

# Kákya Táymut

KUK-yuh TIE-moot, Umatilla Indian Translation: *Bird News*

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Volume 3, No. 1 Pendleton, Oregon January 2005

## 2004 UMATILLA COUNTY BIRDING: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

### Wow! What a year of birding the Club had.

As a group we found **259** different bird species in Umatilla County during 2004!! That is by far a record, and it might last for quite a while because no regular birds were missed.

The following is a summary of our best sightings. Only the first sighting is mentioned. The person reporting the bird probably gets credit even though other birders may have seen the bird, too. I apologize if I missed your name.

Jan 1, Mayanna Porter reported a **Common Redpoll** at her Pilot Rock feeders. Grey Elliot and Tina Jackson had 2 **Blue Jays** wintering at their Cayuse feeders.

Jan 4, Craig & Judy Corder found 2 **White-throated Sparrows** & 2 **Swamp Sparrows** at McNary Park.

Jan 9, Dave Herr had 2 **Lesser Goldfinches** come to his Pendleton feeder.

Jan 14, Nancy Brown had 1 **Tree Sparrow** come to her Hermiston feeder.

Jan 18, the Corders found 2 **Eurasian Wigeon** at Hat Rock State Park.

Feb 1, Dave found 2 **Harris' Sparrows** near Rieth.

March 20, Aaron Skirvin, Dave Herr, Becky Hiers, & Joy Jaeger found 1 **Red-necked Grebe** at McNary Park.

March 21, Dave Herr found 2 **White-headed Woodpeckers** near Albee and 1 **Sage Thrasher** on Alkali Canyon Road.

April 3, Aaron found 10 **Tri-colored Blackbirds** in Stanfield Meadows.

April 10, Malissa Minthorn had her first **Calliope Hummingbird** on McKay Creek.

April 11, Aaron found 1 **Gray Flycatcher** on Mud Springs Road east of Echo.

April 15, Jack Simons found 1 **Great Egret** at the Mission Ponds.

April 27, Aaron, June Whitten, and Bette Husted found 1 **Red-breasted Merganser** at McNary Park.

May 2, Jack found a **Black Tern** at the Mission Ponds.

May 8, the Corders found 2 **Franklins Gulls** & a **Long-eared Owl** nest at Cold Springs.

May 11, Dolly Robinson found the first **Bobolink** near Ukiah.

May 13, the Corders found the first **Bittern** at the Power City wildlife area.

May 20, Aaron found the only **Willet** of the year at the Mission Ponds.

May 21, Joy Jaeger found the first **Swainson's Thrush** near Albee. Tony Greager found the only **Harlequin Duck** at McNary Park. Dave Herr found the only **White-faced Ibis** at Cold Springs NWR.

May 24, Mike & MerryLynn Denny found 2 **Upland Sandpipers** near Albee.

June 5, the Dennys found 1 **Barred Owl** at Langdon Lake.

June 27, the Corders found 1 **Least Flycatcher** at Cold Springs NWR.

July 10, a club field trip produced several **Green-tailed Towhees** near Tollgate.

July 18, June & Duane Whitten and Aaron found 1 **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at McNary Park.

Aug 4, Dee Croteau found several **Mountain Quail** along Camas Creek near Ukiah.

Aug 10, Grey Elliot reported a **Great Gray Owl** near Thornhollow.

Aug 14, a club field trip found 2 **Stilt Sandpipers** at McKay NWR.

Aug 23, Neal Hinds found the first **Semipalmated Plover** at Cold Springs NWR.

Sept 8, the Corders found a **Northern Waterthrush** at McNary Park.

Sept 11, a club field trip found a **Sabine's Gull** below McNary Dam.

Sept 15, Neal Hinds found the first 2 **Sanderling** at Cold Springs NWR.  
 Sept 21, Neal Hinds found the only **Marbled Godwit** at Cold Springs NWR.  
 Sept 30, the Corders & Neal Hinds found the first **American Golden Plover** at Cold Springs.  
 In October, there was a **Blue Jay** invasion with up to 20 Blue Jays seen in the county.  
 Oct 10, the Corders found the first **Surf Scoter** on the Columbia River.  
 Oct 16, the Corders found 20 **Gray-crowned Rosy-finches** on Bald Mountain.  
 Oct 24, Dave Herr found 2 **Pine Grosbeaks** near Tollgate.  
 Oct 29, Aaron found a **Purple Finch** at McKay NWR.  
 Oct 31, the Corders found 2 **Glaucous Gulls** below McNary Dam.  
 Nov 7, the Dennys found a **Thayer's Gull** below McNary Dam.  
 Nov 13, the Dennys found a **Cattle Egret** near Milton-Freewater.  
 Nov 28, the Corders found a **Common Yellowthroat** at McNary Park.

