



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

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SPRING AT MALHEUR

Twelve members of the Pendleton Bird Club enjoyed the spring trip to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge on April 29, 30, May 1 and 2. The trip started out with a little bad weather that got worse as the day progressed. It was raining at Battle Mountain, pouring at Ukiah-Dale Wayside (no albino Robin in sight), sleet, snow, and hail followed us into John Day, and finally thunder and lightning greeted us near Burns. However, all of this let up as we left Burns and we were able to view the great variety of ducks, including those elusive Canvasbacks, Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Curlews, Wilson's Snipe, Willet, and a pair of lingering Snow Geese on the way out of Burns.

Naturally, we were a little apprehensive about the weather on Saturday and left for Headquarters at 6:30 a.m. bundled up in coats and rain gear. It turned out we did not need them as both Saturday and Sunday were lovely days. Except for a sudden thunderstorm and downpour, thankfully brief, on Saturday, the weather was great.

Saturday we birded the Diamond area where we saw a Golden Eagle pursued by a Prairie Falcon. Quote from Russ Betts: "That is like a bomber with a fighter jet on its heels." The Golden Bomber soared steadily upward and the Fighting Falcon continued to attack for as long as we could view them.

The road through this area has been called "Hawk Alley" by our group for some time. We were surprised to find only a couple of hawks and a brave, roadside Badger along this road. The reason soon became evident as several fields were full of people shooting the numerous Belding's Ground Squirrels from makeshift balconies in the back of pickups. We certainly preferred seeing hawks making good use of the squirrels for food.

We enjoyed the rest of this loop back to the Field Station finding a huge flock of White-faced Ibis, a pair of Trumpeter Swans, a Chukar, Sandhill Cranes, and various other sightings to keep us entertained.

Could flat tires be contagious? It does seem far-fetched, but Duane had a flat tire on Saturday and Fern had one on Sunday. Just a minor glitch in our trip.

Early a.m. on both Sunday and Monday found us back at Headquarters. We added several species to our list, especially on Monday when the trees seemed alive with newly arrived birds. A lovely pair of Cassin's Finches was taking sustenance from the feeder. What a great close-up view! Golden-crowned Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Cassin's Vireo, a gorgeous and cooperative Townsend's Warbler, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak, Rufous Hummingbird, and more kept us busy for some time. The resident Horned Owl was trying to nap in his tree while the family, mother and at least two babies, were tucked safely away high up in the tower.

On Sunday, a trip to Page Springs turned out to be another highlight. While watching a Killdeer take a bath (it pays to enjoy the simple things, too), a Virginia Rail stepped out to be seen. Striking it was, too, in breeding plumage. It disappeared into a culvert. Did it think it had fooled us? No, we saw it come out on the other side and continue its search for food. Three Lark Sparrows were feeding in short grass in the campground. They were evidently tired and hungry from their migration flight as we walked all around them and viewed them to our heart's content. Lesser Goldfinch were here also.

It was great to get out of town and enjoy the birds and wildlife of Eastern Oregon. Pronghorn

Antelope, Mule Deer, Yellow-bellied Marmot, the Badger, Belding's Ground Squirrel, various rabbits, muskrat, and thirteen Elk added to our enjoyment. We put 124 species of birds on our list too! This does include an American Bittern seen only by the Tapleys south of Burns on Monday. Some of us had a brief look at a Burrowing Owl and Gray Partridge on the way home.

Those attending the spring trip were Connie and Russ Betts, Marilyn and Alan Jio, Dannell and Bob Tapley, Fern Oliver, Betty Klepper, Becky Hiers, Tanya Harrison, and June and Duane Whitten. The next scheduled trip to Malheur is Labor Day Weekend. Hopefully, more birders can join us on this fun outing.

Submitted by June Whitten

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Field Trip

Saturday, June 4, 2005

Birding in the Juniper Canyon – Stateline Wind Farm Area

Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the NE corner of the Pendleton
Safeway Parking Lot
Trip Leader: Karen Kronner

Bird Club Picnic/Barbecue

Saturday, July 9, 2005

Woodward Campground, Langdon Lake Tollgate, Oregon

Meet at 2:00 p.m. at Woodward Campground

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

THE LORD GOD BIRD

HERE ARE THE REASONS TO BE impressed by the ivory-billed woodpecker, which has emerged like a feathered ghost from the Big Woods of eastern Arkansas more than a half-century after its presumed extinction.

