



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 3, No. 9 Pendleton, Oregon September 2005

Malheur NWR, Steen's Mountain Worth The Wait

Twelve bird club members took part in our annual fall expedition to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge over the Labor Day Holiday. With magnificent vistas in every direction, birds galore and perfect weather to urge us onward, the trip easily exceeded our expectations. Malheur has to be one of the premier birding sites in Oregon. If you haven't been there yet, take the time to "see what the fuss is all about."

In high spirits and anticipation, we departed Pendleton early Friday morning, September 2nd. Naturally, we birded on the drive down to the refuge, taking a lunch break at Clyde Holliday State Park between Mount Vernon and John Day.

Our first birding stop in the Malheur area was the sewage ponds and roadside ponds south of Burns, which yielded quite a few shorebirds and waterfowl, including good looks at Canvasback ducks sunning themselves on a ditch bank — it's not too often you see diving ducks on land. At one of the roadside ponds a Sora strolled out of the underbrush and paraded in the shallow water in front of us. This was my first Sora. Little did we know that in a few days we would encounter a *flock* of Soras at the refuge.

At the Malheur Field Station on Friday evening, the ladies showed off their cooking skills by serving Chicken Enchiladas, fresh salad and warm buttered bread. I figured it couldn't get much better than that until Aaron brought out two of his famous home-baked berry pies for dessert. *Mmmmmm....*

A crimson sky greeted us as we prepared to depart early Saturday morning. The previous evening we had decided to make the trek to Steen's Mountain in hopes of outmaneuvering a cold front forecast to arrive that weekend. As it turned out, the cold front

never arrived and we had great weather the entire trip.

Aaron wanted to bird along the Center Patrol Road, which passes through the refuge, on the way to Steen's Mountain, so we took a quick detour at Benson Pond. Man! Did we hit the jackpot — warblers, sparrows, flycatchers, and accipiters darting in and out of foliage and waterfowl and wading birds in the marshes. As we drove down the dirt road, the tall fire lookout tower at P Ranch loomed ahead. Aaron noted that sometimes "Turkey Vultures used the tower as a roosting site." Sure enough....as we came closer we could see dozens of vultures — actually more than 80 — on the tower soaking up the sun's warmth. Just how many carcasses would it take to feed 80 vultures?

Resuming our trip south on the main highway Aaron kept pointing out the large "cut" in the ridge on the northern flank of Steen's Mountain. I was impressed by the size of that cut but, frankly, this "mountain" was looking more and more like a grass-covered hillside. As we journeyed up the grade toward the summit of Steen's Mountain, we spotted numerous raptors (mostly Red-tailed Hawks) seeking early morning thermals to aid their migration south. Numerous Savannah and White-crowned Sparrows and a few Brewer's Sparrows flew up from the grass and sagebrush. Our "target bird" though was something a little more exotic — the often elusive Black Rosy-Finch.

On the way to the summit, we stopped to converse with a young couple who told us they had journeyed all the way from Virginia to see the Black Rosy-Finch and that they had been skunked the previous

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Blue Mountain Wildlife's Fall Open House

Blue Mountain Wildlife is a nonprofit organization that accepts native wildlife for rehabilitation and offers education programs using live, non-releasable birds of prey throughout northeast Oregon and southeast Washington.

Live raptors will be on display at the Pendleton Wal-Mart Saturday, Sep. 24th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The birds will be promoting **Blue Mountain Wildlife's annual Fall Open House to be held Saturday, October 1, 2005 from 12 – 4 p.m.** Raffle tickets will be available and are \$1 each.

This year's raffle features two exciting packages. Pendleton Les Schwab and Hood River Comfort Suites are the generous sponsors of a Mount Hood Railroad Murder Mystery Dinner Train Weekend. Included are two tickets on the Murder Mystery Dinner Train and a night's lodging for two at the Hood River Comfort Suites. The Bar M Ranch, one of the oldest continuously operating guest ranches in the west, has donated a night's lodging for two at the ranch, to include a room in the Ranch House, three meals a day and any seasonal amenities and activities.