By December nothing was left to find! Great job everyone!

*Contributed by Craig Corder*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### WATCHING WARBLERS BIRDERS' SOCIAL

**February 5, 2005 at Richland, Washington**

**Trip leaders: June & Duane Whitten, 276-9019.  
See article in this newsletter.**

### February 2005 Bird Club Meeting Thursday, February 10, 2005

**Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m., followed by  
"BIRDS OF MISSION PONDS"  
presented by Jack Simons**

Pendleton First Christian Church  
on Main St. across from the Arts Center

### April Bird Club Meeting Thursday, April 14, 2005 6:30 p.m.

**Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m., followed by  
Presentation by Karen Kronner**

Pendleton First Christian Church  
on Main St. across from the Arts Center

### Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count

Nineteen birders and five feeder counters participated in the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count on January 1. Our goal was to find and tally as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period within the 15-mile diameter count circle. The center of our count circle is located about 6 miles southeast of Pendleton.

On a typical Umatilla County CBC we will find 70 to 72 bird species, but the highest total count was 81 species on January 3, 1992. This year, we found 78 species on count day, the second highest species tally in the 18-year history of our CBC. Two new species, Great Gray Owl and Great Egret, were added to the count this year.

Preliminary CBC results: Western Grebe 2, Pied-billed Grebe 1, Great Blue Heron 15, Great Egret 2, Bl-cr. Night-Heron 1, Canada Goose 705, Wood Duck 5, Green-w. Teal 20, Mallard 345, Northern Pintail 3, Northern Shoveler 8, Gadwall 7, Am. Wigeon 193, Ring-n. Duck 60, Com. Goldeneye 94, Hooded Merganser 9, Com. Merganser 9, Ruddy Duck 2, Bald Eagle 9, N. Harrier 40, Sharp-sh. Hawk 3, Cooper's Hawk 2, Red-tailed Hawk 139, Rough-legged Hawk 12, *Buteo* sp. 4, Golden Eagle 5, Am. Kestrel 70, Prairie Falcon 6, Gray Partridge 1, Ring-n. Pheasant 235, Cal. Quail 104, Am. Coot 41, Killdeer 4, Ring-b. Gull 20, Gull sp. 1, Rock Pigeon 517, Mourning Dove 276, Barn Owl 1, Great Horned Owl 11, Great Gray Owl 2, W. Screech-Owl 1, N. Saw-whet Owl 1, Belted Kingfisher 9, Downy Woodpecker 3, N. Flicker 57, Pileated Woodpecker 3, Horned Lark 401, Steller's Jay 5, Black-b. Magpie 264, Am. Crow 37, Com. Raven 41, Bl.-cap. Chickadee 34, Mountain Chickadee 20, White-br. Nuthatch 1, Red-br. Nuthatch 8, Brown Creeper 2, Bewick's Wren 7, Winter Wren 1, Marsh Wren 2, Ruby-cr. Kinglet 18, Townsend's Solitaire 4, W. Bluebird 2, Am. Robin 2, Am. Pipit 35, Bohemian Waxwing 22, N. Shrike 3, European Starling 6153, Yellow-r. Warbler 1, Spotted Towhee 3, Song Sparrow 153, White-cr. Sparrow 347, Dark-eyed Junco 1134, Red-w. Blackbird 427, W. Meadowlark 160, Br. Blackbird 425, House Finch 336, Red Crossbill 2, Am. Goldfinch 48, Evening Grosbeak 2, House Sparrow 412.

In addition to the 78 species seen on count day, six species were found within the count circle during

count week but not on count day: Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hairy Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Pine Grosbeak.

Thank you count participants: Dolly Robison, Jack Simons, Russ & Connie Betts, Bob Gritsky, Karen Kronner, Dave Herr, Marilyn Cripe, Jean Wood, June Whitten, Duane Whitten, Don Cessnun, Aaron Skirvin, Becky Hiers, Jane Holmes, Caty Clifton, Kevin Blakely, Joey Blakely, Katherine Skirvin, Jeanne Jensen, and Rose Scott.

