



# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 4, No. 3 Pendleton, Oregon March 2006

## Everything You Wanted to Know about Canada Geese

ON THURSDAY, MARCH 9, CLUB MEMBERS WERE delightfully informed and entertained by Jack Simon's presentation on waterfowl identification. It was obvious that Jack had gone to great effort to study up on goose identification: maybe too much effort. Right off the bat, Jack admitted that he wasn't sure whether, after so much study in preparation for his presentation, he could identify any goose other than..... "Mother Goose." Now, some of us were starting to get really worried, thinking Jack's preparations had addled his brain, and we were going to have to sit through a series of nursery rhymes! But, Jack rallied and treated us to great humor and wisdom on distinguishing Cackling Goose from Canada Goose.

As Jack explained, there are, or rather **were**, eleven subspecies of Canada Goose recognized in North America. That is, until a couple of years ago when the gurus of goose nomenclature decided there were actually two species of "Canada" Goose: Canada Goose and Cackling Goose. Generally, Cackling Goose is much smaller, shorter necked, and shorter billed than Canada Goose. But, just to confuse matters, two former subspecies of the Canada Goose, called by the colloquial name of "Lesser" Canada Goose, were split: one assigned to the Cackling Goose group and the other to the Canada Goose group. Goose aficionados may need to come up with a new name for the new "Lesser" Cackling Goose. Since it is now the largest subspecies of the Cackling Goose group, they may want to rename it the "Greater" Cackling Goose!



Thankfully, the only goose that breeds in Umatilla County is the "Western" Canada Goose, one of the larger subspecies of the Canada Goose. So, if you see a "white-cheeked" goose here in the summer, it's almost certainly a Canada Goose and not a Cackling Goose. Western Canada Geese also spend the winter, here, along with other subspecies of Canada Geese and Cackling Geese. Keep a watchful eye out for the small sized "Canada" Geese, which you may see in winter, because they are likely to be the newly named Cackling Goose.

Mercifully, Jack then moved on to ducks. And, he showed many beautiful close-up photos of American Wigeons, Ring-necks, Mallards, Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and more. He described the unique features of each species and which ones had been reported from Mission Ponds. A couple of interesting pictures included Buffleheads, with the males showing a large-headed ("buffalo-headed") appearance, and Northern Shovelers with their uniquely shaped (spatulate) beaks.

Jack expressed his hope that club members would see many of these waterfowl on the field trip to Mission Ponds and Wildhorse Golf Course ponds this coming Saturday, the 11<sup>th</sup>. Canada Goose is a common species at the ponds, but in the previous few days, Jack had also seen two Cackling Geese at Mission Ponds, so there is a possibility the field trip participants will get an opportunity to see and compare both species of "white-cheeked" geese on the field trip. For the results of the field trip, please read the article From "Mother Goose" to Golf Carts in this newsletter.

Submitted by Mary Combs and Aaron Skirvin

## **Heronry on Pendleton's Parkway Active Again**

THE HERONRY ACROSS the Umatilla River from the Little League Park in Pendleton is once again gearing up for the nesting season. Twelve nests remain from last year and are being repaired and added to by at least a few Great Blue Herons. On Saturday, March 18, four herons were actively working on nests. Further surveillance this spring is necessary to discover how many herons will use the heronry this year. The heronry is easily observed from the walkway on top of the levee behind the ball fields.

*Submitted by June Whitten*

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **Field Trip**

#### **Echo Meadow – Stanfield Meadows**

#### **Cranes, Shorebirds, Waterfowl**

**Saturday, April 1, 2006**

Trip Leader: Aaron Skirvin  
[askirvin@wtechlink.net](mailto:askirvin@wtechlink.net)

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot

### **Bird Club Meeting**

Thursday, April 13, 2006, 7:30 p.m.

#### **ODFW Efforts that Benefit Non-hunted Birds in Umatilla County**

Presented by Mark Kirsch, ODFW Biologist

**Community Meeting Room, Pendleton City Hall  
SW Emigrant Street, Pendleton**

### **Field Trip**

#### **Great Gray Owls at Spring Creek**

**Saturday, May 6, 2006**

Trip Leader: Dave Herr

**Contact Dave Herr in advance of May 6 to sign up for the trip. See article in this newsletter.**

541-276-6413 or [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net)

### **Bird Club Meeting & Potluck**

**Thursday, May 11, 2006**

**Potluck at 6:30; Program at 7:30 p.m.**

#### **Warbler Identification**

**by Aaron Skirvin and Dave Herr**

First Christian Church Pendleton, Oregon

North Main Street

(Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

### **Field Trip**

#### **Cabbage Hill Birding**

**Saturday, May 20, 2006**

Trip Leader: Aaron Skirvin  
[askirvin@wtechlink.net](mailto:askirvin@wtechlink.net)

