



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

# Kákya Táymut

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

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Volume 4, No. 4 Pendleton, Oregon April 2006

## ***MORE FISH = MORE BIRDS!***

**MARK KIRSCH, DISTRICT WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST** for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Pendleton office, presented a PowerPoint program to explain how the agency manages wildlife to improve our prospects to see and enjoy "non-hunted birds" in Umatilla County. Mark noted that the non-game check-off fund (that we should all donate to on our Oregon State Income Tax form), once the only check-off fund on the tax form, has so much competition now from other check-off funds, it is not able to raise enough money to support a non-game program the agency once had. Because ODFW is funded primarily by hunting and fishing license fees and because they are not a land-management agency, it is amazing how they get the job done!

Mark explained how mitigation from electricity producing facilities has provided the key to providing some habitat improvement for birds. When energy-producing companies propose new projects, the ODFW is limited to submitting comments and acting as consultants to the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council and other regulatory agencies. However, the companies usually recognize ODFW's expertise and adopt their recommendations for mitigating impacts to wildlife. Since dams and wind turbines can have a negative impact on wildlife habitat, the Bonneville Power Administration and private energy-producing companies provide funds to mitigate for habitat loss or changes. Mitigation for impacts to riparian, wetland, shrub-steppe, and savannah habitats has been the focus of attention.

Bonneville Power Administration has funded projects on the Columbia River and its major anadromous fish tributaries. ODFW's fish habitat enhancement projects often include restoration of riparian (streamside) vegetation, which helps cool stream temperatures in summer and provide food, such as insects, for fish. Willows, cottonwood and other native species are planted along streams in protective "tubes" to prevent herbivores, such as deer, from damaging the new plantings until they are well established. In addition to fish, birds also benefit from these projects. Many bird species in the arid Columbia Basin rely on riparian habitat for foraging and nesting, and these restoration projects improve bird habitat by providing the four basic things that all of our birds require: food, shelter, nesting cover, and good water.

Mark explained that another federal agency, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, has funded many programs to protect watersheds and reduce soil erosion on farm lands. These projects often include establishing perennial grasses on formerly farmed lands and creating riparian buffers along streams. Like fish enhancement projects, these projects help to restore habitat used by many species of birds.

Mark talked about the impacts on wildlife of the new "wind farms" that have been established in the local area, especially in the grassland habitats on the Oregon/Washington border. Ferruginous Hawks and Horned Larks are two species affected by the "footprint" of the wind-farm projects. Ferruginous

Hawks seem to be inflexible to changes in their nesting habitat, and the concern is that the new wind turbines may discourage the hawks from using traditional nesting sites near the turbines. These nest sites are being closely monitored with the prospect of providing off-site nest platforms, if necessary.

Although the spinning blades of wind turbines can kill birds, the wind farms cause mortality in other ways, too. In the winter, flocking Horned Larks have suffered some mortality from vehicle traffic accessing the wind facilities. Mark and others are looking at ways to reduce this type of bird mortality at the wind farms.

Mark also informed us about habitat improvement projects that are implemented at the wind farms. Land that is disturbed while constructing the facilities is revegetated with native plant species, which is often an improvement over the vegetation that grew on the land prior to construction. The revegetation projects typically replace annual introduced plants such as cheatgrass, with native grasses and shrubs in an effort to restore some of the former shrub-steppe vegetation that dominated the area prior to intensive farming and grazing.

Mark then turned our attention to ways bird club members may assist ODFW. Mountain Quail is a species that the ODFW reports is repopulating the Blue Mountains in our area. Mountain Quail numbers are increasing, particularly in the North Fork John Day River region in the southern part of Umatilla County, after a significant population decline during the past few decades. As a result of the population increase, ODFW has opened a fall hunting season on Mountain Quail in South Umatilla County (divided by I-84).

Mark asked for our help in determining the range of this species in Umatilla County, and he is especially interested in our sightings of the Mountain Quail in areas north of the John Day River basin. He requested accurate and timely reports with information on where, when, and in what habitat we find quail, as well as any rare birds or birds with stressed populations. ODFW will enter the information into their database.

Mark also asked for our help in providing ODFW with digital photographs of birds. They want to build up their library of bird photos for use in educational presentations and reports. If you have photos you would like to share with ODFW, please call Mark Kirsch or Greg Rimbach at the Pendleton ODFW

office, 276-2344 or contact Mark by email at [mark.t.kirsch@state.or.us](mailto:mark.t.kirsch@state.or.us).