Several of the Center's education birds will be on display in front of Wal-Mart, including a red-tailed hawk, peregrine falcon, great horned owl, barn owl and American kestrel. **Wal-Mart will match up to \$1000 of ticket sales.**

Tickets can also be purchased at the Open House on Oct. 1. You need not be present to win. All proceeds from the raffle will support Blue Mountain Wildlife's rehabilitation and education programs. The Open House on October 1st will feature live hawks, owls, eagles and falcons on display during tours of the wildlife rehabilitation center, exciting falconry demonstrations throughout the afternoon, live music and a silent auction. Lunch will be served from 12 – 1 p.m.

For information about Blue Mountain Wildlife and the fall open house, call 541-278-0215.

Who: Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center

What: 8th Annual Open House

Where: Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center, 5 miles south of Pendleton, OR.

When: Saturday, October 1, noon – 4 p.m.

Driving Directions to Blue Mountain Wildlife: Located 5 miles south of Pendleton Oregon. Take I-84 Exit #209. Turn right (south) onto Southgate/Hwy 395. Travel 6 miles. Turn right off of Hwy 395 onto Arabian Drive. Turn left onto Appaloosa Lane. The Center is on the right.

The Big Sit! Bird Count

Sunday, October 9, is the date of this year's Big Sit! bird count. It begins at 12:00 a.m. on October 9 and runs for 24 hours, until 11:59 p.m. There is no guarantee anyone will be counting birds at the sites during the night hours! This does mean, however, that you can bring a chair, sit inside a seventeen-foot diameter circle, drink coffee, have snacks or lunch, and count birds all day and into the night if you choose. Or, if you can join the group for only one hour or so, that is fine also.

The Pendleton Bird Club has two circles registered in the same locations as last year. The teams are Gulls Galore, which is just below McNary Dam with the spillway in view, and Loons A Plenty, which is down the river on McNary Wildlife Area near the large pond where the Columbia River is also in view.

The Big Sit! is an international event hosted by Bird Watcher's Digest and the New Haven Bird Club. Sponsors are Swarovski and Eagle Optics. Each circle turns in all of the species it sees (or hears) to Bird Watcher's Digest. One species, called the "Golden Bird", is randomly selected by the folks from Bird Watcher's Digest. Each circle reporting the "Golden Bird" on their list is then put into a drawing. The circle drawn for the Golden Bird Award receives \$500 to promote birding or bird habitat.

We hope to see a lot of birders at McNary Dam on October 9. This event is for one and all; friends and relatives are welcome! Be sure to join the fun with the rest of the "Gulls Galore" and/or "Loons A Plenty" for as long as you care to stay. For more information, please contact June Whitten at 276-9019 or jwhitten@oregontrail.net.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Big Sit! Bird Count

Sunday, October 9, 2005

Enjoy an hour or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam at Umatilla. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! bird count, so put October 9 on your calendar! Remember this event allows participants to count the species of birds seen from a circle 17 feet in diameter. Our two circles are in the same location as last year on the Columbia River just below McNary Dam. See the article in this newsletter for more detailed information.

Contact June Whitten at 541-276-9019

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, October 13, 2005 7:30 p.m.

Presentation by Louie Dick, Umatilla Tribal Member

First Christian Church
Pendleton, Oregon
(Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, November 10, 2005 7:30 p.m.

First Christian Church
Pendleton, Oregon
(Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

September 10th Field Trip

There was actually a little rain in Umatilla County on Friday, September 9. It almost settled the dust and made for a great day on Saturday, September 10. Even though this was the official opening of the

Pendleton Round-up, eight people found time to do a little birding: Russ and Connie Betts, Kathy Ramsey, Priscilla Dauble, Ginger Shoemake, Nancy Brown, and June and Duane Whitten.

The first stop was below McNary Dam with the spillway in view. There were quite a few gulls, mostly Ring-billed. One large, first-winter Western Gull finally joined them, as did several Forster's Terns.

Wood Ducks were plentiful in the ponds at the McNary Wildlife Area. Yellow-rumped Warblers roamed the tree tops joined by at least one Orange-crowned and one first-year Wilson's Warbler. One Common Loon was diving near the shore along with the usual White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, and Common Mergansers.