It's huge and beautiful. "A whacking big bird," Roger Tory Peterson wrote, nearly two feet long with a three-foot wingspan, black and white with a streak of red on the male's pterodactyl crest and a fearsome glint in its yellow eyes. To see an ivory-bill left people thunderstruck; their exclamations inspired its nickname: the Lord God bird.

It's alive. The word miracle is overused, but what else explains the survival in the 21st century of an animal considered lost to history so long ago? The ivory-bill was mourned as a mythologized victim of intense predation and habitat loss, of hunters and collectors, of the leveling of millions of acres of Southern forests into pulp and sawdust. Somehow it has endured.

It is an environmental wonder worker. The ivory-bill has had an awesome hold on people's imaginations, to the immense benefit of the environment. In the 1970's, after an Audubon official reported merely hearing the bird in a South Carolina swamp, the state spared 10,000 acres from clear-cutting. More recently, an unconfirmed sighting led to a logging moratorium in Louisiana. The ivory-bill's return is especially sweet to conservationists in Arkansas, where it could help protect the rivers and swamps in the Big Woods, a poor but lush part of Arkansas that one local environmentalist calls "our Everglades, our Yellowstone."

The struggle to preserve the natural environment is one of crushed hopes and excruciating wistfulness. But not always. The ivory-billed woodpecker is a living monument to the stubbornness of all creatures that refuse to be erased, despite all our blundering and destructive habits. Its odd nickname is a fitting tribute: not "Wow," "Geez" or "Check it out," but "Lord God," two words that capture the moment when the eyes widen, the muscles go slack and the mind reels at the wondrous things with which we share the world.

Published April 30, 2005; Author Unknown

A WET AND WINDY FIELD TRIP

FOUR HARDY PBC MEMBERS participated in the March 27 field trip. The original destination was Battle Mountain and points beyond, but because of wind, rain and what appeared to be a fair amount of snow in the mountains, the group opted to drive to Nye Junction and then return to Pendleton via Alkali Canyon and Mud Springs Road. Thus the focus of the trip changed from forested to grassland species. Even with the inclement weather the trip was quite successful. A pair of **Prairie Falcons** were setting up housekeeping in the rock cliffs south of Pilot Rock. A nesting **Ferruginous Hawk** was also observed in the area along with **Northern Harriers** and **Ferruginous, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks** hovering in the wind above the canyon walls.

The trip between highway 74 and the Reith Road yielded the grassland species normally expected this time of year. **Horned Larks** and **Western Meadowlarks** were common. Several **Savannah Sparrows** as well as the years first **Vesper Sparrow** were noted. **Chukars** were seen at Nye Junction and Mud Springs Road and several **Gray Partridge** were also seen along Mud Springs Road. This area also yielded a nesting **Great-horned Owl** and a **Ferruginous Hawk** hovering near a huge nest.

Submitted by Dave Herr

A THROW OF THE DICE

AS I WRITE THIS ARTICLE ON Monday, May 16th, the winter rains that failed to materialize in Pendleton have finally arrived. Not a downpour but a steady 6 or 7 hour drenching that should slightly ease the draught situation. Local wheat growers will be sitting around coffee shops in the Basin today talking about the “million dollar rain” that arrived just in the nick of time. But that has always been the way of commercial agriculture — a throw of the dice.

If you are patient and throw often enough, time will reward your effort. Take for example the multi-year endeavor by Terry and Jane Clarke (landowners at Mission Ponds) to establish a cover crop of native grasses surrounding Mission Ponds. Establishing these grass crops can be costly as well as frustrating because success depends so much on timing and luck — when to broadcast the seed and when the rains arrive can spell success or disaster. This year, I am happy to report, everything came together nicely

to produce a lush crop of native grasses on what was once barren ground on the east and west ends of the property. If the thought of grass vegetation doesn't excite you, then wait until you see the bumper crop of seeds that will disperse as next year's crop (see photos at www.pendletonbirders.org).

Establishing a cover crop will not only provide erosion control, it will provide excellent nesting habitat for ground nesting birds such as Western Meadowlark. Seeds from the cover crop will attract many Passerine (perching) bird species as well as Upland Game species such as Ring-necked Pheasant and California Quail.