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

### **February 10 Bird Club Meeting & Potluck**

The Pendleton Bird Club meeting on February 10 will begin with a potluck at 6:30 p.m. at the Pendleton First Christian Church. Please bring a dish of your choice, your own plates and silverware, cups or glasses, and serving spoons or forks. We plan to leave the basement at the church at least as tidy as it is on our arrival without anyone having to do dishes or much cleanup. Coffee will be provided. Anyone needing additional information may contact June Whitten at [jwhitten@oregontrail.net](mailto:jwhitten@oregontrail.net), or 276-9019.

### **Watching Warblers Birders' Social**

*Editor's Note: June and Duane Whitten have volunteered to lead Pendleton Bird Club members who wish to attend the birders' social at Richland, Washington on February 5. **If you would like to participate with other club members, please contact June Whitten at 276-9019. The group will leave Pendleton (carpool from Pendleton Safeway) at 6:00 a.m.***

Can you imagine watching all of North America's eastern warblers on **February 5th**? You can do just that. Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society (LCBAS) will be holding a birders' social which includes a bird walk in the morning, a break for lunch, the DVD version of **WATCHING WARBLERS** at the Battelle Auditorium, followed by refreshments and visiting time.

The bird walk will be on Bateman Island starting at 8 am. Bateman Island is known for having just about anything show up. Come see what you can find.

The feature, **WATCHING WARBLERS**, is an hour of up-close looks at singing male eastern warblers and more. You may have seen the video, but the DVD version has better sound and picture quality. Battelle Auditorium is located at 903

Battelle Blvd off George Washington Way in the northern part of Richland. A \$5.00 donation will be requested at the door. There is seating for 300 which will be available on a first come, first served basis. The showing will start at 1 pm.

LCBAS is working with the award winning filmmakers Judy Fieth and Michael Male to make this event possible. There will be DVD's available for purchase for \$39.95. Proceeds from the sale of the DVDs will be returned to Judy & Michael to support the making of Watching WESTERN Warblers.

### **A Final Farewell**

A cold fog has settled into the Columbia Basin the past few days making Mission Ponds a dreary place to be. The water's surface now reflects the cold, steel-gray color of the sky. Bird activity has slowed considerably now that winter is just around the corner. Thanks to the fog, the pond's brightly adorned visiting waterfowl have been rendered into dull drabs of color.

I don't know what it is about fog but it depresses me to no end. It forces me indoors where I peer out the windows hoping for a peek at winter's feeble light. Given two extremes — a cold, foggy day or zero degrees on a bright, sunny day — I would gladly bundle up to walk in the sunshine — but not in fog. Even at 35 degrees fog has a way of leaking through my clothing to rob me of both warmth and spirit.

Not even the sight of our "resident" Great Egret this morning (Dec 17<sup>th</sup>) gliding across still waters excited me. I have seen this bird hunting for food more often in the river bottom than at the pond's edge in the last month. No doubt the hunting opportunities are better in the many nooks and crannies offered by the river.

I say "resident" because this particular bird seems intent on calling Mission Ponds its winter home this year. The previous "latest fall-sighting" of a Great Egret at the ponds was October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003. A few bird club members have speculated on when the cold weather would finally drive this bird south. Perhaps our egret senses El Niño lurking nearby.

That would coincide with the announcement by the federal Climate Prediction Center of a weak El Niño developing this year. Our balmy weather with less rain and snow than is typical suggests the greatest computer models on the planet may actually be correct for a change...or maybe we just need to watch the egret.

All of the cottonwood trees and willows have finally lost their leaves and put on their best winter face.

Having produced and stored food from last summer's bounty of sun, water and nutrients, the trees are enjoying a communal break before the annual cycle of renewal repeats itself in a few months.

Speaking of cycles, I came face-to-face with a haunting reality check the other day. I was a half-mile downstream from the ponds when I walked up a river embankment that in previous weeks had revealed salmon spawning in the shallows below. At 10 feet above the water's surface it was a good vantage point.

A weak cold front had produced a significant rise in the water level — enough to finally remove a few of the deer carcasses that had littered the river banks after last summer's die-off from Blue Tongue disease. I spotted no salmon this time and was about to depart when something in the water directly in front of me caught my attention.

Lying on the river bottom in about three feet of water was an oddly shaped object — perhaps a piece of trash washed downstream from the recent rain. Was it a piece of plastic tarp? Perhaps a piece of discarded PVC pipe? The current was moving too fast to identify the object but its white / ivory color contrasted nicely with the dark gravel. It was narrow in shape and perhaps two to three feet long. Not having seen the object from a previous trip to that spot, I now paused to stare into the roiling water.

