



Kákya Táymut

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

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Birding in an Urban Park

While the birding is wonderful in the varied habitats of the great outdoors of Umatilla County, we can also find great birding right in town! Russ and Connie Betts delighted club members at the April meeting with their excellent presentation on the Birds of Pendleton Community Park.

The park is located along McKay Creek in the midst of a large residential area in southwest Pendleton. With the assistance of Jean Wood, the Betts have recorded 84 species of birds in their study area, which includes the park and adjacent residential areas.

Russ Betts began the presentation with a pictorial tour of the park and adjacent areas. McKay Creek flows through the middle of the area and attracts quite a number of water birds, including Greater Yellowlegs, several species of ducks, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Belted Kingfisher to name just a few.

The residential yards, with trees, shrubs, and bird feeders, also attract a wide variety of species. Connie showed the group photos of many of the species they've observed over the last few years. And, most of the photos were her own, taken in her yard or in the park. Feeder birds they find in the neighborhood include American Goldfinch, Black-chinned Hummingbird, House Finch, Northern Flicker, and Dark-eyed Junco. Connie also had photos of other birds that are attracted to the birds that are attracted to the feeders, such as the Sharp-shinned Hawk and even an immature Northern Goshawk, a very rare species in Umatilla County.

If you are looking for a birding trip that doesn't require too much driving, consider visiting the Pendleton Community Park. It's a

short trip to the park for many of our club members and has lots of walking access. Keep track of the birds you see and send your lists to Connie Betts, and she will add your observations to their database.

In the next month or so, the Betts will complete their "Checklist of the Birds of Pendleton Community Park." Be sure to check the Pendleton Bird Club's website at www.pendletonbirders.org near the end of May for the checklist.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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**

North American Spring Migration Count

Saturday, May 12, 2007

Everyone, from beginners to experts, welcome to join in the fun! If you would like to participate, please contact Aaron Skirvin, Umatilla County Coordinator, 276-1948 or umatbirder@yahoo.com



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 a.m., May 19, 2007

The Bird Club will Clean-up a Section of the Umatilla River in Pendleton

Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Stillman Park

SE 4th and Byers Street in Pendleton

Contact June Whitten – 276-9019

White-crowned Sparrow Migration

The annual spring migration of White-crowned Sparrows is currently underway in Umatilla County. Many tens of thousands of White-crowns pass through the county in April each year, with numbers of sparrows peaking during the last two weeks of the month. Putting out bird seed may attract some of the migrant sparrows to your feeder.

Pendleton River Parkway Clean-up, May 19

Saturday, May 19 is the date for the Umatilla River clean-up in Pendleton. The Bird Club will have an area to clean, so put the date on your calendar and come to Stillman Park at 9 a.m. Stillman Park is located at SE 4th and Byers. A great lunch is your reward for working on the clean-up.

Beginning at 6:00 a.m. on May 19, the Bird Club will sponsor a short birding trip to the Old Cabbage Hill Road (Emigrant Road). Remember, everyone is welcome to attend the field trips, regardless of your birding skills. Newcomers are most welcome, and May is a great time to hear and see the songbirds of this area. We will return to Pendleton in time to work on the clean-up. Questions about the clean-up or birding trip, please contact June Whitten at 276-9019.

Spring Creek Great Gray Owls – No Occupied Nests this Year

For a number of years the LaGrande Ranger District of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest has managed the Spring Creek area as a viewing area for Great Gray Owls. Spring Creek is located just south of I-84 about 38 miles southeast of Pendleton. Nest platforms were erected to supplement the broken-top snag habitat normally used for nesting. Each spring biologists from the LaGrande District check the platforms and record the locations of those with nesting owls. Platforms with nesting owls are mapped and locations are made available to birders who would like to observe these impressive birds. Last year, on May 6, the Pendleton Bird Club had a field trip to the area, and a number of adult and nestling owls were observed.

In mid April of this year, the biologists checked all 21 platforms and found that not a single one was occupied by any species. Biologist Mark Penninger reported this was very surprising considering there were a total of nine active pairs (plus one Great Horned Owl pair) nesting last year. Mark stated that in the thirteen years he has been monitoring the nest platforms, he had never seen a year with no active nests. At this time of the year the nestlings should be either recently hatched or very near hatching. Thus Mark suspects we are not just seeing late nesting although he stated that at this time, reasons for the lack of nesting owls would be pure speculation.

The PBC had considered a trip to the Spring Creek area again this year to observe the nesting owls. But, since the chance of seeing any owls is slim at best, the PBC will not have a field trip to the area this spring.

Contributed by Dave Herr

Bird of the Month: Evening Grosbeak - *Coccothraustes vespertinus*

The population of Evening Grosbeaks has been rather sparse in Umatilla County the past few years. Evening Grosbeaks tend to stay in small flocks and have been common sights at local feeders, especially in the fall. There have been very few reports of recent sightings, locally. Dr. John G. Hewston, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA, does an annual Thanksgiving Bird Count in the 12 most western states. In 2006, the Evening Grosbeak was number 57 on the list, with only 21 birds reported.