Meet at 6:00 a.m. at Mission Market

### **Umatilla County Birding Weekend with Salem Audubon**

**June 8 – 11, 2006**

**Pendleton Bird Club hosts Salem Audubon Society members for a weekend of birding in Umatilla County.**

**Salem folks will arrive on the evening of Thursday, June 8.**

**We will take field trips throughout Umatilla County on June 9 and 10.**

### **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.

### **May 6 Birding Trip to Spring Creek to look for Great Gray Owls**

**THE SPRING CREEK AREA**, located in Union County just a few miles east of Meacham is famous for the number of Great Gray Owls found nesting in the area. Nest platforms have been set up in various locations, and each year the U.S. Forest Service, La Grande Ranger District, inventories the platforms and makes the locations of active nest available for birders wishing to visit the area. The Pendleton Bird Club is planning a field trip to this area May 6. I will be leading this trip, and I am asking folks who plan to attend to contact me in advance, so I can get an idea of how many participants we will have. Although the owls are fairly tolerant of human disturbance, too many folks in one group may be disruptive. Please note, to reach most of the nest platforms, cross-country hiking through forested areas will be necessary.

We will plan on leaving from the Pendleton Safeway parking lot at 8:00 a.m. and drive directly to Spring Creek. After birding in that location, we will probably stop at several areas on our way back to Pendleton, so bring a lunch. You may contact me (Dave Herr) by phone, 276-6413, or by email: [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net).



**BIRD OF THE MONTH: Long-billed Curlew**  
**(*Numenius americanus*)**

**ABOUT MID-MARCH** a ringing call is heard over Umatilla County – "cur loo, cur loo, cur loo"; a sure harbinger of spring: the Long-billed Curlews have returned. Not many shorebirds stay to nest in dry Umatilla County, but the Long-billed Curlew is one, joined only by Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, American Avocet, and Black-necked Stilt.

Who has seen a baby Long-billed Curlew? They surely are too cute, beyond description. Most of us have seen baby Killdeer, those marshmallow bits of fluff, running on toothpicks. We were privileged to see a mother Wilson's Snipe and her babies in the Stanfield Meadows a year or two ago. They were pretty amazing with their long bills, but still in proportion to their tiny bodies. But, no baby curlews are on my list. Always something to search for when you are a birder!

Long-billed Curlews are about 23 inches overall, our largest shorebird. They are mottled brown and tan,

and are mostly lighter beige on the underparts. The long bill is decurved, separating it from the up-curved bill of the Marbled Godwit.

Now, long-billed is no exaggeration! The bill of the Long-billed Curlew is about as long as its body from tail to neck. The female's bill is longer than the male's (by about two centimeters), and if you are lucky enough to see a pair together, you may be able to pick out the female by the longer bill. The bill is put to excellent use probing deep into the mud for fiddler crabs, small shrimp, and crayfish. On their dryer breeding habitat, the curlews are is equally adept at probing out worms and insects.



The Long-billed Curlews utilize two habitats, one for the breeding season and one for wintering. For the breeding season, they choose dry grassland, fields, and sagebrush steppe. The nest, always built on the ground, is a hollow thinly lined with grass or weeds on a grassy slope, dry pasture or field. Three to five eggs, about 2.6 inches long, varying from olive-buff, olive, to buffy-white and mottled with brown and olive, are laid. Both parents incubate the eggs for 27 to 30 days. Like most shorebirds, the baby curlews are precocial and can run about and find their own food shortly after hatching. They do, however, stay with their parents for protection and warmth, being brooded on the cool nights. When they are about six weeks old and adept at flying, the young curlews soon set out on their own.

In late summer, the Long-billed Curlews return to what we consider typical shorebird habitat: coastal and inland wetlands with mudflats. Most Long-billed Curlews leave their breeding areas in Umatilla County by early August. Curlews spend their winter south to California, Mexico, and beyond. The immature curlews will not return to the breeding grounds until their second year. How they know to stay put and enjoy the mudflats for an extra year, no one knows. They do return to breeding grounds as two-year olds, but apparently just for practice, because they do not begin breeding until their third year.

A few places to look for Long-billed Curlew in Umatilla County include Echo Meadows, Stanfield Meadows, Mud Springs Canyon Road, and the fields around Ukiah.

Submitted by June Whitten

## From “Mother Goose” to Golf Carts

AS THE SUN PEEKED OVER the snow-capped foothills east of Pendleton on March 11<sup>th</sup> I made a mental note to take the dogs on a quick walk to Mission Ponds. I knew I had to hurry because Pendleton Bird Club members would be arriving shortly for the first leg of a split field trip — first to Mission Ponds then to the ponds at Wildhorse Golf Course.

