



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Káymut

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

Volume 5, No. 3 Pendleton, Oregon March 2007

Changing Seasons: Bird Arrivals & Departures

February through April marks the end of winter and the build-up of spring bird migration in Umatilla County. Stirrings in many of our wintering birds prod them to move northward for the breeding season, while many breeding species are just beginning to arrive for the spring and summer. Here are arrival and departure times for a few of the migrant birds in our area.

Cinnamon Teal – In late March, the earliest migrant Cinnamon Teal can be found in ponds and flooded fields in the Stanfield/Hermiston area.

Common Goldeneye – While Cinnamon Teal are heading northward to Umatilla County, the winter resident Common Goldeneyes, a common winter resident, are leaving for their summering range well north of Umatilla County. By the end of March almost all Common Goldeneyes have left the local area.

Osprey – Look for the earliest Ospreys to return to their favored local nesting sites on April 1, give or take a few days.

Rough-legged Hawk – This striking raptor spends the winter in our area, but begins leaving in late February and early March, with all of them gone by mid-April.

Swainson's Hawk – As the last of the Rough-legged Hawks leave the area, watch for the Swainson's Hawk, a local nester, as it begins arriving late March or early April.

Sandhill Cranes – Echo Meadows is the most reliable spot locally to find migrating cranes. They start moving through in late February and continue well into April. A pair or two of cranes nest in the Ukiah area each summer.

Long-billed Curlew – Each year, these large shorebirds arrive on their breeding areas in the Stanfield/Echo area in mid-March.

Killdeer – A few Killdeer spend the winter in the County, but a noticeable influx of spring migrants arrive in the last half of February. By late-February, some Killdeer are establishing their nesting territories.

Rufous Hummingbird – Male hummingbirds usually show up first in the spring. The Rufous, a migrant species through the lowlands of Umatilla County often show up by April 10 – 15.

Williamson's Sapsucker – Battle Mountain State Park is a good place to look for the earliest arriving Williamson's Sapsuckers. The first ones arrive about mid-March, with numbers rapidly building by the end of March. Occasionally, a Williamson's Sapsucker will over-winter in Umatilla County, but the vast majority move south for the winter.

Say's Phoebe – A few individuals of this hardy flycatcher may occasionally over-winter in Umatilla County. Most, however, migrate out of the county in the fall, then begin to return in late February and early March.

Northern Shrike – This winter resident begins leaving during late February and are completely gone by mid-April.

Loggerhead Shrike – While its cousin, the Northern Shrike, is leaving Umatilla County for higher latitudes, the Loggerhead Shrike begins its migration into and through the local area. Look for them in late March and April; a few may stop to nest here, but most move on through to nest north of here.

Violet-green Swallow – This is the first swallow to arrive in the County each spring. The earliest birds



pass through at the very end of February or first week of March. Locally breeding birds arrive about March 20.

Cliff Swallow – One of the most common spring and summer birds in Umatilla County, the Cliff Swallow is absent from the local area during fall and winter. Watch for the first Cliff Swallows as they move through Umatilla County around April 1st.

American Robin – During most winters, American Robins are scarce in Umatilla County. Look for flocks of migratory robins moving through the County beginning in early February and extending to March. Some of these flocks can contain over 200 birds.

Yellow-rumped Warbler – This warbler is an abundant breeder and spring and fall migrant in Umatilla County. A few spend the winter, particularly in the riparian habitats in the Hermiston/Umatilla area. By mid-February, some Yellow-rumps begin moving through the County, with peak migration in April.

Vesper Sparrow – This common breeder in Umatilla County grassland habitats begins arriving in mid-March.

White-crowned Sparrow – Flocks of this species are easy to find during winter in the lowlands throughout Umatilla County. By late March, however, the annual spring migration of White-crowns begins in the County. Hundreds of thousands of White-crowns migrate through the County from their wintering grounds well south of eastern Oregon. The peak of the migration usually occurs in the last half of April.

Grasshopper Sparrow – Our club's logo bird is a fair-weather bird in our area. They begin arriving on the grassland breeding areas in late April, breed here, spend the summer and most leave by the end of September.

Submitted by Aaron Skirvin

April 12 Bird Club Potluck

The Pendleton Bird Club meeting on April 12 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 April 12, 2007. Anyone needing additional information about the potluck may contact Lorna Waltz at clwaltz@eoni.com or 276-6353.

