

# Pendleton Bird Club

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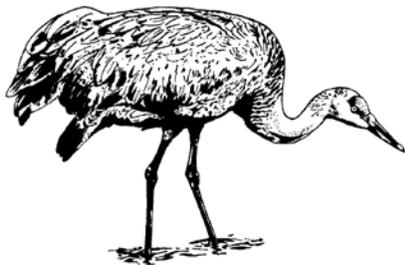
## A Day on the Wild Side

**Ladd Marsh in the La Grande area provides** homes for many bird species as well as various mammals. On the June 12 Pendleton Bird Club field trip at least 78 species of birds were seen plus three antelope and two cow elk, each with a very young calf.

When the first wagon trains on the old Oregon Trail rolled into the Grande Ronde Valley, they came upon a vast marshy area. This forced them to take a higher path, on the hill above what is now Foothill Road, to skirt this wetland. Later, much of the marsh was drained to make way for "progress," a town and surrounding farmland.

Today, thanks to the efforts of many individuals and organizations, a wetlands restoration project is underway. From the fully treated sewage ponds, water is pumped back into some areas to turn them once again into wetlands.

To attest to the already successful restoration effort, Sandhill Cranes are nesting in the area. Five adults and one colt (baby) were seen by the Pendleton birders. Three American Bitterns, a Forster's Tern, Willow Flycatchers, numerous Black-crowned Night-Herons, and several singing Common Yellowthroats added a lot of enthusiasm to our group. Other highlights included a Great Horned Owl; Eared, Pied-billed and Western Grebes; Wilson's Phalarope; most of the ducks of eastern Oregon; Black-necked Stilt; American Avocet; and calling Soras and Virginia Rail.



Trent Bray is a local birding guide and also owner of

"The Bobolink", a well-stocked birding store in downtown La Grande. Trent was willing to take a Saturday away from his store and lead the Pendleton group through Ladd Marsh. As always, knowing where to go is the first step in seeing a lot of birds.

Trent took us first to a huge Bank Swallow colony: way too many swallows to count! Our next stop brought Trent his bird of the day, a Great Egret. Of course, we liked the egret too, but the Bitterns probably got our number one vote. Trent believes Black Terns are nesting in the area, although we did not see any. A Hooded Merganser with three babies was spotted, but she quickly hid under a Russian Olive tree hanging over the pond.

The Pendleton Bird Club sends a big thank you to Joanne Britton, U.S. Forest Service employee from Baker City, for arranging this birding day for us. Also, we extend many thanks to Trent for giving us his time and expertise. We all enjoyed shopping a bit in "The Bobolink" after birding. If anyone would like to visit the store, take 4th Street off Adams Avenue for one block to Washington Avenue. It is located on the corner of 4th and Washington. Hours are 10 to 5 Tuesday through Friday and 10 to 4 on Saturday.

Those attending from the Pendleton Bird Club were Marilyn and Allan Jio; John, Hero and Haval Norman; Bob and Dannell Tapley; Lorna Waltz; Jane Holmes; Jack Simons; David Wayne; Russ and Connie Betts; Duane and June Whitten.

*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 Upper Umatilla River**

Birding at Thornhollow and Corporation

**Saturday, June 26, 2004**

Meet at NE corner of Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot at 7:00 a.m. Bring water and a lunch.

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.**

**Cabbage Hill Birding**

Looking at the weather report for Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, one may have decided to pursue some warmer indoor activity in the morning, but 18 brave souls found the weather just fine, (if not a bit cool), as we traveled up along old Cabbage Hill Road in search of birds.

After meeting at the Mission Market at 6 a.m., several cars caravanned up to the first birding spot, about 5 miles up the old highway at a very brushy draw on both sides of the road. Right away, Yellow Warblers, the species we most often observed throughout the morning, were obvious as they sang and chased each other on the brushy hillside. A Black-headed Grosbeak announced his presence and was

spotted several times as he flew from one perch to the next. A Gray Catbird, one of the birds we hoped to find, began singing and showed itself in the open just long enough for everyone to get a look. Several Spotted Towhees, Lazuli Buntings, and a couple of Fox Sparrows were spotted as they sang from the brushy habitat. Atop its favorite singing perch, a Western Meadowlark serenaded us from a bush along the road's edge. A small group of male Brown-headed Cowbirds called and displayed from the tops of the trees. Were they all waiting for the same female?? Hhmmmm!