My reconnaissance of Mission Ponds was to get a “feel” for what club members might see that morning. The day before, I had watched two Cackling Geese — uncommon visitors — sunning themselves on the south shoreline alongside 75 Mallards and American Wigeon. I was hoping the geese would be there when I arrived.

What I saw though was, well, not very heartening. In fact, my initial thought was, “We may have more birders than birds this morning!” But experience had taught me to expect just about anything to drop in at Mission Ponds.

Standing on the dike road above the west pond, I could see two mated pair of Western Canada Geese and the occasional Mallard or American Wigeon. Then two pair — no, make that three pair — of Hooded Mergansers swam out from a brush pile. This, incidentally, would be the exact same brush pile Dave Herr had tentatively chosen to erect a photo blind for his next photo project. Hmmm...may not need that telephoto after all.

By 8:45, 17 birders had gathered to enjoy the sunny, cloudless morning on the south shore of Mission Ponds. Greeting us, as if on cue, was none other than a very vocal and annoyed Chinese Goose (a.k.a., “Mother Goose”) who belonged to the caretakers on the property. We had a good laugh knowing that ‘Mother Goose’ had been the butt of one of my jokes at my Waterfowl Identification presentation a few nights before at a club meeting. And now here she was in the flesh. Timing is everything.

We first skirted the south shore of the large pond where we saw Mallards, American Wigeons and Green-winged Teal. Too early in the season for Cinnamon or Blue-winged Teal, though. A few Red-winged Blackbirds serenaded us from the tall willow branches as we moved around to the smaller east pond.

Normally this time of year brings a wide diversity of species to the ponds, but I think the recent run of cool

temperatures has stalled the spring migration. However, we did spot a nice flock of Ring-necked Ducks on the east pond. Swimming among them was a single Pied-billed Grebe. Back in the brush we could see a well camouflaged Great Blue Heron which simply ignored us despite the fact we had interrupted its morning snooze.

Making our way around to the north shore, we followed a deer trail above a flooded low-lying area that often attracts feeding puddle ducks each spring. There weren’t any ducks to be found but someone with a keen eye did spot a pair of American Kestrels in a dead cottonwood tree nearby then pointed out that the male was making breakfast out of a mouse.

At that moment a small flock of geese ‘heeer-honked’ their way over the pond, set their wings and glided to a landing. Conspicuous amongst these Western Canada Geese were two smaller, dark breasted Cackling Geese — likely the same pair I had seen the day before.

Realizing that time was passing quickly we walked the final leg around the west shoreline and back to our vehicles. From there we headed up to Wildhorse Ponds where we immediately spotted a large flock (200+) of mixed ducks, mostly American Wigeon. Sprinkled throughout the flock were Gadwalls, Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, American Coots and Common Goldeneye. Someone spotted three female Buffleheads at the far end of one of the ponds — a good find and a new species for the day.

As we continued to glass the calm waters for new species Aaron said he would ask the club manager for permission to walk to a pond some 400 yards north of the club house. When he returned he said we had permission — but only if we *drove* there in golf carts. Hot Dang!

Club members assembled at the club house where the manager gave us a quick lesson on “Golf Carting 101”. As I recall it went something like this: “Put your foot on the right pedal to go. Put your foot on the left pedal to stop. Turn the round thingy in the middle to steer. Any questions?”

Well shoot! That sounded easy enough. Until I discovered that I was the one who would lead this entourage. Now which way did they say to go?

As we single-filed down the golf cart path I commented to my traveling companion, Tanya Harrison, that this was a good example of “the blind leading the blind.” My next thought was how to explain to the manager that seven of his golf carts



had met their doom in a massive pile-up on the Ninth Hole....

Fortunately, none of us were hit by golf balls nor did we crash. It must have been quite a sight to see seven golf carts filled with birders heading out through the rough — another first for the PBC! And, awaiting us at the Ninth Hole was a new species for the day — a small flock of Lesser Scaups.

Before calling it a day we took one last walk around the parking lot ponds where we flushed a hen Northern Shoveler from the cattails. Absent though was the hen Ruddy Duck I had spotted the day before. Though we did not make any spectacular sightings, we did share some good times, a few good laughs and refreshed our souls in the cool, clean air streaming down from the snow-capped foothills above the golf course. From ‘Mother Goose’ to golf carts, it was a day to remember.

Always something going on at Mission Ponds.