Submitted by Aaron Skirvin

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

6:30 p.m., April 12, 2007

Potluck and

“Birds of Pendleton Community Park”

by Connie and Russ Betts

Also, book reviews

by Betty Klepper and Lorna Waltz

Pendleton First Christian Church on

N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., May 10, 2007

Jenny Barnett presents

“Birds of Iskuulpa Creek”

Pendleton First Christian Church on

N. Main Street in Pendleton

Field Trip

Cabbage Hill Birding

Saturday, May 19, 2007

Trip Leader: Aaron Skirvin

askirvin@wtechlink.net

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



Umatilla River Clean-up

9:00 p.m., Saturday, May 19, 2007

The Bird Club will help with the annual spring clean-up of Pendleton's Umatilla River Parkway.

We will join the clean-up immediately after the Cabbage Hill Birding Field Trip

BIRD OF THE MONTH —

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*)

Short-eared Owls are opportunistic inhabitants where small mammals, especially voles and mice, are abundant. This means they are an irruptive species in Umatilla County, very plentiful some years and extremely scarce other years. The food supply directly affects their breeding sites, the number of nesting pairs, the number of wintering birds, and the number of eggs and young produced.

Short-eared Owls are the most diurnal owls in the United States, often seen perched or hunting near the ground during daylight hours. They are a medium-sized owl, about 15 inches long with a wingspread of 38 inches. Their long, narrow wings, aerial flight, and hunting habits are reminiscent of Northern Harriers. The male Short-eared Owl has buffy underparts streaked with brown, while the female has tawny to rust underparts streaked with brown. Both sexes have large, beige facial disks and tiny ear tufts that may appear as ridges. Their backs are brown, mottled with white, while the underside of the wings shows dark markings on the wrist and primary tips. When perched, the long wings extend beyond the tail.

Short-eared Owls usually live and hunt in open areas of grasslands, marshes, or tundra, where they display a buoyant flight pattern as they fly low over the ground with unhurried, irregular wing beats. They may perch on fence posts or the ground while searching for prey.

Short-eared Owls occur in the Hawaiian Islands, Iceland, the Galapagos, the Greater Antilles, and every continent except Australia. They are widespread across the northern parts of the United States, and many breed far into the northern parts of Canada and Alaska. These northern-most birds usually fly south to warmer areas for the winter. In winter, they tend to gather in open habitats that support large numbers of voles. In

an area where food is abundant, they may form communal roosts. Deep snow and ice may cause the owls to abandon their wintering areas in favor of areas where they can more readily locate their ground-dwelling prey. If the food supply is plentiful, the wintering grounds may become the nesting grounds as well.

The female makes a scrape on the ground and sparsely lines it to make the nest, which is often concealed by low vegetation. The average clutch is 4 to 7 whitish eggs, about 1-½ inches in diameter. The female tends the nest until the young birds fly when they are about 42 days old.

Records are showing a fairly serious decline in the number of Short-eared Owls in the United States. This is probably due to loss of habitat and food supply.

In years when Short-eared Owls are irruptive in Umatilla County, they are easily seen along the Mud Springs, Alkali and Coombs Canyon Roads. They may also be seen along Highway 395 South, between Nye Junction and the Gurdane Road. They have also been seen in the area west of Echo, around the BLM Oregon Trail Interpretive Site.

Contributed by June Whitten

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

Nuthatches Seem to Understand Chickadee

By RANDOLPH E. SCHMID, AP Science Writer

Tue Mar 20, 5:43 PM ET

WASHINGTON - Nuthatches appear to have learned to understand a foreign language — chickadee. It's not unusual for one animal to react to the alarm call of another, but nuthatches seem to go beyond that — interpreting the type of alarm and what sort of predator poses a threat. When a chickadee sees a predator, it issues warning call — a soft "seet" for a flying hawk, owl or falcon, or a loud "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" for a perched predator.

The "chick-a-dee" call can have 10 to 15 "dees" at the end and varies in sound to encode information on the



type of predator. It also calls in other small birds to mob the predator, Christopher Templeton of the University of Washington said in a telephone interview.

"In this case the nuthatch is able to discriminate the information in this call," said Templeton, a doctoral candidate.

The findings by Templeton and Erick Green, an associate professor of biological sciences at the University of Montana, are reported in this week's online edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Submitted by Bob Tapley

Pendleton Bird Club Program — March 15, 2007

The program given to the Pendleton Bird Club on March 15 was an excellent presentation by Jack Simons on the wintering raptors of Umatilla County. His PowerPoint program gave the viewers excellent identification pointers and provided a great way to show shapes and flight-patterns side by side.

Jack selected the raptors for his talk based on the species seen on the Pendleton Winter Raptor Surveys. The species featured in the presentation were Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, American Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and Great Horned Owl.

Some of our more conspicuous, local wintering hawks are those birds of the far-north tundra that come as far south as Oregon to winter, the Rough-legged Hawk. Their shape and flight pattern were compared to our most common year-around hawk, the Red-tailed. Jack showed photos and described various sub-species of Red-tailed, such as Harlan's and Krider's. Not as common in winter as Red-tailed or Rough-legged, but occasionally seen is the Ferruginous Hawk.

