



Kákya Táymut

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

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Dusky Grouse or Sooty Grouse

A recent split by the AOU (American Ornithologists Union) has eliminated the name "Blue Grouse" and split it into two species: "Dusky" and "Sooty" Grouse. The Grouse in eastern Oregon, including the Blue, Wallowa, and Ochoco mountains, will now be known as "Dusky Grouse." The Sooty Grouse will include those found in the Cascade Mountains and the coastal range.

In these areas, the Dusky and Sooty can be told apart by location. They do have some distinct differences in field marks, also. The Dusky Grouse of eastern Oregon has a reddish-purple air sac, while the Sooty Grouse has a yellowish air sac. Also, the Dusky Grouse has a dark tail with a very dark gray band, while the Sooty has a pale gray band on the tale. The only place where location may not help identify these grouse is in northern Washington and British Columbia where the areas overlap.

According to an article in the Portland Audubon Newsletter written by Harry Nehls, "The Blue Grouse complex has long fascinated taxonomists. The eight races of this species can be evenly split into two distinct groups: coastal and interior."

"Despite the fact that the two groups are so different from each other that they indicate different species, the intermediate birds (of the northern area) indicate that the birds are of the same species."

The DNA testing was the deciding factor and indicated they are two different species. In 1931, the AOU declared them two species, only to reverse the decision in 1983. They did not have the advantage the DNA testing gives today's scientists to make the correct decision.

On October 12, the Pendleton Bird Club is having an excellent program by Mike Schroeder, "The Grouse of the Lewis and Clark Expedition." With this small amount of background on the Sooty and Dusky Grouse, we will enjoy his presentation even more.

Contributed by June Whitten

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

North American Fall Migration Count

Saturday, September 16, 2006

**Join the fun in trying to count all the birds
in Umatilla County.**

Everyone from beginner to expert is welcome.

Contact Aaron Skirvin, Umatilla County

Coordinator, 276-1948 or

askirvin@wtechlink.net .

The Big Sit! Bird Count

Sunday, October 8, 2006

Enjoy an hour or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! bird count, so put October 8 on your calendar! 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. Watch the September newsletter for more detailed information. Contact June Whitten at 541-276-9019.



Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., October 12, 2006

Grouse of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

Presented by

Mike Schroeder, Biologist with the Washington Dept. of Wildlife

Location of meeting to be announced.

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., November 9, 2006

Pendleton First Christian Church on S. Main in Pendleton.

Program to be announced.

Bird of the Month – Sage Thrasher

(Oreoscoptes montanus)

The Sage Thrasher is an uncommon bird in Umatilla County as they probably no longer nest in this area. As their name implies, Sage Thrashers live and nest in large expanses of sagebrush, which no longer occur in Umatilla County.

Sage Thrashers do pass through Umatilla County in both spring and fall migration. Now, in late August is a perfect time to search them out. Good places to look include the Gurdane--Vinson Road and the Coombs Canyon--Mud Springs area.

The Sage Thrasher joins a large family of thrashers, such as Curve-billed, Crissal, Brown, Bendire's and Long-billed. The Sage Thrasher is the only one present in Umatilla County. The Brown Thrasher range extends into the northeastern states and also Alberta and Saskatchewan for the breeding season. The other thrashers prefer the arid southwest and northern Mexico where they live in cactus or brushy habitats. The Sage Thrasher joins them in winter.

The Sage Thrasher is brownish on the back and tail with buffy underparts and varying shades of brown streaking. There is no visible

difference between male and female. In August, the plumage may be worn and paler. While most thrashers have long, decurved bills, the Sage Thrasher has a short, dark bill. The overall length is 8.5 inches, and the tail is noticeably long. The wing span is 12 inches. In flight, the Sage Thrasher is long tailed and long winged.

The nest is concealed in, or occasionally below, sagebrush. It is constructed of coarse twigs, forbs, and grasses, lined with finer material. Usually, 3 to 5 eggs, deep greenish blue with brown spotting, are laid. Both parents tend the nest, incubate the eggs, and feed the babies. The eggs hatch in about 15 days and the young fledge in another two weeks. Food consists of insects, usually caught on the ground, and berries or other small fruits if available. Sage Thrashers are ground-dwelling birds, but often perch and sing from the top of sagebrush. The song of the Sage Thrasher is a run-on series of warbles and whistles.

On August 27, 2005, several Sage Thrashers were seen on a Pendleton Bird Club field trip along the Vinson-Gurdane Road. They are, no doubt, passing through the area again this year.

Contributed by June Whitten

Getting Started with Shorebird Identification

Fall shorebird migration is well underway in the local area. If you spend any time birding at Cold Springs Reservoir, McKay Reservoir, Mission Ponds, Ukiah sewage ponds, or other similar habitats, you will find shorebirds between late June and October. The intent of this guide is to assist those birders who are just getting started with shorebird identification. The focus of the guide is on shorebirds at McKay Reservoir in the fall. "Fall" shorebird migration begins in late June, when the first adult Western Sandpipers and Least Sandpipers begin moving through the area on their southward migration.

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

In addition, you may find the following species since they are present every year: Lesser Yellowlegs,



Semipalmated Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, and Wilson's Snipe.

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

The following species have been seen in Umatilla County, but they are very rare (at least in fall), probably not present every year, and very difficult to find: Ruddy Turnstone, Pacific Golden-Plover, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot, Stilt Sandpiper (though possibly increasing), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and Dunlin (more common in late fall(?) and spring).