Birds didn't seem to be as numerous as they were a few days ago, someone mentioned, as everyone kept alert for a new find.

The wind was calm at this spot, but we could see the clouds moving in and wondered if that was why the birds were so quiet. (The option of a really-early-morning foray, like at 5 a.m. was discussed; we could arrive at sunrise when more birds would be more active!!!) But soon, a couple Mourning Doves were seen, a California Quail heard, and a male Ring-necked Pheasant crowed in the distance. The wind picked up some and it was a little colder now, but we were getting some good views of an Eastern Kingbird. It was a little uphill from us on the top of a bush and readily visible to all, showing off its dark gray/black hood, back and tail and white belly and white-tipped tail. We later saw two E. Kingbirds at the other edge of the brush.

We decided to move up the road to the second stop along the brushy draw. Almost immediately after exiting the cars, we were amazed and entertained by the Yellow-breasted Chat that drew closer and closer so that everyone could get a good look at its bright yellow breast and see its black lores and white eye-ring and "spectacles". He ran through the entire repertoire of "chatter", for which this beauty is noted. An American Robin flew past, then more cowbirds. Some heard a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. A couple of Cedar Waxwings flew in; a singing Warbling Vireo was heard by many, but not seen, while Am. Goldfinches flew in and out of binocular-range several times. The barely audible song of a distant Dusky Flycatcher challenged our hearing, especially with the din of so many singing birds. An Orange-crowned Warbler sang its halting trill several times for all to hear, and was finally seen in the deep brush after an extended search.

We heard, then saw, another Gray Catbird—what a great sight—as it moved in and out of the brush and finally to the top of a snag to watch us better! Then a Cooper's Hawk and Northern Harrier flew across the road in tandem overhead -- just who was escorting whom through its territory?

At this point some birders left the group to return to town by 8 a.m. The rest got back in our vehicles and continued up the old highway. On the way, Mourning Doves dotted the telephone wires along the road, and we saw Western Kingbird and Common Raven.

At the top of Cabbage Hill, near the road to the radio towers, we parked and got out to see a male Lazuli Bunting, his turquoise-blue color so vivid in the morning light. The wind felt a little colder here, but soon a Dark-eyed Junco was spotted, then a Western Tanager flew in and landed in the same dead tree as the Lazuli Bunting. Chipping Sparrows sang from their low perches, and as we walked up the road, we saw one in silhouette on dead branch.

Aaron heard Vesper Sparrows, so we all left the road and climbed-up a grassy slope to see if we could find the songsters. There were two of them singing and both were finally spotted. A grassland bird—Vespers perch on boulders, fences or low branches to advertise their territorial songs, and can be really hard to spot. As an additional treat, we saw a female Vesper when she flushed from her nest, and we all got to quickly see her four, tiny, spotted eggs in a neat cup nest under a small sagebrush bush. (We quickly retreated from the area, so as not to cause her any more distress.)

Back at the cars, we thought we heard a Veery sing once but were not able to find the skulker in the dense brush. Tree Swallows foraged in the distance near a large snag (possible nesting cavity?) at the far edge of the grassy meadow. We all marveled at the spectacular show of spring wildflowers on the grassy hillsides.

We still had 8 to 10 birders in the group as we continued up old Cabbage Hill Road to the Deadman Pass rest area along I-84. Immediately, someone heard, and then spotted a Western Wood-Pewee as it hunted insects, repeatedly sallying out to catch a flying morsel and returning to the same perch. Aaron tried to call in some birds by making pishing sounds, and a very inquisitive Red-breasted Nuthatch flew to within 15 feet of us to check out the commotion!