The National Audubon Society's 100-year old Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is one tool for tracking population trends. The results clearly show that, while Evening Grosbeaks are an irruptive species (high numbers every two or three years with much lower numbers in between), since 1980 there has been a serious decline in numbers. In the United States, the severest decline is in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions. The cause of the decline is unknown.

There are various possibilities for the decline, probably lack of food in desirable breeding areas being a major factor. Evening Grosbeaks like seeds and buds of hardwood trees in the east. Due to warming trends in temperatures, the Evening Grosbeaks may not be moving as far south in winter as usual, which could contribute to depleting their food supply. They have greatly expanded their range. Prior to 1900 they did not occur east of the Great Lakes. Since that time, they have expanded across the United States and Canada.

Evening Grosbeaks, along with Pine Grosbeaks, are in the finch family. They are recognized by their bone-colored, large, sturdy beaks, which are perfect for eating their favorite seeds. The males have bright yellow bellies, yellow superciliums, which extend across the forehead, and some yellow on the back. Extensive white on the wings is a good field mark in flight. The females are a soft gray-brown with occasional hints of yellow, and white on the wings, which is less prominent than the white on the males.

Evening Grosbeaks breed in conifer and mixed deciduous forests, primarily at higher altitudes in conifer forests in the west. The nest, made of twigs, sticks, and roots lined with finer materials, is a rather frail structure well out on a horizontal limb. Three or four eggs, blue or blue-green flecked with purple, brown, gray, or black, are the usual clutch. While Evening Grosbeaks often prefer seeds for their diet, they also eat tree buds in spring and some fruit, such as Juniper berries. During the breeding season, insects become about 20 percent of their diet. The male feeds the incubating female, and both parents feed the nestlings crushed insect larvae and seeds of fleshy fruits.

Usually Evening Grosbeaks migrate through Umatilla County in late April and May and again in October. However, the most reliable location to see them is in the Ukiah vicinity in winter. Grosbeaks are attracted to some feeders in Ukiah when they are filled with sunflower seeds.

(Footnote: On a recent trip to Colorado, Duane and I were birding with Paul Lehman, who leads birding tours for Wings. Paul travels extensively, keeps bird lists from every state except Hawaii, and does the location maps for several field guides, including Sibley, National Geographic, and Stokes. Upon seeing some Evening Grosbeaks in Colorado, Paul stated how nice it was to see them as he never sees them in the northeast anymore. He lives in Cape May, New Jersey.)

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

March – April Bird Sightings

Well, there is no question about it; Spring is in the air. The **Violet-green Swallows** have returned to downtown Pendleton, and new migrants are showing up every day. This is a great time of the year to be birding.

Along with the expected arriving migrants, occasionally an unexpected bird will be found. This happened to Aaron Skirvin on April 17. Aaron decided to stop and check out Mission Ponds (4 miles east of Pendleton) at noon. When he arrived he found a **GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** perched on a snag in the west pond. He watched the bird for several minutes until it flew to the NE corner of the pond and disappeared. Later in the day, several people tried to relocate the bird, but were unsuccessful. Although **GREAT-TAILED GRACKLES** have been reported previously in the county, this is a great find and an unexpected (to say the least) addition to our County Year list. On April 21 and 22, the **GRACKLE** was again found by several observers at Mission Ponds and in Jack and Sharon Simons' backyard!

On March 7, Duane Whitten spotted a male **Yellow-shafted** variety of the **Northern Flicker** (black mustache and red on the nape) at their bird feeder in the Grecian Heights area of south Pendleton. Although the Red-shafted variety is common and widespread locally, the Yellow-shafted is very infrequently reported.



The mountain snow has started to melt, and on March 19, Joy Jaeger was able to visit her summer home near Albee in the Blue Mountains. During her stay, she found **Steller's Jays**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Western Bluebirds**, **American Robins**, and **Cassin's Finches**, along with several drumming woodpeckers. It will be fun to follow what birds Joy finds as Spring progresses.

Working at the Wanaket Wildlife area on March 19, Jenny Barnett found several **Long-billed Curlews**, 2 **Vesper Sparrows**, a **Cinnamon Teal** and a flock of migrating **Sandhill Cranes**.

March 21, Mike and MerryLynn Denny joined Roger and Ginger Showmake on their Northern Umatilla County Winter Raptor Run. Although it was getting late in the season for wintering raptors they were still able to find **260** birds of prey. A total of **6 Great Horned Owls** was a new record for the count. During the survey, they also found 2 **Vesper Sparrows**, 1 **Savannah Sparrow**, **6 Say's Phoebes** and 7 **American Pipits**.