The group decided to check out Cold Springs Reservoir and possibly have our lunch there. Hundreds of shorebirds, gulls, ducks, and geese held our interest for some time. Western, Least, Baird's, and Pectoral Sandpipers, both Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitchers, and over two hundred Killdeer kept us busy sorting through the birds. In fact, Nancy Brown had a hard time getting anyone to pay attention to the geese. She finally got us looking at her discovery of 14 Greater White-fronted Geese resting with a huge flock of Canada Geese. Great find, Nancy!

It was hard to leave Cold Springs as there were surely some Black-bellied Plovers out there somewhere. We did not find them and finally resorted to eating our lunch. We had fifty species for the morning and a lot of fun, too.

Contributed by June Whitten

Swainson's Hawk??? Yes!

April 11, 2005, we observed a large hawk building a nest (or adding to an old crow's nest) in the middle of Pendleton Community Park, which is located along McKay Creek in southwest Pendleton. The next day the hawk moved its nest building to a cottonwood tree along McKay Creek, still in the park. On April 13, Aaron came to make the identification.

Fortunately, the bird put on a very good display at the nest, and then flew over our heads. Aaron paused and then began to describe the wing pattern (pale leading edge) and the wing tips (up). "Our" Swainson's Hawk (we now had a name for the bird)

was a dark color morph. Interestingly, the male (dark) and the female (intermediate in color) appeared to be different color morphs.

For several days, we continued to see only one hawk at the nest site. On the evening of May 5, we observed two Swainson's for the first time, which indicated a female had arrived, silhouetted in the moonlight. We made almost daily visits to watch the nesting activity. The nest was completed, and the female began incubating the eggs by mid-May. From our observations, it appeared that mom did most, if not all, of the nest sitting. During the first week of June, the eggs hatched. We would walk to the row of mailboxes on SW 37th Street (just west of the bridge), lift our binoculars and be dive-bombed by the male. It got to be a game: just putting our hands on the binocs would bring him from his perch in a nearby tree or light post.

The male caught small rodents and ate them while sitting on top of a light post. He was constantly harassed by an American Kestrel, which led us to believe there was a kestrel nest nearby. If the Kestrel would wander too closely to the Swainson's nest, the male Swainson's chased the Kestrel away. We are not sure when the dad disappeared, but we did not see him after mid June.

Because the nest was situated in the top of the cottonwood tree, we could not see the chicks until June 13 when we identified two white fluffs just poking above the rim of the nest. As they grew, the chicks took turns sitting on the edge of the nest, thrashing their wings. So vigorous was their thrashing, we couldn't believe they didn't knock each other out of the nest. Mom often perched on the edge of the nest, too.

On July 11, one of the young hawks flew a short distance from the nest for the first time, not being very choosy on a landing spot. Poor landings and choices of landing spots went on until July 18 when they fledged. By this time, they had most of their juvenile plumage, making for two handsome hawks.

Our last sighting of the hawks was on August 23; there were three Swainson's circling over the ridge to the west of the park. The nest was beautifully constructed; strong winds during the summer couldn't bring down the well-constructed nest. Without the hawks, however, the nest now looks dark and uninviting.

Although Swainson's Hawks nest locally in agricultural and grassland habitats, this is the first reported nesting of this species of hawk within the city limits of Pendleton.

Birds of Oregon: A General Reference (2003), pages 155-156, has a good discourse on the Swainson's Hawk. "Our" hawks fit the description and behavior patterns, for example, the male arriving at the nest site sooner than the female, the male gathering the food, and his disappearance during the nestling period. Two differences were the timing of egg-laying and hatching, which were about one to two weeks earlier than usual for Swainson's Hawks.

Contributed by Connie and Russ Betts

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two days. Today would be their last chance. A tad concerned now, we pushed on. Finally, after passing massive glacial canyons (Little Blitzen Gorge and Big Indian Gorge) we pulled into the parking area at East Rim Overlook, where we hoped fate would reward our efforts.

I really was not sure what to expect — more grasslands, I suppose — but was totally unprepared when I took my first look "over the edge". Of course the panorama at 9,700 feet elevation was spectacular but looking down those steep moon-surface cliffs to the Alvord Desert below was nothing short of breathtaking. While I was busy taking in this awesome sight, someone yelled, "There's one! No two! Beneath that thistle plant." With all eyes strained on the Steen's Mountain Thistle (with a Pine Siskin conveniently munching on the thistle's flower seeds) we spotted what we had come to see — the Black Rosy-Finch. For the next hour we watched singles, doubles and small groups and finally a flock of more than 100 Rosy-Finches zoom in and out of the rock cliffs and boulder crevasses. Awesome sight!