As a male Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Townsend's Warbler sang from the forest canopy, a female Yellow-rumped busily searched for nesting material in the underbrush. A male Orange-crowned Warbler sang from its low perch while the female hurriedly gathered insects for her hungry brood. And, what would be an outing in the Blue Mountains without a Steller's Jay? Several Violet-Green Swallows soared over the parking lot, and Mountain Chickadee worked the leafy branches of the trees. By 10:00 a.m. we had tallied 42 species of birds. The weather and the birds

had cooperated, and we all said our good-byes as another fine birding morning came to a close.

*Contributed by Dolly Robison*

## **Bluebird Trail Update**

**May 2004** – *Editor's Note: June Whitten prepared the following article (May 2004) for our May newsletter, but due to a lack of space in the newsletter, it is published this month.*

Terry Mayberry, Don Rudy, and June and Duane Whitten checked the bluebird nestboxes at Poverty Flat on May 7. Out of seven boxes, two were empty; five had completed Western Bluebird nests with the following number of eggs: none, one, four, four, and six. Western Bluebirds were observed in or near the nest boxes.

The Albee-Ukiah boxes have been checked several times. At this time, about ten boxes are housing bluebirds. One box was rented by Tree Swallows. There will be follow-up surveys in both areas in the next week or two.

Brooding begins as soon as the clutch is completed and lasts for approximately 14 days. Then, both parents tend the babies for three or four weeks, or until the young bluebirds can fly and feed themselves. Around May 22-26 we should see the first chicks. Bluebirds raised in nest boxes tend to imprint to a box and will select that type of nest when they become breeding birds.

Bluebirds are a declining species due to loss of available nest-hole cavities, loss of habitat to development, loss of nesting sites to introduced species (Starlings and House Sparrows), and loss of life to pesticides and herbicides. Even a small effort such as our Bluebird Trails can make a difference!

**June 2004** - Many bluebirds have hatched and some have fledged from the nest boxes the bird club has sponsored. The adults are quite busy feeding the hungry babies in the nest boxes or keeping track of fledglings and providing them some assistance with food, too.

On June 10 on the Bluebird Trail in the Battle Mountain-Albee area, we counted 26 baby Bluebirds. One female Mountain Bluebird was not budging off her nest so we could not count her eggs or hatchlings.

Out of the 19 nest boxes in that area, 6 are empty, 7 have nests, some with eggs, and 6 have babies. One pair of Mountain Bluebirds, which apparently had not

nested in our nest boxes, was observed with 5 fledglings near one of our boxes.

Tree Swallows appeared not to have fared as well with their nestings. One dead female was found in a nest box and Western Bluebirds had made a nest on top of the old nest. Another dead Tree Swallow was found in a box with 5 cold eggs. Yet another box had 5 cold swallow eggs, which we left in case they were just beginning incubation. Possibly, the cold, wet weather left the Tree Swallows weakened and short of food. It did not seem to affect the bluebirds, however, so we can only guess at the problem.

There were some problems with the nesting attempts of Western Bluebirds in the Poverty Flat area. One nest failed with four dead babies. Another nest appeared to have fledged one or two babies, but had two dead babies also. These observations were made on June 20.

All bluebirds in the Poverty Flat area had fledged and it was difficult to tell for sure how many survived. At least three nests had had babies fledge, and several juveniles, as well as adults, were observed near the boxes. The best judgment was 8 or more babies survived.

One box was taken over by House Wrens who have four small babies. This box had remained empty so the House Wrens were welcome.

*Contributed by June Whitten*

## **2004 'Species Challenge' Off to Great Start**

*"How many bird species can we find in Umatilla County in one year? In 2003, birders reported 244 species in the County. Can we find more than 244 this year? Well, whether we do or don't, we will have fun trying."*

Club member Aaron Skirvin penned those words early this year as a "call to arms" for Club members to get out and hit the bushes, creek bottoms, savannas, swamps, mountain hillsides and any other terrain that might have a bird in it. The response to his challenge has been outstanding! As of June 15th, 224 bird species had been recorded in Umatilla County with many excellent sightings turned in. A link on the Home Page at the Club's website ([www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)) was setup to tally weekly sightings. Club members can access this page to see which birds have been sighted thus far.

