

# *Pendleton Bird Club*

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NEWSLETTER Volume 2, No. 7 Pendleton, Oregon July 2004

## *Early Summer Birding on the Upper Umatilla River*

**On June 26, 11 Pendleton Bird Club members** participated in a birding trip along the upper reaches of the Umatilla River. Target species for the trip were Red-eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird, Veery and Yellow-breasted Chat. Our first stop was at Mission Ponds where Aaron Skirvin showed the group both a nesting Pied-billed Grebe and American Coot.

Next the group stopped at the small roadside pond upriver from Cayuse. Although late in the season, there were still plenty of singing birds to test the group's birdsong identification skills. Most exciting, was a very cooperative Red-eyed Vireo, which everyone was able to observe. The next stop was Wenix Spring, where we birded in a mature riparian cottonwood forest along the Umatilla River. This area is always interesting, and this visit was no exception. Several Veeries were giving their distinctive call notes, and after finding a singing Western "type" flycatcher, Aaron explained the differences between Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatcher calls. However, even after listening to the bird calling, the group decided just to call it a Western "type".

One of our sharp-eyed group members found a Black-chinned Hummingbird nest, and everyone was able to get a great view of one of the nestlings through a spotting scope. The nestling nearly fell out of the nest, but after a few minutes of flapping and scrambling, the young hummingbird climbed back into the nest. A half-grown juvenile Spotted Sandpiper entertained the group as it scurried among the rocks along the river's edge. June and Duane Whitten showed the group a Warbling Vireo nest they had found on an earlier trip to the area,

and as the group was leaving, Jack Simons found a singing Gray Catbird that everyone was able to observe.

After a stop at Thornhollow, where Yellow-breasted Chats were giving their unique song and Lazuli Buntings showed off their brilliant colors, the group drove to the Umatilla Forks area. Birding had slowed by the time (midday) the group reached the North Fork Umatilla River, and the hoped-for American Dippers and Chestnut-backed Chickadees were not found. However, after lunch, Jack Simons was able to show the group a number of different butterfly species, including an amazing mixed group of several hundred swallowtails along the Umatilla River. After a short walk up the South Fork Umatilla River to look for nesting Winter Wrens, which is another species we couldn't find this day, the group returned to Pendleton.

*Contributed by Dave Herr*

## **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.

**PENDLETON BIRD CLUB PICNIC  
AND BARBECUE  
SATURDAY, JULY 24, 2004**

WHERE: BATTLE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK –  
Highway 395 about 35 miles south of Pendleton

TIME: 5:00 P.M.

GOOD EATS: Please bring your own choice of meat to put on the barbecue as well as hamburger and/or hotdog buns if you wish, as well as your own table service. Bring a salad or dessert to share with other hungry birders.

Condiments and ice tea will be provided for one and all. Grills and briquettes will be furnished.

TRANSPORTATION: Plan to arrange your own transportation. Plan a carpool or call another birder who will be happy to give you a ride.

SERIOUS BUSINESS: Guests are most welcome. Do you have a friend who would like to get started birding? Battle Mountain would be a good time and place.

Remember your binoculars – after dinner we will enjoy a bird walk around the park. Non-birders are invited to visit and enjoy the cool evening air and possibly a beautiful sunset.

Aaron Skirvin will discuss the Club's project on creating a bird checklist for Battle Mountain State Park. Dave Herr will share with us his sound recordings of some of the night birds of the area.

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT  
BATTLE MOUNTAIN FOR A FUN OUTING.**

**Shorebirding Field Trip to McKay Reservoir**

**Saturday, August 14, 2004**

This will be an opportunity to see some of the local fall shorebirds. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the upper boat ramp on the west side of McKay Reservoir. Trip leader: Aaron Skirvin – 276-1948 or [skirvins@uci.net](mailto:skirvins@uci.net)

**Field Trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge**

**September 9 - 12, 2004**

This year our fall trip to Malheur Refuge is the weekend before the Pendleton Round-Up. The refuge should be mostly mosquito-free and the weather, birding, and views from Steen's Mountain will be spectacular.

Contact June Whitten, 276-9019 for more information on how to participate.

**Fall North American Migration Count**

**September 18, 2004**

We will have a fun day counting as many birds as possible in Umatilla County.

Contact Aaron Skirvin, 276-1948 or [skirvins@uci.net](mailto:skirvins@uci.net), for more information on how to participate.

