul Daniello reported seeing three **Vaux's Swifts** along Pendleton's River Parkway. He also reported that a pair of **Ospreys** has

taken up residence on the north side of the river, just across from the Elk's Lodge. It's great to have Ospreys nesting in "downtown" Pendleton. Jack Simons reported finding a **BLACK TERN** at Mission Ponds. This is a difficult species to find in the county; several of us tried to find it, but the bird could not be relocated. Aaron took a drive up Pearson Creek and found a number of new year-birds including **Hammond's Flycatcher**, **MacGillivray's Warbler**, **Lincoln's Sparrow**, **Townsend's Warbler**, **Gray Jay**, and at the Ukiah sewage ponds **Wilson's Phalarope** and **Spotted Sandpiper**. And, Joy Jaeger took a photo of the first year-record of **Swainson's Thrush** for the county (near Albee) on the 2nd. On May 3, I (Dave Herr) saw a **Lewis's Woodpecker** at Thorn Hollow. The Bird Club has placed bluebird nest boxes in both the Poverty Flats and Battle Mountain/Albee areas. The boxes will be checked throughout the nesting seasons, but the initial monitoring indicates that many of the boxes are being used. Look for updates on nesting results in this and future newsletters.

May 8th was the Spring Migratory Bird Count, with Aaron directing the effort; it was a great success. Check the Migratory Bird Count article in this newsletter for all the details.

On May 11, Dolly Robison found the first **Bobolink** for the year at the Ukiah-Dale State Park. On May 12, June Whitten reported finding two **Western Flycatchers** in her yard at Pendleton. Craig and Judy Corder reported hearing an **AMERICAN BITTERN** calling May 13 at the Power City Wildlife Area near Hermiston. On May 16, Craig and Judy reported a **GREAT EGRET** in Stanfield Meadows and another **GREAT EGRET** along Emert Road (northwest of Echo). They also reported two **SORA** (rails) calling along Emert road. On May 18, Craig and Judy also found a **GREAT EGRET** at Cold Springs Reservoir. On May 18, Aaron found 3 **BLACK TERNS** at the Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds. Checking Mission Ponds later in the day, Aaron found more interesting birds including a pair of **American Wigeon**, a pair of **Blue-winged Teal** and **18 BLACK TERNS**. After receiving a call from Aaron, I drove out to Mission Ponds and saw seven of the **BLACK TERNS**, a new county species for me! On the same day Connie Betts reported seeing a **Cedar Waxwing** in her yard along with **MANY** baby **House Sparrows**.

On May 20, Craig and Judy reported one **Eastern Kingbird** at McNary Park. On May 21, Bob and

Dannell Tapley saw a **CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE** at their Pendleton bird feeder. **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** can occasionally be found at higher elevations in the County, but seldom in Pendleton. On the same day, Aaron found a **WILLET** at Mission Ponds. This is a rare bird in this county.

I will be gone for much of June, so please send new sightings to Aaron Skirvin, who will compile bird sightings for the June newsletter. Contact Aaron at 276-1948 or skirvins@uci.net.

Contributed by Dave Herr



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