Bald Eagles are most often seen in Umatilla County in winter, when they migrate into the area and become fairly easy to locate. Golden Eagles, less common than the Bald Eagle but still seen regularly, may be seen year-around in Umatilla County. The field marks of falcons (raptors with pointed wings) were shown and described: Prairie, which is fairly common; Peregrine, not easy to

find; American Kestrel, very common; and Merlin, also not always easy to locate.

Thanks to Jack for putting together and presenting a fine program. Now everyone should be ready to try their raptor identification skills! Raptors can be challenging to identify, but getting out and looking for birds and their field marks, and even making mistakes (as we all do), is the only way to improve your identification skills.

Contributed by June Whitten

It's About Time to Put Up Your Hummingbird Feeders

If you feed hummingbirds, each spring you may ask yourself, "When should I put up my hummingbird feeder?" The first migrant birds (Calliope and Rufous hummingbirds) begin moving through Umatilla County in early to mid April. They readily come to feeders to "refuel" for the next leg of their northward migration. Our summer resident Black-chinned Hummingbirds arrive between May 1 and 10, occasionally the last week of April.

If you're thinking about putting up your feeders, now would be a good time to get them out of the box and clean them. In case an early migrant may show up, consider filling and putting up your feeders about April 1. Be sure to hang them where you can see them from your window. Fill your feeders with a solution of 1 part sugar and 4 parts water; do not add red food coloring. Preferably, use cane (rather than beet) sugar. White, granular, table sugar dissolved in clean, fresh water makes a high-calorie nectar savored by hummingbirds.

For answers to all of your hummingbird questions, check out Stacy Jon Peterson's excellent website, <http://trochilids.tripod.com/faq.html#nectar>.

Submitted by Aaron Skirvin

Malheur Wildlife Associates

Many members of the Pendleton Bird Club regularly visit the Malheur Wildlife Refuge, but they many not know there is a group that provided measurable benefits to the Refuge and National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Malheur Wildlife Associates is a "Friends" group for the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. It is an independent nonprofit organization formed and



managed by private citizens that supports the Malheur Refuge. It is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System's Friends program established in 1996 to encourage community involvement in activities of the National Wildlife Refuge System. During the year the "Friends" group provides many vital services to the Refuge including wildlife and habitat conservation, environmental education, advocacy and administration, and enhancing opportunities in wildlife viewing, photography, interpretation, hunting and fishing. If this sounds like an organization you would like to investigate further, you can check their website at www.malheurfriends.org or write Alice Elshoff, Malheur Wildlife Associates Chairman at Calice@highdesertair.com for more information.

Submitted by Dave Herr

February – March Bird Sightings

Spring is officially here, even though we started daylight saving time a couple of weeks ago. It is clear from this report that many migrants have already started to move into the area. We can expect many new birds during the following weeks.

On February 16, the Dennys and Shoemakes ran their Northern Umatilla County Raptor run. Throughout the winter they have been finding exceedingly high numbers of birds of prey and this run was no exception. Mike reported they found a total of 270 birds of prey, including **213 Red-tailed Hawks**.

Visiting her summer home near Albee on February 16, Joy Jaeger reported finding several **Bald Eagles** on the trip.

On February 18, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten birded in the southern portion of the County. They had a number of good sightings including 3 **Bald** and 2 **Golden Eagles**, 6 **Northern Shrikes**, several **Evening Grosbeaks** in Ukiah and at Albee, 4 **Western Bluebirds**. The following day Aaron and June birded along the Columbia River. 3 **Western Gulls** at McNary Dam were a great find. At the Port of Umatilla they found a number of different waterfowl species including one **Barrow's Goldeneye** and one male **Ruddy Duck**. In the Columbia near Juniper Canyon, they found 2 **Common Loons**, the first seen in the County this year.

On February 19, Janet Ebaugh found a flock of

Dunlin near Sand Hollow.

Connie Betts reported that on February 21, Russ spotted a **Black-crowned Night Heron** along McKay Creek near the Community Park. She reports that many of the ducks present during the winter have moved on.

On February 24, Nancy and Lyle Brown found 65 **Sandhill Cranes** at Echo Meadows. These were the first cranes reported in the County this year.

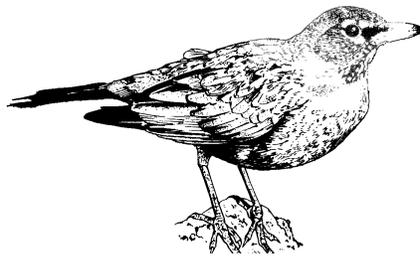
Birding the following day, Aaron and June found 13 **Sandhill Cranes** in the same location. They also found an early **Yellow-headed Blackbird** and a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** along the Echo-Reith road at Echo. Nancy Brown has also reported a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** is visiting her Hermiston feeder.

