



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 4, No. 12 Pendleton, Oregon December 2006

Our Mountain Place: Birds and Wildlife and What We See Them Doing – Part 3

Editor's note: The following article is the final in a series of three articles prepared by club member Joy Jaeger. The articles focus on Joy and Steve Jaeger's property in the Blue Mountains near Albee, where they are restoring the property for wildlife and learning about the critters that live there.

By providing water on the ridge top near our trailer, we attract several kinds of birds that now don't have to go ¼ mile to the creek. Regulars to the water in the summer include Williamson's Sapsuckers, Northern Flickers, American Robins, Steller's Jays, Mourning Doves, and bluebirds (both Mountain and Western).

Several species of birds nest on our property, and they are easy to watch and provide plenty of entertainment as they go about their duties of building nests, defending territories, and parenting their babies. A pair of American Kestrels seems to return to each year to the same large snag within viewing distance of our trailer. (We had placed a bluebird nest box nearby and moved it when we realized it was too close to the kestrels.) Nearly every year, the kestrels raise a family of very noisy babies. You can hear their cries over 50 yards away when a parent comes to the nest bringing food. The kestrels had originally nested at the top of the snag, but that nest cavity was large enough to allow ravens in to raid the nest. As a solution to their problem with the ravens, the kestrels kicked a flicker out from its nest hole nearer the ground and took over the nest cavity.

This year a pair of Northern Flickers made a nest in a snag about 150 yards from our trailer. We had just moved one of our nest boxes to the other side of the snag but moved it again after I discovered the flickers

had decided to use the snag for a nest. The base of the snag looked like someone had been chopping wood, because strewn on the ground were little chunks of wood the flickers had chipped out for their nest. I also found a Pygmy Nuthatch nesting in a snag near our trailer that we could observe quite easily. Last year, we had the opportunity to watch a House Wren build its nest. It chose the nest box closest to the trailer and would fly up with a twig longer than its body and had to sort of drop it and grab it again nearer the end to get it stuffed through the hole in the nest box. Compared to the size of the small wren, the sticks were not really thin or lightweight, either.

Other birds common to our place include Dark-eyed Juncos (one of the few birds I could recognize from our yard in Pendleton), Cassin's Finches and Chipping Sparrows. This year there were also several Red Crossbills in the spring, though we didn't see any nests. On two occasions we have seen Bald Eagles, and one fall we had Blue Jays visit.

Occasionally, I see Clark's Nutcrackers (which at first I thought looked like a gull when it came to our feeding area; it was much larger than I expected) and Turkey Vultures. I saw a Pileated Woodpecker once and Hairy Woodpeckers several times. The only hummingbirds that come to our feeder seemed to be females (I can't tell one kind from another) or Rufous. There are plenty of other birds that I have seen or heard but can't identify yet. I want to take pictures of them all to identify later, but I can't get close enough or they won't stay still and pose for me.

Once a White-breasted Nuthatch came to our feeder and tried to hide the seeds in the bark of a tree nearby. We could see it pounding the seeds under the bark. We don't know whether the nuthatch came

back to its food stash and wonder if it actually remembered where it cached the seeds.

The concentrations of birds and animals feeding at our feeder occasionally attract bird-eating hawks. Over Labor Day weekend, one small hawk (either a Sharp-shinned or small Cooper's) kept trying to catch the Steller's Jays. It was about the same size as the jays, so sometimes it got chased by the jays instead. It would swoop down and scatter the jays, but they didn't act really too scared. Once, the hawk actually caught one. Five other jays were sitting in the tree watching like they had ringside seats. I grabbed my camera and went over to where I saw them go down, but when I got there both the hawk and jay flew off. There wasn't a bunch of feathers all over the ground as I had expected, so they must have been just looking at each other with the hawk probably figuring it had bitten off more than it could chew, and the jay holding its own.

Since the jays seem to be territorial, some of them get along with certain ones better than others. We have seen a lot of "jay fights" over the seed pans, so the jays are probably more used to fighting than other types of birds. It is interesting that they seem to get along better with the Mourning Doves and other birds and animals than with other jay families.

Actually we began to think that in the "pecking order" the Mourning Doves "rule" over the jays. The doves move more slowly and just sort of take over a pan (garbage can lid) and the jays hop away to another. Since the Dusky Grouse have started coming regularly to the seed and water this year, we have decided they "rule" over all the others. They don't have to actually do anything; like the doves, they just come into the feeding area and get into a pan and there isn't room enough for any other birds.