The following shorebirds are known to breed in Umatilla County: Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Phalarope. (Upland Sandpiper may still breed in Umatilla County near Albee/Ukiah.)

Identification Guide to Fall Shorebirds near Pendleton & McKay Reservoir

Smaller than Killdeer

1. Peeps = Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper.

Western Sandpiper – Dark, often black legs; long, tapering, down-curved bill; brownish gray back, often with rufous on scapulars. Common to Abundant.

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

Baird's Sandpiper – Black legs and bill; slightly but noticeably larger than Western and Least Sandpipers; brownish breast; juveniles have buffy head; wings noticeably longer than tail. Uncommon to common.

Semipalmated Sandpiper – Dark or black legs; short, blunt bill (though some overlap in bill length with Western Sandpiper); grayer back than Western Sandpiper, usually no rufous on scapulars. Rare and

difficult to distinguish from Western Sandpiper.

2. Spotted Sandpiper – A little larger than the peeps; pale legs; spotted (breeding adults, only sandpiper with spotted breast and belly) or white beneath (juveniles and winter adults); constantly teeters/bobs; white streak on shoulder. Uncommon

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

4. Sanderling – Black legs and bill; very pale white and gray (salt and pepper pattern); black spot at wing bend. Very rare.

Similar in size to a Killdeer

1. Killdeer – White beneath; white collar; 2 black breast bands; orange rump and tail. Common to abundant.

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

3. Solitary Sandpiper – Legs olive-greenish; **prominent white eye-ring (our only sandpiper with eye-ring)**; white-dotted wings and back; occasionally bobs/teeters. Uncommon to Rare.

4. Wilson's Phalarope – Yellowish or grayish legs; gray and white body; needle-like black bill; swims, wades, and forages on mud. Uncommon to Rare.

5. Red-necked Phalarope – Black patch around and behind the eye; usually swims; short, needle-like bill; brownish or brownish-gray, with buffy or whitish stripe on each side of back.

Larger than Killdeer

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

2. Lesser Yellowlegs – Long yellowish or orangish legs; smaller than Greater Yellowlegs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; thin, straight, blackish bill, a little longer than the width of head. Uncommon.

3. Long-billed Dowitcher – Stocky and brownish;



very long bill; white rump-back (in flight); solid dark cap. Uncommon to Common.

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

5. American Avocet – Long, blue-gray legs; faded rusty (in fall) head; black and white body; up-turned bill. Very rare.

6. Black-necked Stilt – Very long reddish legs; black and white body and head; straight thin black bill. Very rare.

Other shorebirds rarely seen in the fall at Pendleton-McKay Reservoir: Long-billed Curlew (wrong habitat), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper (possibly increasing), Short-billed Dowitcher, Red Knot, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, American Golden Plover, and Ruddy Turnstone.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

July – August Bird Sightings

Well, it's mid-August, and we are clearly in the summer doldrums. Birding has been slow and few bird sightings have been reported. This is the time of year when we are normally searching for migrating shorebirds, but because of the excellent snow pack last winter (a good thing!), the water level at McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs remains very high. This means the mud flats, so attractive to the migrating shorebirds are not present. Hopefully the water levels at both these reservoirs will continue to drop and shorebirding will pick up later in the month.

On July 22, while looking for **Mountain Quail** and **Dusky Grouse** near the North Fork John Day River, Aaron and the Whittens found a **Bald Eagle**, but no grouse or quail. Walking along the Umatilla River behind his home on July 30, Jack Simons reported finding a female **Wood Duck** with one duckling. Apparently this duck raised a second brood. Jack also noted the flock of **American White Pelicans** continues to be seen along the Umatilla River. The following day, Aaron reported one **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Mission Ponds.

On July 28, while stopped for road construction two miles west of Tollgate, Mike Denny observed a single adult **Northern Goshawk**.

Birding along Pearson Creek on August 13, Aaron found a pair of **MOUNTAIN QUAIL** with 8 chicks. Although **Mountain Quail** are a resident in Umatilla County, they are rare and difficult to find in the County. On the same trip, birding along lower portion of Pearson Creek, Aaron was able to locate 18 species along a 200 foot stretch of road. He noted it was a "very birdy" area!

On August 11, Aaron checked out McKay Reservoir for shorebirds. He reported there was some exposed mud in the extreme upper end and he was able to identify the following shorebirds: 1 **Solitary Sandpiper**, 1 **Semipalmated Plover**, 2 **Greater Yellowlegs**, 3 **Spotted Sandpipers**, 8 **Least Sandpipers**, 25 **Western Sandpipers**, 3 **Long-billed Dowitchers** and 3 **Wilson's Snipe**. He also noted a **Great Egret**, 3 **Caspian Terns** and 3 adult **Common Terns**. At McKay the following day, Aaron and the Whittens found 2 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** and 50 **Killdeer**. At the same area August 13, Aaron found 3 **Baird's Sandpipers**, 3 **Lesser Yellowlegs** and 8 **Greater Yellowlegs**.

Lorna Waltz reported a **Black-capped Chickadee** at her feeder on August 17. Although a common bird in the winter, it is unusual to find them in town during the summer.

Jenny Barnett reported she has recently been seeing a many **Common Nighthawks** near here home in Pendleton. On the 17th, Jenny reports there were more than two dozen flying around her home during the evening hours. I am interested if others are seeing more **Common Nighthawks** than normal this year. Please send any sighting of Nighthawks you might have as well as your other sighting to me, Dave Herr at dsherr@oregontrail.net or call at 276-6413.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

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