For instance, scrolling down the list reveals that all nine species of Wrens, Dippers and Kinglets; all eight species of Thrushes; all six species of Grebes; all ten species of Woodpeckers (including the elusive White-headed Woodpecker); all four species of Rails, Coots, and Cranes; all three species of Vireos and all seven species of Chickadees, Nuthatches and Creepers have been sighted in the County so far. Quite the accomplishment, Club members!

In addition, of the twelve species of Owls previously recorded in the County, only the Great Gray Owl and Snowy Owl have eluded our efforts (thus far). And, of the sixteen species of Osprey, Falcons, Hawks and Eagles previously recorded in the County, only the Northern Goshawk and Gyrfalcon have not shown up on our radar screens.

Of the eight species of Jays and Crows, only the Western Scrub Jay (a very infrequent visitor) has not been seen. And, of the seven species of Swallows, only the Purple Martin has not been seen.

Club members have made some great sightings since January 1st, including — Swamp Sparrow and Barrow's Goldeneye (Craig & Judy Corder); Common Redpoll (Dolly Robison and Jane Holmes); Lesser Goldfinch and Harris's Sparrow (Dave Herr); Blue Jay (Grey Elliot); White-headed Woodpecker and Sage Thrasher (Dave Herr); Canyon Wren (Craig & Judy Corder); White-throated Swift and Gray Flycatcher (Aaron Skirvin); Calliope Hummingbird (Malissa Minthorn); Great Egret (Jack Simons); Chestnut-backed Chickadees (June Whitten / Aaron Skirvin); Lewis's Woodpecker (Jean Wood); Black Tern (Jack Simons); Bobolink (Dolly Robison); American Bittern and Sora (Craig & Judy Corder); Willet (Aaron Skirvin).

**Bird On!!**

*Contributed by Jack Simons*

## **Paul Daniello Leaving Pendleton**

Paul Daniello, one of the founding members of the Pendleton Bird Club, will be moving to New Hampshire next month. Paul has enrolled at Antioch New England Graduate School at Keene, New Hampshire, where he will seek a Master's Degree in Resource Management and Administration. We all wish Paul the best of luck in his new adventure. And, he will update us periodically on the birds he sees in New Hampshire. To stay in contact with Paul, his email is [ggreyhnd@mac.com](mailto:ggreyhnd@mac.com).

## Mission Ponds Checklist Growing

Birding at Mission Ponds continues to add new species to the Birds of Mission Ponds Checklist. The updated list can be viewed at the Pendleton Bird Club web site by clicking on "Umatilla County Bird Checklists".

To date, 107 bird species have been recorded at Mission Ponds. Club members Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten began a Checklist of the Birds of Mission Ponds in 2002 and by August 2003 had recorded 94 species. In less than a year since then, 13 new species have been added. This number will almost certainly increase as more and more birds discover the excellent habitat the ponds have to offer.

Recent additions to the list include Bullock's Oriole, Double-crested Cormorant, Ruddy Duck and Black Tern. Conspicuously absent though are species commonly found in the local area such as Western Kingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Merlin, Dunlin, California Gull, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker. I've spotted several of these species in my pasture only one-quarter west of the ponds thus it is likely only a matter of time before someone connects on a missing species.

*Contributed by Jack Simons*

## May – June Bird Sightings

All of the migrant bird species that breed in Umatilla County had returned to the area by early June. Nesting activities are in full swing now and have been for several weeks for some of the resident species. The next influx of new species will begin in July with the start of the annual fall migration of shorebirds. Even though bird migration has quieted in the past few weeks, a few observers were fortunate enough to find some unusual species for the county in the past month.