Occasionally, we see Wild Turkeys on our property. Once, I tried to take their pictures, but I found that turkeys can quickly cover the ground (without even flying) a lot faster than I can. The only birds that I can really get close to are Dusky Grouse. We have been lucky this year as a few have been hanging around near our shed and trailer. They have even been coming into the feeding and watering area. They like to get up on stumps and look around, and if you approach slowly they stay still and think you will not be able to see them. You can then approach fairly closely and not scare them.

An interesting sighting was a male Dusky Grouse in a fall display. The tail was up and the neck was somewhat puffed up as it walked through the grass about 50 yards from our trailer. What caught my attention at first was the sight of the tail seemingly walking through the grass with no body. When I realized what it was I grabbed my camera and went out to try for some pictures. As I approached, the tail came down and it looked like a regular grouse. Then, it jumped up on a stump, and I got even closer. I decided to try making sounds like I have heard the female grouse make (sort of quiet clucks), and up came the tail and it began walking around on top of the stump. There I was trying to take pictures and make sounds like a female grouse at the same time, but it worked. Next year, I hope it is still around so I can see it in full display. And, next spring I want spend some time along the creek and listen for the Ruffed Grouse doing his territorial drumming display.

Contributed by Joy Jaeger

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Umatilla County

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 30, 2006

Mark your calendar and reserve December 30 for counting birds.

All are welcome and encouraged to join the count! Be sure to contact a team leader (see article in this newsletter) right away to participate. The count is next Saturday!

Compiler: Aaron Skirvin 276-1948
askirvin@wtechlink.net

Bird Club Meeting & Potluck

6:30 p.m., January 11, 2007

Aaron Skirvin presents

"Winter Sparrows of Umatilla County"

**Pendleton First Christian Church
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Field Trip

McNary National Wildlife Refuge at Burbank, Washington

Saturday January 27, 2006

**Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway
Parking Lot**

Trip Leader: Tanya Harrison

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 8, 2007

Jack Simons presents

“Rural Raptor Routes”

**Pendleton First Christian Church
S. Main Street in Pendleton**

Tufa Tower and Wildhorse Golf Course Birds

Tufa (pronounced “TOO-fuh”) Towers are, indeed, “towers” in Mono Lake, California. At the December meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club, club member Dave Herr, who visited Mono Lake in June 2006 on his annual sound-recording workshop, explained that Tufa Towers are calcium formations, formed by underwater hot springs when the Mono Lake was much deeper.

Since the 1940’s, Mono Lake has been severely depleted as a result of the City of Los Angeles diverting the streams feeding the lake for its municipal water supply. When the lake level declined, the towers were left exposed. Recently, an agreement between the City of Los Angeles and residents of the Mono Lake area has restored some of the stream flow into the lake, raising its water level.

Dave told the audience that the towers made unusual perches for many birds and nesting sites for some birds, as the Violet-green Swallow. He also shared his wonderful photos of birds of the Mono Lake region, including California Gull, Savannah Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Sage Sparrow, and Say’s Phoebe.

Dave’s photographic tour of Wildhorse Golf Course ponds reminded us all of the wonderful birding opportunities here in Umatilla County. He encouraged members to take advantage of this neat birding area, close to Pendleton, where you can approach water birds very closely during the spring and summer. His stunning photos of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Ruddy Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes, Redheads, Green-winged Teal, and others inspired members to place Wildhorse Golf Course ponds on their list of high-priority, local birding sites.

Dave’s excellent photography, sound recordings of birds and commentary on the areas he visited made a most informative program for the 28 members attending the meeting. Thanks to Dave for a great program! We are so fortunate to have such a talented birder in our club who is so willing to share his time and talent.

Contributed by June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB’S WEBSITE

**Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Members’
Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.**

www.pendletonbirders.org

Bird Club Fund Raiser a Great Success

The Pendleton Bird Club wants to recognize club members Betty Klepper and Dannell Tapley for organizing and executing a fun and productive fund raiser at the club’s December meeting. Thank you Betty and Dannell for your outstanding efforts.

Many, many thanks, too, to all who contributed items for the raffle and silent auction. We couldn’t have a successful fund raiser without your contributions. Among the items contributed were bird paintings, books, feeders, bird seed, stepping stones, ornaments, note cards, a lovely beaded hummingbird, and so many more nice items.

Of course, we wouldn’t have a successful fund raiser without club members purchasing raffle tickets and bidding on auction items. Your cumulative efforts raised a total of \$434 for the Pendleton Bird Club. With the proceeds from the fund raiser we can continue the club’s website, occasionally bring in outside speakers, on special occasions pay rental fees for meeting rooms, make a donation to the First Christian Church for allowing us to use their

Fellowship Room free-of-charge for monthly meetings, replace and repair nest boxes on the Bluebird Trails, expand the Bluebird Trails if we have willing volunteers to assist, prepare Umatilla County bird checklists, and purchase and sell club hats and tee-shirts.

