



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

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Willamette Valley Birders Visit Umatilla County

Ten members from the Salem Chapter of the Audubon Society and two from the Corvallis Chapter arrived in Pendleton on Thursday, June 8. A get-acquainted dinner was held Thursday evening in the banquet room at Roosters Restaurant with seven members of the Pendleton Bird Club attending also.

Both Friday and Saturday were full days of birding in the Blue Mountains with lots of birds and plenty of views of eastern Oregon in all her spring finery!

Friday started at 5:30 a.m. with a visit to the ponds at Wildhorse Golf Course, then a stop at the Wetland Community Park at Mission and a trip up the Old Cabbage Hill Road. Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Gray Catbirds, Lazuli Buntings, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Fox Sparrows were plentiful. Then, going by St. Andrew's Mission, we went up the Umatilla River near Homli and then to Thornhollow. Veery, Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Willow and Western Flycatchers were some of the birds seen along the Umatilla River. We went over the hill at Thornhollow and took the Eagle Creek Road into Weston. We had snacked on juice and fruit earlier in the morning, but breakfast at the Long Branch in Weston was very tasty, plus a colorful location and decor.

More scenic views awaited us on the Tollgate Highway, and it is so lush and green! We had to confess, however, that the wonderful shades of green are due to the recent rains and will all too soon turn to browns and golds.

A small disappointment, due to road construction on Tollgate Highway, was that we could not turn onto the McDougal Road, which offers spectacular views

of the North Fork Umatilla Wilderness Area and great birds, too.

Instead of taking McDougal Road, we drove straight to Target Meadows Campground. This spot did not disappoint us as we had Wilson's and Townsend's Warblers, Brown Creeper, and an American Three-toed Woodpecker, a life bird for many of our guests. Because we couldn't access McDougal Road earlier, we substituted a short trip to Burnt Cabin Trailhead instead, which offered up great birding. Calliope Hummingbird, Dusky Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, a drumming Ruffed Grouse, Red-naped Sapsucker, and many more species entertained the group for over an hour.

We drove back to Woodward Campground at Langdon Lake for a lunch-snack break. We saw 4 female goldeneyes on the lake, and the usual discussion ensued over their identity: female Common Goldeneyes vs. Barrow's Goldeneyes. We were also treated to Spotted Sandpiper, many singing Townsend's Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Hammond's Flycatcher.

We returned to Pendleton for an early dinner at Shari's Restaurant where several Pendleton Bird Club members joined the group. We then drove to upper McKay Creek to the home of Malissa and Mike Minthorn-Winks. Along the way, on Tutuilla Flat, a pair of spectacular Long-billed Curlews posed along the road for everyone to see. Arriving at upper McKay Creek, we were greeted by Malissa's parents, Pat and Les Minthorn, who led us to the hummingbird spectacle on the back deck. Their dozens of hummingbirds were so much fun to watch coming in to feed at twelve feeders; Calliope, Black-chinned and Rufous entertained us until nearly dark.



After breakfast on Saturday morning and a brief tour of McKay Reservoir, we drove out to Coomb's Canyon Road to find our club's logo bird. The Grasshopper Sparrows were quite cooperative and was another life bird for several people.

Chukars, another life bird for some of our visitors, were plentiful and in full view along East Birch Creek Road. Yellowjacket Road was also productive, where we had good looks at Bullock's Oriole, Willow Flycatcher, Black-headed Grosbeak, Turkey Vulture, and Vesper Sparrow. We stopped for lunch at the summit of Yellowjacket Road, and, fortuitously, our lunch stop was about 60 feet from a Williamson's Sapsucker nest. As we ate lunch, the group was entertained by the parent Williamson's as went in and out of the nest to feed their babies.

The memorial to the 1878 war at the intersection of Albee Road and Yellowjacket Road near Albee was an interesting historical sidelight to the trip. The war ended with the Battle of Birch Creek, for which Battle Mountain State Park is named. On the way to Battle Mountain State Park, a Clark's Nutcracker was a popular sighting along Albee Road, as were the Western Bluebirds and their nestlings in a nest box. Another pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers at the day-use area at Battle Mountain park gave everyone close looks at this beautiful woodpecker. At Battle Mountain Summit, we found a pair of nesting Pygmy Nuthatch and several Western Bluebirds.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Field Trip (tentative)

Tollgate Birding

Saturday, July 8, 2006

Annual Bird Club Picnic/Barbecue

Saturday, August 5, 2006

**Woodward Campground at Langdon Lake,
Tollgate, Oregon**

Meet at 3:00 p.m. at Woodward Campground
Stay tuned: more information will be provided in
upcoming newsletters.