Later that morning we spotted Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, American Kestrels, accipiters and numerous buteos soaring, hovering, and playing in the breeze rising off the mountain bluffs. Since noon was rapidly approaching someone suggested we head over to a place called Kiger Gorge to eat lunch.

There are few words in the English language that do justice describing Kiger Gorge! To appreciate the size and configuration of the gorge, just imagine a giant steam shovel scooping out a perfectly

symmetrical canyon one mile wide by one-half mile deep that goes on for miles and miles. I took a few shots with my camera knowing there was no way to record the scale of this natural wonder. It is said that Kiger Gorge may be the most perfectly preserved glacial valley in North America.

As we finished our lunches at the overlook, serendipity struck: two or three club members turned just in the nick of time to see a large bird flush from the grassy slopes and land nearby. Shouts of “*Sage Grouse! Sage Grouse!*” could be heard. (PERSONAL NOTE: Sensing this obvious *faux pas* — it was a GREATER Sage Grouse, mind you — I refrained from correcting excited club members at that moment for fear they might throw me into the gorge....) This was the first time any club member had seen this species on Steen’s Mountain — what a treat!

The balance of the day was spent returning to the Field Station where, once again the gals prepared another delicious dinner, this time a hearty beef stew. Since we had only birded a mere 14 hours that day, Aaron called for volunteers to hit the dirt roads near the Field Station to look for Common Poorwills. A few of us were up to the challenge, so off we went hoping to spot a “golden eye” alongside the roadway. (The eyes of a Poorwill reflect a golden color when a car’s headlights strike the eye’s retina.)

Not too far into our nocturnal quest we spotted a very large bobcat crossing the road ahead of us. That got our adrenaline going again, just in time to see what we had hoped for — a Common Poorwill “helicoptering” from the roadside ahead of us. Chalk up another one for the PBC!

Sunday morning brought a few high clouds but not enough to deter us from our planned activity: to bird around the Refuge Headquarters then charge off into the marsh along the Center Patrol Road. There were not a lot of birds at Headquarters that morning but we did manage to see a warbler called an American Redstart. They are not common so it was a nice way to start the morning. Then, just before departing the parking area, a pair of White-faced Ibis’s made their appearance — another first-bird for the trip.

Driving into the marsh we stopped at the first body of water, scoped through flocks of waterfowl and shorebirds then walked down to a little pot hole of water not 20 feet across. Feeding on the duck weed were two juvenile Cinnamon Teal, totally oblivious to 12 people gawking at them. Suddenly there was

movement at the base of the cattails along the pond’s edge. A small, shy chicken-like bird was slowly making its way to the water’s edge. Imagine our surprise when one of the marsh’s most secretive birds appeared in the open only 20 feet away. Slowly the Sora circled the little pond to give us great camera shots. That’s when we spotted a second bird sneaking through the cattails. This ‘mysterious stranger’ was slightly larger in body size and had a longer bill. We quickly recognized it as another elusive marsh bird — the Virginia Rail.

Leaving the Sora and Virginia Rail behind we continued out into the marsh where we came upon an awesome gathering of Black-crowned Night-Heron, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, White-faced Ibis, waterfowl and shorebirds. What a sight (and ruckus!) they made.

Just down the road we stopped at a pond to count 10 juvenile Ruddy Ducks and more juvenile Cinnamon Teal. A canal provided the pond with water and was now starting to dry up, exposing mud flats for birds to feed. And, right on cue, we spotted a mixed *flock* of 8 Virginia Rails and Soras feeding amongst the cattails and on the mud flat within 20 feet of the edge of the road. When was the last time you saw a flock of rails???

As the day progressed we did more birding but also took time to visit some of the historic towns and sights nearby, including the town of Diamond, Frenchlen Hotel and the Peter French Round Barn.