On February 26, Jack Simons was checking Mission Ponds with his dogs and found 150 **American Wigeon**, 4 female **Common Goldeneye** and 12 **Green-winged Teal**.

Merlins are not a common bird in Umatilla County. This month Aaron had two sightings. On February 28, he saw a **Merlin** at Mission Ponds as he was driving to work. On March 5, Aaron reported a **Merlin** circled his yard and landed on the north side of his house.

Also on February 28, Dolly Robinson reported she watched a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** captured a sparrow-sized bird while she was filling her bird feeder. March 5, Jean Wood watched another **Sharp-shinned Hawk** hunting. While walking in the Pendleton Community Park, Jean watched a **Sharp-Shinned Hawk** dive at a **Killdeer**. Unlike the interaction Dolly observed, this time the hawk went away hungry.

March 1, Connie Betts reported there were 8 nest occupied at the heronry across the river from Melton ball fields.



American Robin

Aaron and June, birding along Alkali Canyon road on March 5, made two exciting finds. First they were able to observe a **SAGE SPARROW** for several minutes along the road before it dropped out of sight. While waiting for this bird to reappear, a **Short-eared Owl** landed in the field about 40 yards away. Two new County-year birds in less than 5 minutes! The **SAGE SPARROW** was an especially great bird since the last sighting of this species in the County was in 2004.



An injured **GYRFALCON** was found about 4 miles NE of Pendleton on March 6.

On March 6, Craig Kvern reported hearing a flock of **Sandhill Cranes** calling as they flew over Adams.

Birding in the Meacham area March 10, Aaron and June found **Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets**, a singing **Varied Thrush** as well as several other species. The following day, June, Duane and Aaron traveled to the Albee area to put up new bluebird boxes. Birds of interest included 2 singing **Cassin's Finches, Pygmy Nuthatches, Red Crossbills, Western Bluebirds** and a **Northern Shrike**. Later in the day they drove up East Birch Creek Road and found 2 **Golden** and one **Bald Eagle**, a **Ferruginous Hawk** and a **Rock Wren**. Later the same day, Aaron found the year's first **Tree Swallows** at Mission Ponds.

On March 15, Aaron and June did a March "Umatilla County Big Day". Their route went from McNary to Ukiah. In all they found a total of 86 species for the day, including 3 new County-year birds. The new birds included **Greater White-fronted Goose** near Wanaket, a calling **White-breasted Nuthatch** at Battle Mountain State Park and two drumming **Red-naped Sapsuckers** at Battle Mountain.

Jack Simons reported that his dogs helped him locate a **Pileated Woodpecker** that was in his

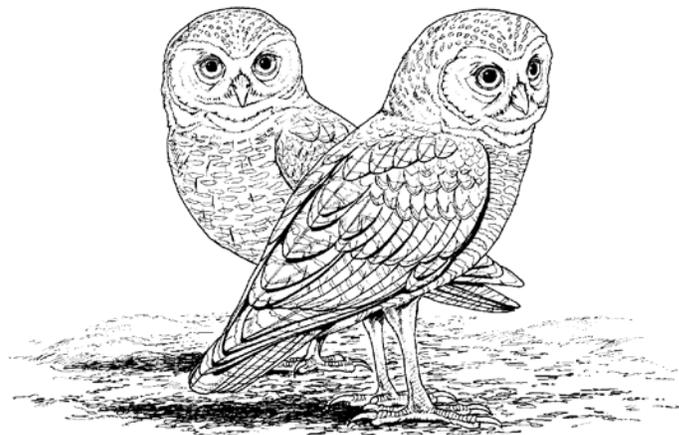
pasture, and Sharon Simons reported seeing a **Spotted Towhee** at their feeder March 16.

Also on March 16, Ron and Carole Louderback, birders from Tri-Cities, reported finding a **RUSTY BLACKBIRD** along Emert Road. They said the bird was in a flock of several hundred **Red-winged Blackbirds** and it still had much of its winter plumage.

On March 18, while on a Pendleton Bird Club field trip, Jean Wood spotted the year's first **Long-billed Curlews** outside of Echo. Also noted on the trip were a large number of migrating **White-crowned Sparrows**. The following day Aaron heard the year's first **Williamson's Sapsucker** drumming at Battle Mountain State Park.

At the present time **146 species** have been found in Umatilla County this year, and as spring arrives, many more migrants will be found. Please send all your interesting sightings (not just new arrivals) to Dave Herr at dsherr@oregontrail.net or call (541) 276-6413.

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