BIRD OF THE MONTH - COMMON

POORWILL (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*)

The Common Poorwill is an uncommon bird that summers in the western half of the United States and winters in Mexico and the southern edge of Arizona and California. Along with other Nightjars and Nighthawks, they are nocturnal and not readily seen.

Common Poorwills feed at night, usually from the ground, flying moth-like to capture insects in their mouths and skimming silently, low over the ground. The facial bristles are specialized feathers that may function like the whiskers of a cat to amplify sensations of touch. They also drink water by fluttering open-mouthed over the surface of the water.

The Common Poorwill is one of the smallest Nightjars at only 7¾ inches long and a wingspan of 17 inches. Their cryptic coloration varies, some individuals being much lighter overall than others. They have many shades of brown, beige, and gray with a slight white collar on the front of the neck. There are small white corners on the edge of the tail, which may show in flight.

Mostly ground dwellers, Common Poorwills choose arid to semi-arid habitat that includes brush, scrub, prairie, and often rocky canyons. The nest is really "no nest," where the eggs are laid on the ground, in gravel, or a flatish rock. It is often partly shaded by shrubs and on or near steep hills with dead grass. The nest is a perennial site that the Poorwills return to annually.

Usually 2, one-inch eggs, pinkish to cream with lavender mottling, are laid. If disturbed on the nest, the adult attempts to lure the intruder away by tumbling and hissing through its widely opened mouth. Typically, Common Poorwill fledglings can fly at an early age of about ten-days old.

Poorwills are named from their call, which is a low whistled "poor will," with the accent at the beginning of "will" and dropping at the end. They are usually easier to hear than see. Poorwills may become torpid at night in cold weather, where they can reduce their body temperature to close to the surrounding air temperature. This lowers their metabolic rate and conserves energy. There are some reports of Poorwills hibernating, but more research is required on this subject.



It has been exciting to find Common Poorwills on the Gurdane Road this year, just a few miles from Highway 395 South. They were once fairly common on the Coombs Canyon Road, but none were located there this year. There must be other areas in Umatilla County where they occur. More research is needed on this bird, both locally and generally, to better understand its distribution and life history.

Contributed by June Whitten

(Willamette Valley Birders Visit Umatilla County - Continued from Page 2)

The Bobolinks at Ukiah performed on cue, and we were very pleasantly surprised to actually see a Gray Partridge at Ukiah, another life bird for several of our guests. A short trip to Ukiah sewage lagoons produced several species of waterfowl, as well as 3 Wilson's Phalaropes and very distant views of 3 flying Long-billed Curlews.

After dinner at The Thicket Cafe in Ukiah, we were entertained by Cassin's Finches and a Red Crossbill at a feeder in Ukiah. Then we headed south out of Ukiah to USFS Road #55, which passes through the Tower Burn. Our primary goal was to find Green-tailed Towhee and Lewis's Woodpecker, and we weren't disappointed. Green-tailed Towhees responded to a recording of their songs, and we got good looks at a couple of towhees. Lewis's Woodpeckers were busy foraging among the snags in the old burn. Other birds observed here were Lincoln's Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, and MacGillivray's Warbler. We made an attempt to find a Black-backed Woodpecker along the 55 Road just outside the burn area, but we were not able to locate this hard-to-find species. Before reaching Highway 395, we all got good looks at a badger as it waddled down the middle of the road.

After a short rest stop at Ukiah-Dale State Park at dusk, the group split up: a couple of cars headed back to Pendleton and the rest of the group headed west on USFS Road #53 toward Divide Well Campground to search for Flammulated Owl. On the way out to Divide Well, we spotted a small herd of bull elk in the headlights. The elk suddenly appeared as ghostly forms in the trees along the road, and gave us a short look before they trotted off into the dark forest.

It was after 10 p.m. when we arrived at Divide Well. However, it took us only a few minutes to call up a Flammulated Owl, which called

and circled around us. Unfortunately, other than brief silhouette views of it flying from tree to tree, the tiny owl managed to stay hidden in the trees. Try as we might with flashlights, we could not see this cryptic owl in the branches.