There is more good news: The federal government has provided Oregon with funds for a "wildlife diversity" program. The money hasn't made it to the field offices yet, but there is hope! Stay tuned.

*Contributed by Marilyn Cripe*

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **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)

**See article in this newsletter.**

### **Umatilla County Spring Migration Count**

Saturday, May 13, 2006

**We need you to help count birds in Umatilla  
County!**

For further information, contact  
Aaron Skirvin 276-1948; [askirvin@wtechlink.net](mailto:askirvin@wtechlink.net)

### 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.**

**For more information contact:**

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

### Field Trip

#### Ladd Marsh (near La Grande)

**Saturday, June 17, 2006 (tentative)**

Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot

### 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 11 Bird Club Meeting & Potluck

The Pendleton Bird Club meeting on May 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.

Anyone needing additional information may contact Lorna Waltz [clwaltz@eoni.com](mailto:clwaltz@eoni.com) or 276-6353.

### Of special interest to Pendleton's birders...

**IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN** – Taxes are done, and your spring cleaning is complete, right? So come out to the Umatilla River Parkway and join all your friends for the annual spring river cleanup on Saturday May 20.

Volunteers will be given gloves and bags and will collect garbage along the riverbanks. All will meet back at noon for a fabulous (free!) picnic lunch.

The weather is always cooperative and the birds are always in abundance. As an added bonus you can wander off and inspect the heronry at the Little League Park.

Plan to be at Stillman Park by 9:00 AM to join other club members in cleaning up a portion of the River Parkway. Further details can be obtained by contacting June Whitten, 276-9019.

### Another very special event on May 20

*On the Wing* – A gathering of friends to celebrate and support the work of **Blue Mountain Wildlife**.

Join us in the Blues Room at Hodgen Distributing for a sampling of gourmet hors d'oeuvres, fine drink, music, and silent and live auctions.

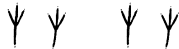
May 20, 2006 Hodgen Distributing, Pendleton (Budweiser Building I-84 Airport Exit) 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. Mark your calendar for this special annual event...seating is limited! Purchase tickets (\$15 each) in advance from Lynn Tompkins, Jane Holmes, Pat Morris, Greg Holden, or at the door.

For additional information contact Lynn Tompkins at 541-278-0215 or [lynn@bluemountainwildlife.org](mailto:lynn@bluemountainwildlife.org)

## 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 nests available for birders wishing to visit the area. The Pendleton Bird Club is planning a field trip to this area May 6. I (Dave Herr) 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).



### **BIRDS OF THE MONTH:**

**Black-Chinned Hummingbird** (*Archilochus alexandri*)  
**Rufous Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus rufus*)  
**Calliope Hummingbird** (*Stellula calliope*)

It's time to clean your hummingbird feeders and hang them up. Hummingbirds should be arriving in Pendleton any day now. Clean the feeders at least weekly with a mild bleach and water solution. Rinse them very well and they are ready for the syrup. Most recipes are four parts of water to one part sugar. It's best to use cane sugar, and never use honey for sweetener. Bring this solution to a boil, cool, and fill the feeders. It is best not to add any food coloring as it may not be healthy for the birds, and they will certainly come to the feeders without any coloring in the syrup.

The first hummingbirds to be seen in Umatilla County each spring are migrating Rufous or Calliope Hummingbirds. The Black-chinneds arrive a bit later,

but they do stay and nest, possibly in your own yard. The Rufous and Calliope will nest in cooler areas in the mountains of Oregon (including the local Blue Mountains), and some continue farther north for the breeding season.

Although hummingbirds have a brain about the size of a grain of rice, they have superb memories for food sources. If your yard had a feeder or flowers that were attractive to the hummingbirds last year, they will return to look for them again this year. No "bird brains" are these tiny creatures that weigh about 0.12 ounces or less and feed on nectar and insects.

Research, reported in the "Journal of Current Biology", suggests they can remember both the locations of food sources and can plan with a certain amount of precision. "To our knowledge, this is the first demonstration that animals in the wild can remember both the locations of food sources and when they visited them," reported Susan Healy of the University of Edinburgh. Healy and scientists in Britain and Canada studied Rufous Hummingbirds in the Canadian Rockies. They found that the birds remembered where specific flowers were located and when they were last there, two aspects of episodic memory which were thought to be exclusive to humans.