**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.**

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual Oregon Shorebird Festival  
September 3-5, 2004 at Charleston, Oregon  
(near Coos Bay)**

For registration and other event information contact Dawn Grafe (541) 867-4550 or email [oregoncoast@fws.gov](mailto:oregoncoast@fws.gov)  
Also, visit their website:  
[oregoncoast.fws.gov/shorebirdfestival.htm](http://oregoncoast.fws.gov/shorebirdfestival.htm)

**Win a Fun Weekend For Two**

Blue Mountain Wildlife will hold its fall Open House on October 2, 2004. Raffle tickets are now available for three weekend packages. Wildhorse Resort has generously donated two golfing packages. Each package includes 18 holes of golf for two, a night's lodging at the hotel, free admission to Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and lots of coupons for use throughout the resort.

Les Schwab and Hood River Comfort Suites are the generous sponsors of a Mount Hood Railroad Mystery Dinner Train Weekend. Included are two tickets on the

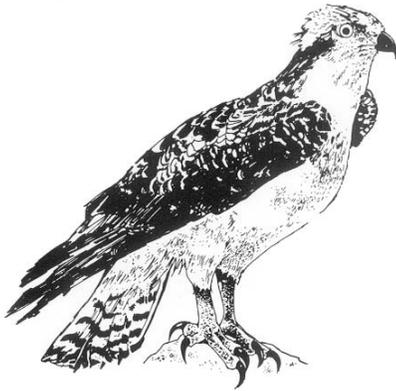
Mystery Dinner Train and a night's lodging for two at the Hood River Comfort Suites.

Tickets are \$1 each and will be available at the July 24 bird club picnic at Battle Mountain State Park or several businesses in Pendleton. Call 541-278-0215 for more information. All proceeds from the raffle will support Blue Mountain Wildlife's rehabilitation and education programs.

## **Birding at the Top of the Blues**

**Birding has slowed some around Pendleton due to** the waning breeding season and hot weather, but on July 10, seven Pendleton Bird Club members found plenty of bird activity at the summit of the Blue Mountains near Tollgate. Some of the target birds on our list included Barred Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, and Green-tailed Towhee.

Our group's first stop was at Woodward Campground, which is located along the western shore of Langdon Lake. Immediately upon getting out of the cars, we saw an Osprey dive into Langdon Lake and come up with a



nice-sized trout that was big enough to give the fish hawk a workout as it tried to get airborne with its heavy breakfast.

Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills were the most

noticeable and abundant species at the campground. We had good views of both species as they constantly called from the trees overhead and flew to and from a bathing and drinking spot in a small stream feeding the lake. A grayish-tinted (rather than yellow-green) Orange-crowned Warbler was spotted several times as it foraged for insects among the low bushes along the lakeshore. Hammond's Flycatchers and a couple of Lincoln's Sparrow were prominent singers, too. The brilliant yellow and red plumage of a male Western Tanager elicited oohs and aahs from all the birders.

We turned our binoculars back to the lake as Tree and Violet-green Swallows foraged over the lake's surface, and two or three Mallard families swam or rested near the shore. Across the lake, perhaps 150 or 200 yards away, a small flotilla of ducks attracted our attention. Initially, the ducks were too far away to identify, but we

were fortunate that the ducks were swimming toward us. As they approached, we recognized the ducks as a female goldeneye with six ¼-grown ducklings. They continued to swim in our direction, with the ducklings repeatedly diving and the mother constantly on the lookout for any threats to her ducklings.

Scopes were promptly set up to try to identify the mother duck, since both Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes are found in Umatilla County. Many Common Goldeneyes spend the winter in the area, especially on the Columbia River below McNary Dam. Commons are thought to be only winter visitors here; a few Barrow's spend the winter in the county, and there are breeding records for this species at Langdon Lake. Although male goldeneyes are readily distinguishable, females present an identification challenge. Bill color of the females, usually mostly yellow in Barrow's and mostly gray/black in Common, is one difference, and head shape is another. We strained to see bill color, which was difficult to discern in the poor light. Our long study of the female as she swam across the lake showed a sloping forehead, indicating a Common Goldeneye. But could it be a Common, even though there are no "substantiated" records of Common Goldeneye breeding in Oregon?

Eventually, the goldeneye family made its way to the northwest shore of the lake, very near us, where they climbed out of the water and onto a wooden dock. There they settled down to rest and soak up the morning sun. With the ducks now stationary, we took advantage of the opportunity to move within about 120 feet for better views. The female showed a solid gray/black bill and sloping forehead. Duane Whitten took several photographs of what appeared to be a family of Common Goldeneyes. Over the next week, two other birders saw the goldeneye family and independently identified them as probable Commons. Maybe this will be the first substantiated breeding record of Common Goldeneye in Oregon!