Our final target bird for Saturday (which was rapidly approaching Sunday) was the Common Poorwill. We planned to look for them along Gurdane Road. As we were driving back to Highway 395 from Divide Well, and with visions of Common Poorwill dancing in my head, I (Aaron) spotted a Common Poorwill in the headlights along the gravel road. It did not fly as we passed by the bird before I could get the car stopped, and I announced my sighting to the others over the walkie-talkie. The fact that it didn't fly as we passed by should have been my first clue. Getting out of the vehicles, we discovered it was actually the very rare "Rock" Poorwill, the "fossilized" and larger version of the Common Poorwill. A little embarrassed by my misidentification of a rock for a bird, I ushered the rock off the road (by means of a swift kick) so no one else would be tempted to make the same mistake.

On the way to Gurdane Road, we stopped briefly at Battle Mountain State Park to see if we could call up a Northern Saw-whet Owl. But, we had no luck with the owls that had been so responsive just a month ago. After traveling about a mile and half on Gurdane Road, we spotted a real Common Poorwill on the left side of the gravel road. The Poorwill stayed put while we all got out and viewed it in the lights of the car. Everyone had a chance to see the bird through a spotting scope from a distance of 50 to 60 feet! Soon another Poorwill flew in, joined the first one briefly, and left. The second Poorwill flew in and landed three times, while the original one clung to its edge of the road. The second one was much lighter than the other, and such color variation is not uncommon among Poorwills. Or, it's possible the darker bird may have been a juvenile.

The Common Poorwill, which was a life bird for some of our guests, was our last bird of the day, or rather the first bird sighted on Sunday. We arrived back in Pendleton after 1 a.m. Sunday morning, tired but happy birders!

Later Sunday morning (about 7:30 a.m.), Aaron and Bob and Dannell Tapley led the group along the Rieth-Echo Highway to view the White-throated Swifts. The swifts readily cooperated, as we spotted them flying next to the basalt cliffs before we got out



of the cars. We proceeded to show our guests the birding hot spots in the west end of Umatilla County (Yoakum, Nolin, Stanfield Meadows, McNary Wildlife Area, Cold Springs Reservoir), and found, among other species, Lark Sparrows, Sage Thrashers, avocets, stilts, Bewick's Wrens, American White Pelicans, Caspian Terns, a Clark's Grebe, and a Virginia Rail. All in all, the weekend produced about 141 species of birds in Umatilla County.

Our visitors from Salem and Corvallis were a wonderful group of people to take birding, and they were very appreciative of the efforts of the Pendleton Bird Club to see they had a good time, saw beautiful scenery, and best of all--what they came to see--birds! Many thanks to our new friends from the Willamette Valley for their cooperation and patience in making their visit a great birding experience: Glen Lindeman, Dick Gettis, Eugenia Becker, Kathy Patterson, Paula Vanderheul, Marcia Cutler, Phil and Maureen Caudill, Vivienne Torgeson, Wes Craven, and Janet and Kieth Williams.

Also, thank you so much to the Salem/Corvallis birders for their generous donation of \$120 to the Pendleton Bird Club. The club will put their donation to good use, probably in the production of a birding site guide for Umatilla County.

Plans are in the formative stages for a Pendleton Bird Club field trip to the Willamette Valley for a weekend of birding with members of the Salem Audubon Society! Stay tuned for details as the plans develop.

Contributed by June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin

May - June Bird Sightings

Bird finding in Umatilla County from mid May through mid June 2006 has been fairly good – considering the frequent rain showers and occasional thundershowers and torrential downpours. If you had a chance to do some birding between rain showers, you might have found the birds very active, as they tried to make up for lost time while waiting out the weather. While we were weathering the storms locally, Dave Herr (the usual writer of this column) was enjoying sunny, warm conditions in California. Dave has returned from his “working vacation” and is ready to resume receiving your bird sightings for the July edition of the newsletter.

Visiting their property in the Blue Mountains near Albee on the weekend of May 20-



21, Joy and Steve Jaeger found a few pairs of **Western Bluebirds** using their nest boxes. Other cavity nesting birds on the Jaeger's property included **Pygmy** and **White-breasted Nuthatches**.

The most remarkable bird sighting of this reporting period was a male **SNOWY OWL**, spotted by James Toews on the morning of May 22 just inside the Oregon border along Stateline Road, west of Milton-Freewater. Upon hearing the report of the owl, Ginger Shoemake of Walla Walla was able to relocate the bird and take its photo. Presumably, the owl was on his way back to its Arctic nesting grounds, but finding a Snowy Owl in Oregon after March is almost unheard-of.