A **partially albino male American Robin** has been sighted several times at Ukiah-Dale State Park over the past 2 months. Mike Hann, an Oregon State Parks Department employee in the Ukiah area, first reported the bird in late April. In mid-May, the Pendleton Bird Club members who traveled to Malheur NWR saw this bird, feeding nestlings, at the park. Most recently, Bob and Dannel Tapley saw and photographed the bird in the park on June 13. We'll try to put one of Bob's photos on the bird club website [www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org) in the next few days. It's worth the trip to Ukiah-Dale State Park to see this strikingly colored robin. You can reach the Ukiah-

Dale State Park by driving south from Pendleton on Hwy 395. About 2 miles south of the Ukiah (Highway 244) junction, you will see the park on the east side of the highway, next to Camas Creek. The bird is most often seen in the vicinity of the restrooms.

In mid-May, Pat Tempinski reported a **Great Horned Owl with young** in a nest along Wildhorse Creek between Pendleton and Adams.

On May 21, Dave Herr found a **WHITE-FACED IBIS** at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. This is a difficult species to find in Umatilla County, with none being reported most years. Dave also found an **American Bittern** at the refuge and a **Sora** at Echo Meadows. Also, on May 21, Tony Greagor, saw a male **HARLEQUIN DUCK** at McNary Wildlife Area. This species is extremely difficult to find in Umatilla County; we are aware of only one other report of Harlequins in the county - Bill Jacobson saw two in the Umatilla River at Pendleton on May 27, 1993.

Dave Herr continued his birding adventures on May 22, when he visited the Cayuse and Thornhollow areas. Numbers of breeding birds were increasing in the riparian cottonwood stands along the Umatilla River, and Dave was the first to report **Veery**, **Gray Catbird**, and **Red-eyed Vireo** this year.

Mike and MerriLynn Denny saw 2 **UPLAND SANDPIPERS** near Albee on May 24. A pair or two of these rare (in Oregon) sandpipers probably nest in the wet meadows in the Albee-Ukiah areas annually, but are always on private land and very difficult to find from the public roads. Karen Kronner and others conducted surveys for this species and found a few pairs in the Albee-Ukiah areas in the early 1990's.

On May 26, June and Duane Whitten, while watching a baseball game at Bob White Park in Pendleton, reported the first sighting of **Common Nighthawk** in Umatilla County this spring.

On May 30, Dave Herr had a great night of owling in and near Divide Well Campground, which is located in the extreme southwestern corner of Umatilla County. Dave found **5 Flammulated Owls** and a **Long-eared Owl**. On May 31, June and Duane Whitten and I found an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** and several **Red Crossbills** at Battle Mt. Summit.

**Short-eared Owls** are more common and a little easier to find locally this year than last, especially along Hwy 395 at Whittaker Flats. Club members

who were returning from Malheur National Wildlife Refuge saw one there on May 17; June and Duane Whitten and I saw one on May 31; Dolly Robison saw 3 on June 3; Craig and Judy Corder saw 3 on June 6; and Bob and Dannell Tapley saw one on June 13.

On June 4, Linda Dillavou, who lives near McKay Dam, photographed a female **Black-chinned Hummingbird on a nest** in a maple tree in her yard. One of Linda's photos is posted on the club's website, [www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org).

Members of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society (Walla Walla, WA) found a **BARRED OWL** at Langdon Lake on June 5. This is only the fourth record (of which we are aware) of this species in Umatilla County.

Dolly Robison was surprised to see 2 **Turkey Vultures** near Hermiston on June 7. Although vultures are seen regularly in summer in the Blue

Mountains, they are very unusual in the Hermiston area. On June 19, June & Duane Whitten, Dan and Shirley Wilkerson (from Bryan, Texas), and I saw 2 **Forster's Terns** flying along Camas Creek near Ukiah.

Dave Herr will return from his travels in a few days to resume his duties as "Bird Sightings" compiler for the newsletter. Please send your new sightings to Dave for the July newsletter. You can contact Dave at 541-276-6413 or [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net).

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

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