After spending most of an hour watching the goldeneyes, we drove to the southern part of the campground, hoping to find the Barred Owl that the Walla Walla Audubon Society members found there on July 5. Dave Herr set up his sound equipment and attempted to call in the Barred Owl, but we had no luck. A short walk into the forest revealed a male Winter Wren, which was continually singing from a small fir tree. The birders were fortunate to see a beautiful, yellow and black, male Townsend's Warbler. This species is fairly common in the fir and mixed conifer forests of the Blue Mountains but can be difficult to see when they forage high in the forest canopy. A family

group of at least four Red-breasted Nuthatches gave us close looks as they moved from tree to tree near us. A thrush (probably Swainson's) made a low, quick fly-by and landed nearby. However, in typical thrush fashion, it would not show itself long enough for us to see its field marks. Woodward Campground and adjacent Langdon Lake are rich in bird life; our group recorded 35 species in about two hours of birding there.

We ate lunch at the Burnt Cabin Creek overlook, which is situated high above the South Fork Walla Walla River about three miles north of Langdon Lake. The group took some time off from birding to appreciate the showy wildflowers, paintbrushes in particular, at the overlook. A nearly white monkshood (usually purple) coaxed out at least one camera for close-up photos.

We felt lucky to see an Olive-sided Flycatcher because of their apparent decreasing population in the Blue Mountains. Western Tanager, Orange-crowned Warbler, Red-naped Sapsucker, MacGillivray's Warbler, Mountain Chickadee, Warbling Vireo, and several other species kept our binoculars busy during our short stay at the overlook.

We had one other target species to try to find before making our way back to Pendleton: Green-tailed Towhee. This towhee, with its red cap, white throat, gray belly, and green tail, is very uncommon in Umatilla County. Last July, with the help of Mike and MerryLynn Denny, we found a few Green-tailed Towhees in a brushy draw at the Lick Creek overlook into the North Fork Umatilla Wilderness Area. To reach this birding spot, we turned south off Highway 204 on McDougall Road and drove about three miles to the end of the road. A very steep, brushy draws extends south into Lick Creek just west of the road's end. After carefully walking/sliding 50 to 100 yards down the slope, we got close enough to hear or see three Green-tailed Towhees in the draw. We also found several Rock Wrens, Dusky Flycatcher, Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, and several other species here.

The group ended the trip with a total of 50 bird species on our list. During the hot days of July, when bird activity has slowed in the lowlands of Umatilla County, a trip to the higher elevations in the Blue Mountains can bring a welcome relief from the heat as well as a great day of birding. Trip participants were Dave Herr, Betty Klepper, Aaron Skirvin, Virginia Storey, Lorna Waltz, and June and Duane Whitten.

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

## **Canada Goose Relocates to Pendleton from La Grande**

It's not often that we have the opportunity to learn about the history of individual birds we observe in the field. However, this past spring, a Canada Goose with a plastic neck collar (#339K, black numbers on white background) was seen several times at McKay Reservoir. The goose was always with a mate and 4 goslings. Bird banding records at the Bird Banding Program, U. S. Geological Survey, showed that this goose was banded as a gosling in 1996 near La Grande, Oregon. Brad Bales, Waterfowl Biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, banded the female goose when it "was too young to fly" in June 1996.

If you find a bird with a band or collar, please take the time to report your observation to the North American Bird Banding Program at 800-327-BAND. Information from bird banding studies helps us understand the movement, survival and behavior of birds.

## **Getting Started with Shorebird Identification**

Fall shorebird migration is just getting underway in the local area. If you spend any time birding at Cold Springs Reservoir, McKay Reservoir, Mission Ponds, Ukiah sewage ponds, or other similar habitats, you will find shorebirds between July and October. The intent of this guide is to assist those birders who are just getting started with shorebird identification.

To begin with, it is important to know which species occur within the local area during late summer and fall. If you visit shorebird habitat in Umatilla County, you will certainly come across Killdeer, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, and Long-billed Dowitcher.

In addition, you may find the following species since they are present every year: Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, and Wilson's Snipe.

Some species are present in low numbers each year but can be difficult to find: Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Pacific Golden-Plover, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Curlew, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Sanderling.

The following species have been seen in Umatilla County, but they are very rare (at least in fall), probably not present every year, and very difficult to find: Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot, Stilt Sandpiper Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Red Knot, Dunlin (more common in spring), Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, and Red-necked Phalarope.

### Descriptions of the 12 most common species.

Killdeer is one of the most common shorebirds and most people are familiar with it. They have a white belly; white collar; 2 black breast bands; orange rump and upper tail.

Each of the next five species is noticeably smaller than Killdeer:

Western Sandpiper – Dark, usually black, legs; white belly; long, tapering, down-curved bill; brownish gray back, often with rufous tint on the scapulars.

Least Sandpiper – Greenish or yellowish green legs; short, slightly down curved bill; back often brownish; brownish streaks on upper breast.