Growing native grass can test your patience and resolve. You can bet Terry and Jane will be back next winter to “throw the dice” one more time. How fortunate that Mission Ponds has landowners who regard stewardship so highly.

The number of bird species seen at the ponds is directly related to the quality of the habitat available. Only two years ago the Club celebrated the arrival of the 100th bird specie at the ponds. Since then, Club members have reported 15 new species bringing the current total to 115.

Two new species have been added to the Mission Ponds checklist in the last 6 weeks alone — Barrow's Goldeneye and Pileated Woodpecker. Given the 259 bird species reported in Umatilla County in 2004, we can expect to see many new sightings in the months and years ahead.

Speaking of sightings, I checked my three Wood Duck nesting boxes hanging from the cottonwood trees in my back pasture early this month and can report two of my boxes had females incubating eggs. Momma Wood Duck was sitting on her eggs in one box (I could not see how many but a typical clutch size would range from 5 to 15 eggs). Not to be outdone, momma Screech Owl was sitting atop her 4 cream-colored eggs only 200 feet away in a second box. **Latest Update:** I stumbled across momma woodie with her two babies contentedly swimming in our back pond Thursday evening (May 19th).

To this mix of predator and prey, we can add three Great Horned Owl chicks and two Red-tailed Hawk chicks in their respective nests a half-mile downstream from the ponds in a cottonwood thicket. (This thicket is composed entirely of dead trees, the result of a fire that swept through the river bottom in the summer of 2003). If we include three active Osprey nests (and who knows how many more

waterfowl and perching bird nestlings), it looks like we will have a busy summer indeed!

With a new crop of avian predators and prey species gearing up for their chance at survival, maybe it is life itself that represents a “throw of the dice” and not just agriculture. Always something happening around Mission Ponds.

Submitted by Jack Simons

SIGN UP FOR THE CLUB'S FALL TRIP TO MALHEUR NWR AND STEENS MOUNTAIN

THE PENDLETON BIRD CLUB is sponsoring a fall trip to Malheur NWR/Steens Mountain on Labor Day weekend, September 2, 3, 4, and 5, 2005. We will stay at the Malheur Field Station, which gives us good access to birding areas around the refuge and Steens Mountain. Duncan Evered, Director of the Malheur Field Station, has us “penciled in” for the long weekend, but our reservation at the Field Station will not be confirmed until we send a deposit.

Since the Field Station seems to be getting busier and busier, it is apparent we need to get our deposits in early to reserve the better accommodations. We can reserve the “Owl” and the “Pelican” quarters on Labor Day weekend if we affirm our reservation early. I want to collect the deposits and mail them to Duncan by June 10. If you plan to participate in the fall trip to Malheur/Steens, please send or deliver your \$20 per person deposit to me by June 5.

Thanks for taking the time to do this now, so we are assured of satisfactory accommodations.
June Whitten 1837 SW Athens Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801 email: jwhitten@oregontrail.net phone: 276-9019.

UMATILLA COUNTY MIGRATION COUNT, 2005

ON MAY 14, NINE BIRDERS IN SIX teams, plus one feeder counter, 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 3 a.m. and finished their routes by 9:30 p.m.

This year, we found 147 species, which exceeded last year's species total of 141. All teams combined counted 6,907 individual birds for the day. Cliff Swallow again claimed the honor of the

most numerous species, with 1,167 birds counted. Cliff Swallow has captured the title each of the last three years. Nancy Brown found a swarm of nesting Cliff Swallows at the I-82 Bridge at Umatilla. She tried a novel approach to counting the swallows by counting occupied nests and multiplying by two. This method produced a total of 426 swallows, and Nancy believes this is a conservative estimate. This approach is as good as any, because it's nearly impossible to count individual swallows in the swirling swarms around their nesting colonies.

Owls were well represented in this year's count, with the bird counters reporting six species: Great Horned, Short-eared, Long-eared, Barn, Northern Saw-whet, and Burrowing. This is the first time Burrowing Owl has been reported on the count; Jack Simons and I found one perched on a fence post along Alkali Canyon Road. Russ and Connie Betts were fortunate enough to find a pair of Northern Saw-whet Owls at a nest (old Pileated Woodpecker nest hole) along the Umatilla River near Thornhollow. Another nocturnal bird, Common Poorwill, was seen along Ranch Road. This is the first time a Poorwill has been reported on the spring migration count.