We may use some of the funds for a book the Pendleton Bird Club is planning to publish on the great birding sites in Umatilla County. Once the book is on the market, sales should replace the funds used for publication.

Thank you club members for your generous support of the Pendleton Bird Club!

January 11 Bird Club Potluck

The Pendleton Bird Club meeting on January 11 will begin with a potluck at 6:30 p.m. at the Pendleton First Christian Church. Please bring a dish of your choice, your own plates and silverware, cups or glasses, and serving spoons or forks. We plan to leave the basement at the church at least as tidy as it is on our arrival without anyone having to do dishes or much clean-up. Coffee will be provided.

In addition to the delicious food, our potlucks offer a great time to socialize with fellow club members and guests. We hope you are able to join us on January 11, 2007. Anyone needing additional information about the potluck may contact Lorna Waltz clwaltz@eoni.com or 276-6353.

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count - Saturday, Dec. 30, 2006

HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR THE 20th official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is scheduled for **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2006**. This local count is part of the national 107th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. If you are interested in the history and count data accumulated for the hundreds of counts across the country, please visit Audubon's website (www.audubon.org) then click on the link to Christmas Bird Count.

Last year, 24 bird counters saw 70 species of birds, and tallied a total of 11,186 individual birds in our circle. Our count circle is 15 miles in diameter, with the center located about 7 miles southeast of Pendleton. We welcome **everyone** (from beginning birder to expert) to help count birds on December 30. There are no major changes in Audubon's rules from

last year as to how we conduct our count. The participant's fee remains at \$5 per birder for those counters older than 18 years of age and each participant will receive a CBC issue of *American Birds*.

Our count circle is divided into six areas, and each area has a Coordinator (see below). Each Coordinator is responsible for organizing and managing the bird counters in his/her area. To get involved, each interested participant must contact directly one of the Area Coordinators to join that group for count day. The coordinator will set a place and time for his/her team members to meet on count morning. If you want to help count birds on December 30, please contact one of the coordinators listed below.

- ◆ **Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek and Riverside)
Jack Simons — home: 276-8566
- ◆ **Area 2** (Umatilla River and Cayuse)
Jenny Barnett — home: 276-0639;
cell: 310- 0374
- ◆ **Area 3** (McKay Reservoir and Birch Creek)
June and Duane Whitten — home: 276-9019
- ◆ **Area 4** (Patawa Creek, Coyote Creek and upper Tutuilla Creek)
Dolly Robison — home: 567-3642;
work: 278-6471
- ◆ **Area 5** (Mission, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats)
Aaron Skirvin — home: 276-1948
- ◆ **Area 6** (Spring Hollow Creek and upper McKay Creek)
Dave Herr — home: 276-6413; work: 278-3869

Birders can also choose to do feeder counts if you have an active feeder in the count circle. If you want to do a feeder count, contact Aaron Skirvin (see contact information below). All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the count results. Abby's Pizza on Southgate in Pendleton has reserved the back room for us from 4:00 – 8:00 pm that evening. Please contact Aaron Skirvin (276-1948, home or askirvin@wtechlink.net) if you have any questions about the areas or feeder counts or how to participate.

LET'S GO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTING ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2006!!!

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

Bird of the Month – Marsh Wren **(*Cistothorus palustris*)**

The Marsh Wren is a feisty little bird, and one you may hear in some locations in Umatilla County all winter. Marsh Wrens don't appear to do a true migration, but some may move into warmer climates for the winter. Marsh Wrens, true to their name, live almost exclusively in cattails, reeds, or similar vegetation in marshy habitat.

Unless it is the breeding season, Marsh Wrens are quite secretive and are known to hide deep in the reeds to avoid detection. Even then, however, they may give themselves away with a typical wren scolding call.

This 5-inch bird with a 6-inch wing span seems to think it is much larger. During the spring, the males become quite "boisterous" as they establish territories and attract mates. Their seven-inch tall nest is attached to reeds, built in layers with an entrance near the top. The male builds the nest of reeds and the female lines it with finer grasses. During this time, the male sings extensively and defends his territory aggressively. This is the best time of the year to observe Marsh Wrens.

They are not only small, but the brownish-rust coloration blends in quite well with the reeds. The throat is whitish, and the breast varies with buff, gray and white. The prominent white eyeline, the short, cocked tail, and a few blackish streaks on the upper back, are the main field marks.

If you enjoy keeping a life list of the birds you see, you will want to keep good records on the Marsh Wren. It is highly probable that the Western and Eastern Marsh Wrens are two distinct species and may, in the near future, be renamed accordingly.