The research included tracking hummingbirds to artificial flowers filled with sugar/water solution. Some flowers were filled every ten minutes and others every twenty minutes. The birds returned to the flowers matching the refill schedule, revisiting the flowers filled every ten minutes before the flowers filled less often. They also observed that hummingbirds defending territories remember which flowers have been recently emptied. "We were surprised that their timing abilities were so good that they managed to cope so efficiently with as many as eight different flowers," said Healy.

Of course, we may not remember where we put our car keys! But, the hummingbirds' very lives depend on remembering where food sources will be found. Most of these tiny creatures migrate as far as 2,000 miles each spring and fall. The migration route is filled with dangers, starvation being a very real possibility. Scientists suspect the brains of hummingbirds became highly developed because of their long travel schedules, and they cannot afford to waste time and energy doing long searches for food.

Which hummingbirds will you have in your yard?



Most likely it will be Rufous and Calliope during spring and fall migration and Black-chinned in the spring and summer. However, Anna's have been reported in Umatilla County, and watch for Broad-taileds, which are more likely to occur at higher elevations, such as Upper McKay Creek, up the Umatilla River, Meacham and Ukiah. Please report hummingbird activity to the Pendleton Bird Club, especially if you have an unusual species.

*Contributed by June Whitten*

### **Close Encounter: April 17**

On our way back from Arizona, Dannell and I took the back road home from Baker City. Just after we passed Hot Lake, just east of La Grande, we saw two birds scrapping along side the road. We were able to get turned around and go back to see what was happening. Luckily there was a wide enough spot for us to get off the road. It turned out to be a crow and a Barn owl. To us the owl seemed like it might be injured. If so, we planned to try to capture it and take it in for rehab. The crow seemed to be the aggressor and the owl on the defense. At one time the crow grabbed the owl by the wing and picked it clear off the ground. When I walked toward them, the owl flew off with the crow in chase. They flew across the road and railroad tracks then down low out of sight. A short time later the crow came back and perched on the power lines. We never were able to determine what the fight was all about.

*Report and photos contributed by Robert Tapley*



### **Bird Sightings, March – April 2006**

Although we saw a lot of clouds and rain in March and the first half of April, the spring birds are starting to arrive. And this is the time when we tally many of the “first of the year” county birds. Jack Simons, our Webmaster, keeps track of them on the Pendleton Bird Club web site, so if you are interested in what’s being seen, keep checking the 2006 county list on our site.

Large flocks of **Sandhill Cranes** were found in the western part of the county during the report period. Bob and Dannell Tapley, Aaron Skirvin, Rose Scott and Nancy Brown all reported finding them in the Stanfield area.

Birding at the feedlots along Emert and Rosenberg Roads March 18, Aaron Skirvin found 2000 to 3000 **Brewer’s Blackbirds**, hundreds of **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Brown-headed Cowbirds** and several dozen **TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS**. On March 19, Bob and Dannell found a number of nesting **Great Horned Owls** and **Red-tail Hawks** in the area west of Pilot Rock. The same day, Jack Simons saw and heard a **Say’s Phoebe** along the dike road near Mission Ponds. Others have also reported seeing **Say’s Phoebes** in the Pendleton area and Caty Clifton reported two **Say’s Phoebes** building a nest at her Athena home. On March 20, Aaron added **Eared Grebe** to the County year list, finding one above McNary Dam. Aaron, June and Duane Whitten birded the area around Ukiah March 21. They noted **Prairie Falcons**, **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Mountain Bluebirds**, singing **Red Crossbills**, **Cassin’s Finches**, **Golden Eagles** and the years first **Turkey Vulture** along with more common birds. Clifford Freese reported numerous species around his home along highway 204 above Weston, including **Wild Turkeys**, **Gray Partridge** and **California Quail**. On March 24, Verna Johnson found a **BLUE JAY** at her feeder. She also reported a **BLUE JAY** at her feeder in January. Birding in the Echo Meadows area on March 25, Rose Scott found **Violet-green Swallows**, **Yellow-headed Blackbirds**, **Long-billed Curlews** and several **Tundra Swans**. On March 26, Aaron and June Whitten found 65 **Violet-green** and 35 **Tree Swallows** flying over Mission Ponds. March 28, Rose Scott found 2 **Black-necked Stilts** at