Monday dawned bright and clear as club members prepared for one last drive to Headquarters. The resident Great Horned Owls could be seen high in a tree peering down at us this morning. [Yay! *Ed.*] A wide variety of migrating birds was visiting that morning, including Cassin’s Vireo, Williamson’s Sapsucker, Lewis’s Woodpecker, Western Tanager, Wilson’s Warbler, flycatchers and 2 or 3 species of sparrows.

Time was running short so we decided to take in one last tourist attraction — the Peter French Sod House and adjoining buildings on the refuge property. A refuge employee shared his knowledge of the history of the local area dating back to the late 1800s when cattle barons “ruled the roost.” As disparaging as that thought may sound, ironically, it was this very plundering of the marsh’s ecosystem (as well as heron and egret plume hunters) that resulted in President Theodore Roosevelt declaring Malheur a

bird sanctuary under Federal protection in the early 1900s.

By mid-morning we were packed and ready to head back home. Driving out of the Field Station my mind made a connection between the senseless destruction the early settlers had imposed on the marsh and seeing a solitary Great Egret nest containing two nestlings sitting atop a cottonwood tree at the entrance to the Peter French Sod House. To me, the nesting egret family was an inspiring symbol of the enduring tenacity of wildlife in the refuge and how they had overcome man's intrusions to make this a unique place for future Oregonians to enjoy.

Bird On!!

Submitted by Jack Simons

Fall 2005 Migration Count

On September 17, 2005, Pendleton Bird Club members conducted the 2005 Fall North American Migration Count in Umatilla County. Eleven birders in eight teams drove the backroads, hiked through forests and fields, and scoped the reservoirs, ponds, and rivers throughout Umatilla County searching for and tallying as many birds as possible in one day.

Dolly Robison and Nancy Brown counted in the west county area, and Cold Springs Reservoir was the birding hotspot, producing a total of 2,370 birds. Highlights for their efforts were a juvenile Sabine's Gull seen by Nancy at McNary Dam; 247 American White Pelicans; 1149 Mallards; 1 American Avocet; 2 Black-necked Stilts found by Dolly at Wanaket ponds; 16 Pectoral Sandpipers; 86 Sandhill Cranes; 94 Lesser Yellowlegs; and 3 Common Nighthawks.

Russ and Connie Betts recorded 32 species on their drive up the Umatilla River and Cabbage Hill. A Common Goldeneye was a surprise find at Wildhorse Golf Course ponds. They found two elusive American Dippers near the Umatilla Forks and two Pileated Woodpeckers. They also had the distinction of reporting the highest tally of American Coots for the day: 50 birds, all at Wildhorse GC ponds.

Duane and June Whitten spent a few hours birding in the McKay Reservoir and Tutuilla Flats areas, prior to a lunch engagement at Bar M Ranch, and recorded 34 species. In the limited amount of time they had to count birds, they found 32 American Pipits at McKay Res.; 1 Spotted Sandpiper at McKay Reservoir; and

64 White-crowned Sparrows. On their drive back to Pendleton from Bar M, June and Duane saw 15 Wild Turkeys at Thornhollow, the only Wild Turkeys reported for the count.

Counting in the Tollgate area, Dave Herr found 36 species. Highlights included 3 Townsend's Warblers; 4 Fox Sparrows; a Winter Wren; a Merlin, 2 Williamson's Sapsuckers; 1 Red-naped Sapsucker; and 5 Common Goldeneyes at Langdon Lake.

Bob and Dannell Tapley counted birds along the Umatilla River from Rieth to Nolin and in the grasslands habitats along Alkali Canyon, Coombs Canyon, Mud Springs Canyon, and Birch Creek Roads southwest of Pendleton. Highlights of their day's birding included a loose flock of 11 Sage Thrashers along Mud Springs Canyon Road; more than 230 Violet-green and Tree Swallows along the river and lower Birch Creek; 1 Merlin; 181 Horned Larks; 1 Burrowing Owl at the nesting burrow along Alkali Canyon Road; 165 White-crowned Sparrows; and 1 river otter.

Counting in the Mission and Pendleton areas, Jack Simons found 44 species. Among his highlights were 2 Great Egrets at or near Mission Ponds; 4 Cassin's Vireos; 1 Western Wood-Pewee; 11 Gray Partridges; 20 Vaux's Swifts; and 3 Black-crowned Night-Herons.