Suddenly, as if on cue from an unknown source, the ripples slowed directly above the object. Then, by some strange quirk of fate, an upwelling of water magically appeared creating a window to view the object lodged amongst the rocks. This "bubble" of still water not only allowed me to *see* the object, it *magnified* the image as if a huge magnifying glass had been placed on the water's surface.

This was not a piece of trash. There, in plain sight lay the spine, neck and skull of a deer — almost certainly one of the Blue Tongue victims I had seen months before. So clear was this bubble of water that I could count every vertebrae from 20 feet. But my gaze focused on something very eerie. Staring back at me from the river's depth was the haunting eye socket of this once living creature.

That eye socket seemed to beckon from the still water, as if to say, "I am not a piece of trash. I am the fawn you almost stepped on in the tall grass in your back pasture three years ago. I am the yearling who left my tracks in your flower garden while you slept one night. I am the doe you saw feeding alongside

your horses during the cool of the evening last summer. I am the buck who filled your heart with thoughts of wilderness when you saw me run and jump over your fence. I am not a piece of trash."

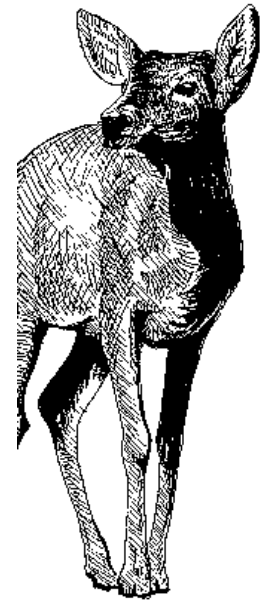
Then, in a matter of seconds, the "bubble" collapsed, the window closed and the ripples obscured the skeleton to its watery grave — its secrets forever sealed at the bottom of the river. The uneasy thought that I would be the last human to have seen the remnants of that animal were unsettling.

Since that day I've asked myself many times why that scene played-out the way it did. What are the odds of a "focusing bubble" appearing above an object in moving water? Was it Divine Intervention? If so, what was God's intent? Or was it just the play of water and rocks coming together at just the right moment?

I like to think that all living creatures are born with a spirit and that the skeleton revealed itself to me as a 'final farewell' — a humble reminder that life is short and every moment is precious. Even when you feel depressed because it is cold and foggy outside.....

Always something going on around Mission Ponds.

*Contributed by Jack Simons*



#### VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

**Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Member's Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.**

[www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)

#### Bird Checklist for McNary Wildlife Area

Ever wonder what birds you can find at McNary Wildlife Area (located near McNary Dam on the Columbia River)? The next time you visit this great birding area be sure to take along a copy of the new checklist prepared by Craig Corder. The list contains 208 species and shows seasonal abundance for each species. You can find a copy

of the checklist on the club's website [www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org). Click on Umatilla County Bird Checklists, and then scroll down to "Checklist of the Birds of McNary Wildlife Nature Area."

### December – January Bird Sightings

Well, it is now officially winter, but the weather has been relatively mild, and as of yet we have not had significant snowfall. Probably as a result of the mild weather many interesting birds were found during this report period. **BLUE JAYS** were observed in the McKay Subdivision area in Pendleton throughout the report period. The Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count was held on January 1, 2005. Since the McKay area is outside the count circle, **BLUE JAYS** were not included in the Christmas Count total. However **GREAT GRAY OWL** and **GREAT EGRET** were both new species for the count. Check the full count results reported elsewhere in the newsletter.

Birding along the Columbia River between Sand Beach and Juniper Canyon on December 22, Craig and Judy Corder noted "ten's of thousands" of **Mallards**, plus many **Canada Geese**. They also found over **100 Western Grebes**. The same day Aaron Skirvin reported 4 **Pacific Loons** and 4 **American White Pelicans** in the Columbia River below McNary Dam. Birding at Hat Rock State Park December 26, Craig and Judy counted over **600 American Wigeon** and found a **Mountain Chickadee** and an **American White Pelican**. This was the first pelican the Corder's have found at the park and the bird may be injured, as I have seen it several times since the Corder's initial report. Also on the 26th, Trent Bray found an **American White Pelican**, a **Common Loon** and 2 **Virginia Rails** at McNary Wildlife Park. The same day Trent found **50 Great-Blue Herons** and a **GREAT EGRET** in the Stanfield/Echo Meadows area. On December 27, I (Dave Herr) found a total of 10 **Pine Grosbeaks** near Tollgate.