the ponds along Emert Road. Also on the 28<sup>th</sup>, Connie Betts reported 8 occupied **Great Blue Heron** nests at the heronry across the river from the little league park. She also reported seeing a **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Mallards** and **Belted Kingfishers** along McKay Creek near Pendleton Community Park. The same day, Aaron reported seeing two **Ospreys** perched on the traditional Osprey nest at the east end of Pendleton. Aaron and the Whittens found the years first **Williamson's Sapsucker** at Battle Mountain and reported lots of bluebirds near the bird club's nest boxes at Albee. March 31, Rose Scott found a pair of **Cinnamon Teal** along Emert Road.

On April 2, Bob and Dannell Tapley birded in the southern part of the county. Near Albee they found a **Gray Jay**, **Mountain** and **Western Bluebirds** and **Red Crossbills**. Returning home via the Gurdane Road, they found numerous bluebirds, including **30 Mountain Bluebirds** in one flock! The first week of April, Clif Freese found **Spotted Towhees** and **Western Meadowlarks** near his home above Weston. He also reported photographing a nesting **Great Horned Owl** near the top of the Thorn Hollow Road. April 5, a number of **Wild Turkeys** decided to roost in the trees at the corner of 31<sup>st</sup> and Isaacs. Numerous folks reported seeing the birds and there was even an article in the East Oregonian. April 6, Connie Betts found **Violet-green Swallows** at the Pendleton Community Park. April 7, Duane Whitten saw a **SNOW GOOSE** near Pendleton Country Club. Birding the western part of the county April 8, Aaron and the Whittens reported finding **Cinnamon Teal**, **American Avocets** and **Black-necked Stilts**. They also noted two **Caspian Terns** flying over the river at the McNary Wildlife Area. On April 9, Aaron reported 5 **American White Pelicans**, 16 **Double-crested Cormorants** and a **Merlin** at McKay Reservoir. The same day, Connie Betts reported finding 36 **Caspian Terns** and **Western Grebes** at Warehouse Beach, which is located along the Columbia River just upstream from Hat Rock State Park. April 10, Jack Simons had 3 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at his feeders. April 13, Jean Wood counted 40 **Sandhill Cranes** flying over Pendleton Community Park. April 14, Aaron found **Violet-green, Rough-winged, Tree** and **Bank Swallows** flying over Mission Ponds. On April 15, Aaron noted the first spring **White-crowned Sparrows** in his yard and Connie Betts reported them at her home the following day. These are birds migrating through the area on the way to their northern nesting ground. For the next several weeks we can expect to see and hear the sparrows as they stage in our area before moving

north. April 16 June and Duane found 6 **SNOW GEESE** flying over the south end of McKay Reservoir. On the 16<sup>th</sup> Connie also reported that Russ counted 14 adult **Great Blue Herons** and one baby at the Pendleton Little League Park heronry. However the big news from Connie was her report that the **Swainson's Hawks** have returned to the Pendleton Community Park. Connie reports it appears the hawks are rebuilding the crow nest in the middle of the park. It will be fun to follow Connie's reports on these birds. And finally, Duane and June found a bright male Eurasian Wigeon near Stanfield April 18.

As the spring migration progresses, please continue to send your sighting to me, Dave Herr at [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net) or call at 276-6413.

### Poet's Corner

Kirtland's Warbler, by Chuck Hagner

Show me a warbler, and I'll show you a feathered sprite, a half ounce dynamo.

Show me a warbler that migrates over open seas, and I'll show you a marvel, a species that ornithologists want to know more about.

But show me an endangered warbler that breeds only in Michigan and winters only in the Bahamas, and I'll show you an avian celebrity complete with a fan club of bird-watchers, scientists and conservationists aching to know more about the creature's private life.

I'll show you a Kirtland's Warbler.

But only if I can find one.

*submitted by Mary Combs*

### VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

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

*Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant*

*Editor for April: John Norman*

*Phone Number: 541-278-7916*

*Email: [janorman@uci.net](mailto:janorman@uci.net)*



Pendleton Bird Club  
70371 Prairie Road  
Pendleton, OR 97801