*Submitted by Jack Simons*

### Great Egrets in Umatilla County in Winter

**PRIOR TO THE WINTER OF 2004-05**, Great Egrets had not been reported in Umatilla County during the winter (see New Winter Bird for Umatilla County in the April 2005 *Kákya Táymut*). Two egrets were seen throughout that winter in the Mission area and one at Stanfield.

For the past few months, club members have made numerous reports of one and sometimes two Great Egrets along Stage Gulch Creek in Stanfield. Often the bird(s) can be seen from Hwy 395 where the highway crosses the creek in “downtown” Stanfield. The latest report was a sighting on March 18, 2006.



In addition, one egret apparently was going to spend this past winter along the Umatilla River in the Mission area but sadly perished in mid-December (see postscript to Jack Simon’s 2005 Annual Report on Mission Ponds in the December 2005 *Kákya Táymut*). By no means are the egrets common here in winter, but they are

showing signs of expanding their winter range to include Umatilla County.

*Submitted by Aaron Skirvin*

### Bird Sightings, February-March 2006

**WOW, SPRING STARTS** in a couple of days and a number of migratory birds are starting to arrive in the county. One of my favorite spring migrants is the **Sandhill Crane**. Lyle Brown had the first county report of this species on March 10, when he found over 100 cranes along Emert Road, near Stanfield. Aaron Skirvin and June and Duane Whitten reported cranes in this area on March 12, and today (March 18), I saw several flocks in this area totaling well over 200 birds. Clearly, now is the time to see these majestic birds in Umatilla County.



On February 25, Bob Flores and Steve Mlodinow birded in the McNary Wildlife Area and found a **Fox Sparrow**, 2 **Townsend’s Solitaires**, 3 **Lincoln’s Sparrows** and a **Cooper Hawk**. The year’s first **Tree Swallows** were found at the wildlife area the same day. Also on the 25<sup>th</sup>, June Whitten and Aaron, birding at Wanaket Wildlife Area, found a **Merlin**, 19 **Greater White-fronted Geese** and 9 **Golden-crowned Sparrows**. Connie Betts reported that on February 26 she watched a fight in her back yard between a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and an **American Crow**. She noted the “Sharpie” won. Birding west of Pilot Rock on February 26, Aaron and the Whittens reported finding 4 **Ferruginous Hawks** along the Coombs Canyon Road and one along Alkali Canyon Road. They also reported finding a nesting **Golden Eagle** near Vinson. The following day Dannell Tapley saw a **Downy Woodpecker** at her feeders.

March 4<sup>th</sup> was an exciting day for Aaron. Birding northeast of Pilot Rock, he found a juvenile gray morph **GYRFALCON**. This falcon, normally found in the arctic, has seldom been reported in our area and this sighting is a great addition to our county year list. Aaron was also able to locate a **HARRIS’S SPARROW** in the same vicinity. Bob Gritski reported finding a very early **Swainson’s Hawk** on March 4<sup>th</sup> near Woodpecker Truck Stop. Normally this species is not found in the county until April. On March 5, Mike Denny reported finding a **Peregrine Falcon** along Highway 730 in Umatilla County. This was the also a first county report for the year. On

March 7, Neal Hinds found 5 **Tundra Swans** at the Wanaket Wildlife Area. And, as noted previously, Lyle Brown reported the year's first **Sandhill Cranes** on March 10. Birding in the Echo Meadows and Emert Road area, Aaron found a **Least Sandpiper**, 10 **Dunlin**, a **Greater Yellowlegs** and **Brown-headed Cowbirds**. He and the Whittens also found a male **EURASIAN WIGEON** at Mann's Pond.

Bob Tapley reports that a male **Northern Flicker** has found that the sheet aluminum on this amateur radio antenna makes a really loud drumming post. What a great way to wake up in the morning. Although probably not as loud as Bob's woodpecker, on March 14, I found **Downy** and **Pileated Woodpeckers** drumming at Wenix Springs. I also found a **Northern Pygmy Owl** at the end of the Iskuulpa Creek Road. Walking through his back pasture on March 17, Jack Simons had a surprise. He spotted a strange bird, and when he got a better look, found he was watching a **BLUE JAY**. Although there were a number of **BLUE JAYS** in the county in winter of 2004-05, there have only been a few reports this winter. On March 18, Aaron found the first **Tricolored Blackbirds** of the year at the feedlots near Emert road. Rose Scott reported seeing 2 **Great Egrets** in Stanfield along the

creek that runs through the north end of town. For more information on Great Egrets, check out the article in this newsletter on egrets wintering in Umatilla County.

With spring just around the corner, migratory birds will begin to arrive in greater numbers. Please report the results of your spring birding trips to me, Dave Herr, at 276-6413 or email at [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net).

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

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

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