I counted birds in the Pilot Rock, Vinson, Gurdane, and Ukiah areas of the county. Highlights included a flock of 31 Great Egrets at Ukiah's sewer ponds; 50 Chukars; 48 Gray Partridges; 1 Loggerhead Shrike; 2 Eurasian Collared-Doves at Pilot Rock; 6 Clark's Nutcrackers; 1 juvenile Grasshopper Sparrow; and 3 Sanderlings.

The bird counters reported a total of 11,000 individual birds and 130 species. These are the highest totals for any fall migration count in Umatilla County. Last year, for example, we tallied a total of 9,277 individual birds and 121 species. Thank you to all who made our count another success. The results of your efforts:

Canada Goose 674, Tundra Swan 1, Wood Duck 80, Gadwall 21, American Wigeon 32, Mallard 1461, Cinnamon Teal 6, Northern Shoveler 7, Northern Pintail 3, Green-winged Teal 18, Ring-necked Duck 9, Bufflehead 1, Common Goldeneye 6, Hooded Merganser 1, Common Merganser 17, Ruddy Duck 30, Chukar 50, Gray Partridge 59,

Ring-necked Pheasant 112, Wild Turkey 15, California Quail 232, Pied-billed Grebe 7, Eared Grebe 4, Western Grebe 11, American White Pelican 249, Double-crested Cormorant 34, Great Blue Heron 32, Great Egret 35, Black-crowned Night-Heron 6, Turkey Vulture 20, Osprey 8, Northern Harrier 33, Sharp-shinned Hawk 3, Cooper's Hawk 3, Swainson's Hawk 9, Red-tailed Hawk 75, Golden Eagle 4, American Kestrel 125, Merlin 2, Prairie Falcon 8, American Coot 83, Sandhill Crane 86, Semipalmated Plover 2, Killdeer 78, Black-necked Stilt 2, American Avocet 1, Greater Yellowlegs 45, Lesser Yellowlegs 95, Spotted Sandpiper 1, Sanderling 3, Western Sandpiper 1, Least Sandpiper 4, Baird's Sandpiper 5, Pectoral Sandpiper 16, Long-billed Dowitcher 39, Wilson's Snipe 9, Sabine's Gull 1, Ring-billed Gull 568, California Gull 4, Herring Gull 1, Common Tern 6, Rock Pigeon 251, Mourning Dove 248, Eurasian Collared-Dove 2, Great Horned Owl 1, Burrowing Owl 1, Common Nighthawk 3, Vaux's Swift 55, Belted Kingfisher 17, Williamson's Sapsucker 2, Red-naped Sapsucker 1, Hairy Woodpecker 3, Northern Flicker 62, Pileated Woodpecker 3, Western Wood-Pewee 2, Say's Phoebe 26, Cassin's Vireo 5, Loggerhead Shrike 1, Steller's Jay 7, Clark's Nutcracker 6, Black-billed Magpie 358, American Crow 31, Common Raven 50, Horned Lark 193, Violet-green Swallow 130, Tree Swallow 100, Barn Swallow 123, Black-capped Chickadee 2, Mountain Chickadee 31, Red-breasted Nuthatch 25, Brown Creeper 1, Rock Wren 5, Bewick's Wren 1, House Wren 2, Winter Wren 1, Marsh Wren 1, American Dipper 3, Golden-crowned Kinglet 14, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 30, Western Bluebird 38, Mountain Bluebird 22, Townsend's Solitaire 2, American Robin 100, Sage Thrasher 15, European Starling 1200, American Pipit 38, Cedar Waxwing 6, Orange-crowned Warbler 4, Yellow Warbler 2, Yellow-rumped Warbler 260, Townsend's Warbler 3, Western Tanager 1, Spotted Towhee 7, Chipping Sparrow 86, Vesper Sparrow 30, Savannah Sparrow 142, Grasshopper Sparrow 1, Fox Sparrow 4, Song Sparrow 36, White-crowned Sparrow 978, Dark-eyed Junco 49, Red-winged Blackbird 172, Western Meadowlark 183, Brewer's Blackbird 749, Blackbird sp. 56, Brown-headed Cowbird 155, House Finch 69, Red Crossbill 20, Pine Siskin 41, American Goldfinch 65, House Sparrow 116.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

August – September Bird Sightings

I can always tell fall is approaching when I start seeing skunks in the early morning under my bird feeders (they eat the sunflower seed scattered by sloppy **House Finches**). This morning (Sept. 20), there were three. The **White-crowned Sparrows** have also returned to the valley, another harbinger of the approaching fall.