Connie Betts is preparing a Pendleton Community Park checklist and is birding in the area almost daily. On December 30, she reported 4 **BLUE JAYS** at her feeder as well as 2 **Greater Yellowlegs** and a **SLATE-COLORED JUNCO** near the park. Jack Simon found the first **Varied Thrush** reported this year at his home on January 5. Also on January 5, while looking for the **GREAT GRAY OWLS** found during the Christmas Bird Count, Craig and Judy Corder found **25 Pine Grosbeaks** in the Poverty

Flats area. On January 6, Connie Betts found 6 **BLUE JAYS**, 2 **Great Blue Herons** and 2 **Greater Yellowlegs** near the Pendleton Community Park. The same day, Craig and Judy found over **1000 Common Goldeneye** and 3 **Barrow's Goldeneye** above McNary Dam. Birding in the Echo Meadows area January 8, Craig and Judy reported 6 **Brown-headed Cowbirds** as well as a large number of **Brewer's Blackbirds**. Craig remarked that winter sightings of cowbirds were quite rare in the 70's, but now winter sightings are almost common. Also on January 8, Aaron Skirvin and June and Duane Whitten reported the first **Wild Turkeys** of the year south of the I-84 at the base of Cabbage Hill. They then traveled to the Columbia River where they found 2 **Eared Grebes** above McNary Dam, an **Orange-crowned Warbler** near the fish viewing room and 3 **Horned Grebes** and a **Peregrine Falcon** below the dam. January 10, Sharon Simons reported a **Mountain Chickadee** at her home feeder. The next day, Jack Simons was looking out their living room window and saw 4 **Bald Eagles** (2 adults and 2 juveniles) along the Umatilla River (pretty impressive, I'm lucky to see a couple of **Dark-eyed Juncos** when I look out my living room window!). Birding in the McKay area in Pendleton on January 13, Connie Betts reported finding 2 **BLUE JAYS** at the corner of 37<sup>th</sup> and Kirk as well as 2 **Downy Woodpeckers** and 2 **Townsend's Solitaires** in the Community Park. Birding at McNary Wildlife Park the same day, Neal Hinds added **Hermit Thrush** and **HARRIS'S SPARROW** to the county year list.

June Whitten had a great yard bird on January 14. A **Northern Goshawk** sat in a tree looking over her Grecian Heights yard before flying toward McKay Reservoir. In mid-December Connie Betts reported seeing a **Northern Goshawk** in the McKay area, so this large accipiter may be wintering around Pendleton. Aaron Skirvin and the Whittens ran their monthly raptor survey on January 15. They found a total of 201 raptors on the 100-mile route including a **Merlin** and 7 (Yes, seven!) **Prairie Falcons**. Birding in the Wenix Spring area early the same day I was able to hear 2 **Great Horned Owls**, a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** and a **Western Screech-Owl**. Later in the day I found a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** and an **American Dipper** in the same area. Driving along the Kamela Road in Umatilla County, Alan Contreras (one of the co-editors of [Birds of Oregon](#)), reported finding 4 **Pine Grosbeaks**. On January 16, Alan and his party reported finding a **Black-backed Woodpecker**, and a large number of

**Northern Pygmy-Owls** in the same area. In fact, Alan reported the area along the Kamela Road was “stuffed with them”. Alan’s party also found a **Northern Goshawk** near the Poverty Flats. On January 18, Connie Betts saw 5 **BLUE JAYS**, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and a **Downy Woodpecker** in the Community Park. He’s BACK, Jack Simons reports!!! On January 19, Jack found one of the Mission Pond **GREAT EGRETS**. They left when the water froze, but now that there is open water, one returned. Will one of the birds stay until next spring? I’m sure Jack will keep checking and let us know. And finally, also on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Aaron reported seeing two **BLUE JAYS** along the highway near Wenix Springs. These may be the same birds Grey Elliot has been seeing.

A number of PBC birders share their recent bird sightings with other club members using an informal

e-mail list. Normally the sightings are timely and often include more detail than I have space to report in the newsletter. If you would like receiving these “up to the minute” reports or would like to send your report to other interested Club members via e-mail, please let me know and I’ll send you details. Of course I will still be summarizing reports for the newsletter each month and I need your sightings. Please remember that I am interested in all reports, not just rare birds. Send your reports to [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net) or give me a call at 276-6413.

*Contributed by Dave Herr*

**Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant**

**Editor for November: Aaron Skirvin 276-1948**  
[skirvins@uci.net](mailto:skirvins@uci.net)



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