Dave Herr found a pair of Three-toed Woodpeckers at Woodward Campground (Langdon Lake). Three-toed Woodpeckers are elusive in Umatilla County, so they were a great addition to the list. Dave also found a pair of Common Goldeneyes on Langdon Lake. This species probably breeds at the lake, and if we can verify breeding, this would be the first documented record of Common Goldeneye nesting in Oregon.

Joy and Steve Jaeger saw an immature Golden Eagle along Yellowjacket Road, south of Pilot Rock. They also discovered a pair of Blue-winged Teal (and got their photograph) on a small (1 acre) pond in the Umatilla National Forest near Albee. Blue-winged Teal are regular, but uncommon spring and summer visitors in the county, but this pair must have been lost, because Blue-wings are normally seen around ponds and wetlands in the lower elevations of Umatilla County.

Counting birds in the Stanfield area, Dolly Robison found Tricolored Blackbird and the hard-to-find Sora. Soras might (or might not) be plentiful in the wet meadows and marshes west of Stanfield, but they are very secretive. Dolly had a near miss with the local Great Egret at Stanfield. The egret has been seen regularly throughout the winter and spring in Stage Gulch Creek in downtown

Stanfield. Dolly couldn't find it on count day, but when she asked a couple of young boys who were playing along the creek if they had seen a large white bird, they replied, "Oh yes, it flew off when we walked down here."

Thank you to Russ and Connie Betts, Dolly Robison, Nancy Brown, Jack Simons, Joy and Steve Jaeger, and Dave Herr for your help in counting Umatilla County birds and making our count a success again.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

APRIL-MAY BIRD SIGHTINGS

AS EXPECTED, MANY NEW SPECIES have migrated into the area during this report period making for great birding and lots of new birds to report.

By April 16, Malissa Minthorn reported that all three species of hummingbirds (**Black-chinned**, **Calliope** and **Rufous**) had started to visit her feeders along Upper McKay Creek. Also on the 16th Aaron Skirvin and Duane and June Whitten found **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and a pair of **Red-naped Sapsuckers** at Emigrant Springs State Park. The next day, Aaron and the Whittens birded the southern part of the county compiling an impressive list of species that included: **2 HARRIS'S SPARROWS**, a **GRAY FLYCATCHER**, a breeding plumaged **Bonaparte's Gull** (Ukiah sewage ponds), **2 Brewer's Sparrows** a **SAGE THRASHER** and a **Western Kingbird**. Jack Simons reported a **Tundra Swan** at Mission Ponds the same day. The next day Jack saw a **Pileated Woodpecker** at the ponds, raising his total "Pond Tally" to 115 species. On April 19, Aaron spotted **6 Horned Grebes**, **4 Eared Grebes** and a **Common Loon** at McKay Reservoir, all in breeding plumage. April 21, June Whitten spotted the year's first **House Wren** in her yard. April 23, Bob and Dannell had a great day birding in the northwest part of the county, tallying more than 45 species. Some of their better birds included **Western Kingbird**, **Ferruginous Hawk**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Great Egret** and **Grasshopper Sparrow**. The same day J.R. Cook saw **2 Canvasbacks** at Wildhorse Country Club and Craig Corder reported a singing **Cassin's Vireo** in Hermiston. Birding in the southern and western parts of the county April 24, Aaron, Duane and June found a number of great birds including **8 Short-eared Owls**, a **Lark Sparrow**, **2 Vaux's Swifts**, **2 Wilson's Phalaropes** and a **Blue-winged Teal**.

One April 25, Joy Jaeger reported the years first **Chipping Sparrow**. April 29, Steve Jagers, a Portland birder, reported seeing **14 Short-eared Owls** along highway 395 south of Pilot Rock. April 30, Aaron and Jack Simon reported finding **Yellow Warblers** and **Nashville Warblers** along Iskuulpa Creek.