Baird's Sandpiper – Black legs and bill; slightly but noticeably larger than Western and Least Sandpipers; brownish breast; juvenile has a buffy head; wings noticeably longer than tail.

Spotted Sandpiper – Pale legs; spotted beneath (breeding adults) or white beneath (juveniles and fall/winter adults); constantly teeters/bobs; white streak on shoulder.

Semipalmated Plover – Killdeer-like, but much smaller; one dark breast band; small bill.

The following species are similar in size to a Killdeer.

Pectoral Sandpiper – Yellowish legs; overall brownish color (except belly); heavily streaked breast down to white belly.

Solitary Sandpiper – Legs olive-greenish (sometimes yellowish); prominent white eye-ring (our only sandpiper with eye-ring); white-dotted wings and back; occasionally bobs/teeters.

Lesser Yellowlegs – Long yellowish or orangish legs; body same size as Killdeer, but is much taller due to long legs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; thin, straight, dark bill, a little longer than the width of head.

The following species are noticeably larger than Killdeer:

Greater Yellowlegs – Long yellowish or orangish legs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; long bill, about 1.5 times the width of head; bill thick at base and often two-tone, appears slightly upturned.

Long-billed Dowitcher – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; white back (in flight); solid dark cap.

Wilson's Snipe – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; whitish stripes on back; whitish streak on crown.

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

### June - July Bird Sightings

It's hard to believe that summer is here and the nestlings for many species have already fledged. Mike Denny, who is doing field work in the Blue Mountains, reported that starting the first week in July he began noticing post breeding wondering by adults and flocking sub-adults birds throughout the higher elevations or the Northern Blue Mountains. During this report period the club had two great field trips. The birds found on these trips are reported in separate articles in the newsletter.

On June 25, walking near his home along the Umatilla River, Jack Simons reporting seeing a **Long-billed Curlew** flying overhead heading east. One June 26, Craig and Judy Corder, birding at Cold Springs Reservoir, found 4 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 20 **Western Sandpipers**, 8 **Least Sandpipers** and **50 Blue-winged Teal** (in one location!). On June 27, Joy Jaeger found two **Blue Grouse** near her summer home in the Blue Mountains near Albee. She took several excellent pictures that can be found on the Pendleton Bird Club's website. Undoubtedly the best bird of the reporting period was a singing **LEAST FLYCATCHER** that Craig and Judy found on June 27 at Cold Springs Reservoir. The **LEAST FLYCATCHER** is normally found in the east and has seldom been located in Umatilla County.

On June 29, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten checked the club's bluebird boxes in the Battle Mountain and Albee areas. Aaron reported that nesting was quite successful, and he did not think there was a total failure of bluebirds in any box. He noted that some boxes are being used by **Tree Swallows**, now that the Bluebirds have fledged. Later, at the Ukiah sewage ponds, Aaron and June found a number of different duck species with young as well as 11 **Western Sandpipers** and a **Lesser**

**Yellowlegs.** One June 30, Aaron, June and Duane checked the Ukiah sewage ponds and found eight different species of ducks and **52 Wilson's Phalaropes.** Later in the evening they drove to Divide Well Campground, which is located in the extreme southwestern corner of Umatilla County. Here they were able to find two **Flammulated Owls** and later in the evening another **Flammulated Owl** and a **Great-Horned Owl** along Forest Road 53 about 5 miles west of Ukiah. On July 2, Aaron found one **Greater Yellowlegs** and the **Pied-billed Grebe** still on the nest he had located earlier at Mission Ponds. On July 8, Aaron found that the **Pied-billed Grebe** nest at Mission Ponds had been disturbed, and 3 eggs or eggshells were visible in the nest. A few days later, the nest was completely gone, and no grebes were seen. On July 15, Craig and Judy found an early **Pectoral Sandpiper** near Stanfield. The same day, birding at Cold Springs Reservoir, they found 38 different species including immature **Virginia Rails** and **Double-crested Cormorants.** They also noted that the **LEAST**

**FLYCATCHER** still continued to call. On July 18, Aaron, June and Duane birded at the McNary Wildlife Area. They found six **Forster's Terns**, six **Lesser Scaup**, 120 **American White Pelicans**, 45 **Caspian Terns**, eight **Western Sandpipers**, 12 **Least Sandpipers** and one **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER.**

Fall shorebird migration is underway, with adult birds flying south from their breeding grounds. As water levels drop at Cold Springs and McKay Reservoirs, shorebirding at both these areas will begin to pick up. Check the newsletter for future field trips to both of these locations, and please continue to send your bird sighting to me, Dave Herr, at 541-276-6413 or [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net).

*Contributed by Dave Herr*

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## *Pendleton Bird Club*

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