According to David Allen Sibley, author of *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, "Eastern and Western populations (of Marsh Wrens) show subtle differences in plumage but have marked differences in song. Comparing mid-continent populations where Eastern and Western meet, Western averages paler and drabber overall, with generally reddish-brown scapulars and flanks. Individual Western males sing more than 100 song variations; Eastern males sing only a few song types."

Donald Kroodsmas, author of *The Singing Life of Birds*, is also quite convinced the two are separate

species. As a graduate student at Oregon State University, Donald Kroodsmas describes the following as the only seminar he remembered from four years in graduate school: "Each male (Marsh Wren) had more than 100 different songs in his repertoire, and all males in a marsh had the same songs, with the next song from a male often depending on what his neighbor had just sung." This research was done in Washington State. Later, Donald Kroodsmas and this same researcher did similar tests in Illinois to discover just how differently the two races sing. Of course, the research was extended to many areas in various states to substantiate the evidence of two races of birds.

So, if you see or hear a Marsh Wren east of the Mississippi River, you may very soon have another species for your life list. DNA research, according to Donald Kroodsmas, is backing up the earlier research on songs.

In eastern Oregon, listen in the marshes and reeds, especially in the spring, and enjoy the song and antics of the Western Marsh Wren. McNary Wildlife Nature Area, Power City Wildlife Area, Wanaket Wildlife Mitigation Area, and Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge are known locations for the Marsh Wren in Umatilla County.

Contributed by June Whitten

November - December Bird Sightings

Although winter officially starts in another day or two, based on the weather we've been having it has already arrived. As might be expected, with the cold and foggy weather, there are not a lot of bird sightings to report.

On November 27, Jenny Barnett reported seeing a **Say's Phoebe** along the trail to the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute. November 29, while feeding his horses, Jack Simons counted a total of **46 Common Mergansers** flying down the Umatilla River near his home. This must be some kind of a record!

December 2, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found 10 **Barrow's Goldeneyes** and one **Western Gull** at Port of Umatilla and a **Pacific Loon** below McNary Dam.

On a trip to McNary Wildlife Park December 5, Ginger Shoemaker reported her group found a number of good birds including over **300 Ring-necked Ducks**, **30 Gadwalls**, **4 Barrow's Goldeneyes**, 1

Pacific Loon, 2 Common Loons and an adult **Peregrine Falcon**. In total, they found 39 species in the park.

December 16 Aaron and June and Duane Whitten found several **Brown-headed Cowbirds** and at least one **Tricolored Blackbird** at the cattle feedlot at the intersection of Emert and Rosenberg Roads near Echo.

There were reports from two Raptor Routes run this report period. On December 17, June & Duane Whitten and Aaron reported finding 10 **Northern Harriers**, 37 **Red-tailed Hawks**, 25 **American Kestrels**, 2 **Merlins**, 5 **Prairie Falcons**, 1 **Bald Eagle**, 1 **Golden Eagle**, 2 **Rough-legged Hawks** and 2 **Cooper's Hawks**. Aaron reported the numbers are up this month with 87 total birds compared to 62 for last month. A couple of "bonus" birds on their raptor route were **American Tree Sparrow** and **Harris's Sparrow**. One December 20, the Dennys and Shoemakes ran the Northern Umatilla Raptor Route. Again this month they had outstanding numbers of hawks. Mike reported finding a total of **319** raptors for the day including **239 Red-tailed Hawks** and **55 American Kestrels**.

Great Egrets have been noted by several folks during the report period. Dolly Robison, Neal Hinds, Nancy Brown and Connie Betts all reported seeing **Great Egrets** in and around Stanfield. Several of the sighting were along the small stream that runs through the north part of town. Jack Simons has reported seeing one and sometimes two **Great Egrets** at Mission Ponds. Aaron notes that a few **Great Egrets** started spending the winters in the County

beginning in the winter of 2004-2005, and it will be interesting to see if they remain this winter.

Connie Betts continues to keep track of the birds in the Pendleton Community Park as well as the area around her home. On December 7, she received a report from a neighbor stating a **Rough-legged Hawk** swooped into their yard attempting to get a squirrel, but missed. The hawk is welcome to try his luck at squirrels in my feeders anytime. On December 9, Connie reported finding her first **Greater Yellowlegs** for the season long McKay Creek as well as 27 **Mallards**. On December 11, Connie was watching 2 **Great Blue Herons** along McKay Creek when one caught and swallowed an 8-inch fish head first. She said it was still "flopping" as it traveled down the throat. Where is your camera when you need it?

Winter migrants are being reported north of us and hopefully some will move down into Umatilla County. Keep watching your bird feeders for Common Redpolls and other unusual birds, and please continue to send all your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr at 276-6413 or dsherr@oregontrail.net.

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