This period, birding has been focused at several well-known local locations and my report will concentrate on these locations. The Club has also hosted several field trips this report period and I have not listed the species found on these trips. Check the individual reports located in this newsletter for trip results.

McKay Reservoir: The water has continued to drop at McKay throughout the report period, producing varying amounts of shorebird habitat. On August 22, Ray Korpi, returning from the Oregon Field Ornithologist meeting in La Grande reporting finding **3 STILT SANDPIPERS** and **2 Baird's Sandpipers** at McKay. Birding McKay the morning of August 24, Ginger and Roger Shoemake reported finding **35 Red-necked Phalaropes**, **12 Greater Yellowlegs**, **5 Lesser Yellowlegs**, **20 Long-billed Dowitchers**, **5 Killdeer** and **200 Western/Least Sandpipers** in a mixed flock. Birding later in the day, Aaron Skirvin was able to add **1 STILT SANDPIPER** and **3 Baird's Sandpipers** to the day list. On September 8, Aaron reported finding **2 SANDERLINGS** among with about **50 Western Sandpipers**. He also found a lone adult **Tundra Swan** at the upper end of the Reservoir. On September 11, Russ and Connie Betts were able to re-locate one **SANDERLING** along with **Baird's** and **Pectoral Sandpipers**. They reported the **Tundra Swan** was also present.

Cold Springs Reservoir: Although the draw down of Cold Springs Reservoir started later than at McKay, Cold Springs has reached it's minimum depth, providing acres of excellent habitat. Retuning from the Oregon Field Ornithologists meeting on August 21, Dave Irons reported finding 12 shorebird species at Cold Springs including **1 STILT SANDPIPER**, **1 SANDERLING**, **1 SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** and over **14 Baird's Sandpipers**. Birding the area August 24, Neal Hinds reported finding a couple of **SANDERLINGS** and several **Semi-palmated Plovers**. Birding the area on August 30, Aaron and June Whitten found all the expected shorebirds including **1 SANDERLING** and **8 Stilt Sandpipers**.

However, their most exciting find was an adult **SABINE'S GULL**. On September 5, Neal Hinds found the year's first **AMERICAN GOLDEN - PLOVER**. On September 15, Neal observed **150 Sandhill Cranes** flying over the Reservoir.

Umatilla County Grasslands: The grasslands west and south of Pilot Rock have provided good birding all summer. Although the **Burrowing Owls, Short-eared Owls** and most sparrows appear to have left the area, this is still a great place to see **Chukars** and **Gray Partridge**, especially along the Gurdane road near the highway 74 junction. If you want to check this area out, do it before the opening of hunting season **October 8**, after which game birds will be difficult to find.

Other Area Sightings: On August 29, Joy Jaeger reported seeing 9 **Blue Grouse** at her summer home near Albee. Joy also reported an immature **Northern Goshawk** in the same area and is concerned it may scare away the grouse. On August 30, Jack Simons reported finding a mature **Barn Owl** and 2 **Turkey Vultures** at his home near Mission. **Great Egrets** continue to be seen at Mission Ponds. On September

8, Rose Scott reported her daughter had seen one and Jack reported one September 8 and 10. On September 14, birding at McNary Dam, Nancy Brown reported seeing a number different species including 2 **Blue-winged Teal**. On September 17, Nancy reported finding a juvenile **SABINE'S GULL** at McNary Dam spillway and the following day Aaron found 2 **juvenile SABINE'S GULLS** and 15 **Common Terns** at the Dam.

The Fall Migratory Bird Count was held Saturday September 17. There were lots of interesting birds found, and the report for the count is listed separately. And as I noted above, don't forget to check out the detailed reports in this newsletter for results of PBC field trips held during this report period.

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

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