Conducting bird surveys near Iskuulpa Creek on May 26, Jenny Barnett reported the first 2006 sighting of **Swainson's Thrush** for Umatilla County.

Marilyn and Gene Cripe are starting their second year in their new house on McKay Creek, and Marilyn has been working hard at making the place attractive to birds. She's met with considerable success already, but in late May she advised those who come to visit to bring an umbrella due to the droppings of the colony of **Cliff Swallows** that is nesting on their house.

On May 29, Ginger & Rodger Shoemake and George & Deanna Jameson of Walla Walla had a great day of birding in the Blues. In addition to a male **American Three-toed Woodpecker** at Target Meadows Campground, they reported finding **Red-naped Sapsucker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Winter Wren**, “tons” of **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, a couple of pairs of **Brown Creepers**, several singing **Hermit Thrushes**, and four species of warblers (**Wilson's, MacGillivray's, Townsend's, and Yellow-rumped**). Ending the day's birding at Langdon Lake, they saw four female goldeneye ducks, which they thought were probably Common Goldeneyes, and a pair of **Spotted Sandpipers**.

Also on May 29, Jack Simons reported finding about 30 **American White Pelicans** in the Umatilla River just west of Mission. This flock of pelicans grew in size (up to about 80 birds) over the next couple of weeks and several observers spotted the birds at Mission Ponds and flying over, resting in, or fishing in the Umatilla River between Mission and Rieth, including downtown Pendleton. Apparently, the pelicans were focusing their fishing efforts on

juvenile salmon smolts that were moving downstream toward the Columbia River.

Birding near their home in Hermiston on May 31, Neal and Sandi Hinds reported the first sighting of **Common Nighthawk** in Umatilla County for 2006. On the same day, Neal and Sandi saw a flock of **“Wild” Turkeys** just north of Hermiston. They weren’t convinced they were actually Wild Turkeys, and the consensus of opinion of the birders in the west county is that they are feral turkeys derived from a flock of domestic turkeys now roaming free.

On June 3, while scouting out the following week’s birding route for the Salem Audubon group, June Whitten and I found numerous **Willow Flycatchers**, several **Gray Catbirds**, and two **Veerys** along the Umatilla River between Mission and Thornhollow. The following day, June and Duane Whitten and I found two **Trumpeter Swans** at the Ukiah sewer ponds.

On June 5, Tanya Harrison observed a “bunch” of **Forster’s Terns** along the Columbia River at Warehouse Beach Park, which is located about 2 miles east of Hat Rock State Park.

Jack Simons counted **22 Double-crested Cormorants** at Mission Ponds on June 10. Jack, who regularly checks out the birds at Mission Ponds, says that his previous high count of cormorants at Mission Ponds was 12. Also on June 10, Jack found **40 Amercian White Pelicans** at the ponds. On June 11, Rose Scott reported that a pair of **Black-headed Grosbeaks** was regularly visiting her backyard feeder at Mission.

Over the extended weekend of June 9 – 11, ten members of the Salem Audubon Society and two members of the Corvallis Audubon Society joined several of our club members for three great days of birding in Umatilla County. The local birds were very cooperative for our guests, as the group tallied about 141 species during their stay. For details on the

weekend birding experiences with our Willamette Valley friends, see the article beginning on page 1 of this newsletter.

Marilyn Cripe and her friend from Portland, Char Corkran, observed a number of birds while riding their horses in the Blue Mountains near Indian Lake on June 12. Among the birds reported on their trip were **Western Tanager, Osprey, Western Bluebird**, and a pair of **Williamson’s Sapsuckers** with nest in a snag.

Earlier this spring, Lee Farren who lives in Ukiah, reported a **Barn Owl** possibly nesting in the church steeple along Hwy 244 in downtown Ukiah. At about 0445 hrs on June 18, just prior to beginning a bird survey along Camas Creek, I saw one of the adult **Barn Owls** perching on a powerline on the south side of the church.

Dave Herr has returned to Pendleton from the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California, where he helped lead the annual workshop on recording nature sounds. He is ready to resume his duties as field notes editor, so please report your bird sightings to Dave at dsherr@oregontrail.net or call him at 276-6413.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

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Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Member’s Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.
www.pendletonbirders.org

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