May 1, Aaron and Jack birded the Tollgate area. At Langdon Lake they found **3 Common Goldeneyes**. In the same area they also found **Townsend's Warblers**, a **Winter Wren**, **Vaux's Swifts**, **Fox Sparrows** and several woodpecker species. However the best bird of their trip was a **Northern Goshawk** they observed east of Langdon Lake. May 2, Rose Scott reported a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** in her yard. On May 6 Nancy Brown reported **Golden-crowned Sparrow** in her Hermiston yard. On the same day, Jack Simons decided to check and see if anyone was using the 3 large nest boxes he placed on his property near the Umatilla River. The first box was empty, but in the second box he found a nesting female **Wood Duck** (who did not fly) and in the third box a nesting **Western Screech Owl** with 4 eggs! On May 7, Bob and Dannell reported finding **2 Western Bluebirds** and **2 Chipping Sparrows** on Cabbage Hill. After birding in the Tollgate area on May 7, Aaron, Duane and June decided to wait until dark to try to find the **COMMON POORWILLS** that had been previously reported in the Coombs Canyon area. They were successful in seeing one **COMMON POORWILL** and later heard it calling. They also heard **Great-horned Owls**, **Killdeer** and **Grasshopper Sparrows** calling that night. A number of new species were found May 8. Aaron reported finding the year's first **Wilson's Warbler** and **Bullock's Oriole** at Wildhorse Golf Course and birding along the upper Umatilla River I (Dave Herr) found a **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Western Tanager**, **Warbling Vireo**, **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Hammond's Flycatcher**, **Dusky Flycatcher** and a **MacGillivray's Warbler**. Checking out the Stanfield Meadows area, Bob and Dannell found the years first **Forster's Terns** as well as **Black-necked Stilts**, **Northern Pintail**, **American Avocets**, **Ruddy Ducks**, **Yellow-headed Blackbirds**, **Canada Geese** and **Northern Shovelers**. May 10, Nancy Brown saw a bird near her home she could not identify. She knew it was some kind of pheasant, but one she had ever seen before. Finally she was able to find a picture of the bird in her [Birds of China Field Guide](#). It was a **REEVES'S PHEASANT**. Surely this bird has escaped from someone's collection, but Nancy has yet to find the

owner. On May 11, walking at the McKay Community Park, Jean Wood spotted the years first **Lewis' Woodpecker**.

The North American Migratory Bird Count was held on May 14 and a number of PBC members participated. Lots of great birds were found and the results are listed in a separate newsletter article.

Connie Betts continues to observe birds at the Pendleton Community Park and surrounding area. She reports the **Swainson's Hawks** are nesting and they even "sort of" dived bombed her twice. The Community Park **Blue Jays** have not been seen recently, but Connie still thinks they are nesting in the area and if a nest is not found, perhaps young birds will be observed. Connie also observed a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** carrying nesting material and is checking to see if this species may be breeding in the area.

Last year, Linda Dillavou photographed a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** nesting in her yard below McKay Dam. Linda reports that this year a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** is rebuilding the same nest. It seems reasonable to assume this is the same bird.

Please continue to send your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr at **276-6413** or dsherr@oregontrail.net.

PBC APRIL 23 WOODPECKER SEARCH

TEN MEMBERS OF THE Pendleton Bird Club participated in the April 23rd "Woodpecker Search" field trip. Originally planned for Tollgate, the trip was switched to the Emigrant Meacham/Summit area because snow still blocking many high elevation roads. The first stop was Emigrant Springs State Park where, among the expected species, Aaron Skirvin was able to show the group Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Golden Crowned Kinglets. At Emigrant Springs we were able to find three

woodpecker species including Red-naped Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, and a calling Pileated Woodpecker. Moving to the Summit Road the group added Hairy Woodpecker and Williamson's Sapsucker to the list of woodpecker species. After a short stop at the Iskuulpa Creek Overlook, the group decided to try birding on Cabbage Hill. However, with thunder, lightning and threatening clouds moving in, lthe group beat a hasty retreat back to Pendleton.

Submitted by Dave Herr

YOUNG HERONS THRIVING

IN SPITE OF THE RATHER COOL and rainy spring, the young herons on the Pendleton River Parkway appear to be doing very well. Two nests have four young each and these are a little over a month old. They stand up quite tall now and will soon be getting "out on a limb" to practice flapping their wings. Several of the other nests have two to four babies also. It is impossible to see into the nests when the young are sleeping. Three herons were brooding their young today so we'll have to wait until warm weather or feeding time to see them. There was a total of fourteen young visible May 10.

A hot-air balloon would be nice to hover over the nests long enough to see all of the babies. Since that is not likely, we will have to keep track of them best we can with a scope from the Parkway.

Submitted by June Whitten

Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant

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