Birding in the Northern end of the county March 21, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found the first **Black-necked Stilts** of the year. They also found **Cinnamon Teal** and **6 Dunlin**. They reported one basic plumaged **Common Loon** on the Columbia as well as a **Western Gull** upstream of McNary Dam.

March 23, Connie Betts reported 4 **Violet-green Swallows** at the Pendleton Community Park, although she reported that the **Gadwall** pair and male **American Wigeon** have left the park area.

The same day, Susan Sheoships found a **Pileated Woodpecker** at the Mission wetland Park. It will be interesting to see if this large woodpecker continues to use what is almost urban habitat.

Sharon Simons noted two **Golden Eagles** circling over her home near Mission on March 24.

On March 25, Mary Ann Low reported seeing **Wilson's Snipe** off Yellow Jacket Road south of Pilot Rock. Also on March 25, Russ and Connie Betts reported seeing the year's first **Osprey** along the Umatilla River at the Rieth bridge.

Birding at Mission Ponds on March 27, Aaron reported a swarm of over **700** swallows including **~600 Violet-green Swallows**, **~100 Tree Swallows**

and at least one **Cliff Swallow**, the first reported this year.

Birding in the southern part of the county on March 29, Ron and Carole Louderback reported finding a **Ferruginous Hawk** south of Pilot Rock, 7 **Mountain Bluebirds** south of Ukiah and 2 **Short-eared Owls** at milepost 28 in the Whittaker Flat area along Highway 395. **Short-eared Owls** have been difficult to find in the county this year.

March 30 at the Pendleton Community Park, Connie Betts reported finding 1 **Greater Yellowlegs**, 5 **Violet-green Swallows** and 1 female **Brown Cowbird**. She also reports that 3 **Mallard** pairs are nesting along McKay Creek near the park.

On March 31, Neal Hinds reported the first **Caspian Tern** for the year flying over the Columbia River.

Mark Henjum found several flocks of **Mountain Quail** in Umatilla County along the North Fork John Day River in mid March.

March 31, I (Dave Herr) was able to find one of the quail Mark Henjum had reported as well as a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** at Battle Mountain State Park. The same day, June and Duane Whitten found the year's first **White-throated Swifts** along the Umatilla River near Yoakum Bridge.

Jack Simons reports that a pair of **American Kestrels** appears to be setting up housekeeping in a woodpecker hole in a snag behind his home. April 3, Sharon Simons reported the **Osprey** returned to the nest east of town at the "Welcome to Pendleton" sign. On a sad note, Jack reports one of the resident **Canada Geese** (Geezer) that he and Sharon have been feeding for years appears to have a broken leg. I'm sure Jack and Sharon will keep us updated on how "Geezer" and his mate "Gabby" are doing.

April 3, Aaron reported 10 **American Avocets** wading in a puddle in a pasture along I-84 near the Stanfield Exit.

The following day, birding along the Stanfield Meadows Road, Ron and Carole Louderback of Kennewick, WA, reported the year's first **Swainson's Hawk**. Their list also included **Cinnamon Teal**, **Black-necked Stilts**, **American Avocets**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Dunlin** and several hundred **Sandhill Cranes**.



Don and Norma Staebler reported that a pair of **Western Screech-Owls** is nesting at their place in SW Pendleton not too far from McKay Creek. They have put up a few owl nestboxes in trees in their yard, and most years a pair of screech-owls takes up residence during the nesting period.

Aaron had a great day April 7, birding in the southern part of the County. He found 3 new birds for the County year list including **Dusky Grouse**, **Loggerhead Shrike** and **Canyon Wren**. Other birds of interest included drumming **Ruffed Grouse**, **Wild Turkeys**, **Evening Grosbeaks**, **Bald Eagle**, and **Ferruginous Hawk**.

On April 8, Aaron found two more "year" birds, both difficult to find in the County. These included a **White-throated Sparrow** on Cabbage Hill and a male **Red-breasted Merganser** at McKay Reservoir.

Neal Hinds reported finding 35 species while birding in the Stanfield-Echo Meadows area. His list included **American Avocets** and **Tri-colored Blackbirds**.

April 9, Aaron reported a large flock of swallows feeding at Mission Ponds, which included **Tree**, **Violet-green**, **Northern Rough-winged**, **Cliff** and 2 **Barn Swallows**.

Mike Denny and Roger Shoemake located the first Umatilla County **Western Kingbirds** for the year north of Pendleton on April 11.

On April 13, Tanya Harrison reported the first hummingbird of the year in the County, a male **Rufous** along Iskuulpa Creek Road (formerly Squaw Creek), which is located a few miles east of Thornhollow.

McKay Reservoir yielded some exciting birds for Aaron on Friday, April 13. His list included **20**

Snow Geese, a **Merlin**, a **Peregrine Falcon**, and 2 adult **Common Loons** in breeding plumage.

Aaron, birding in the southern part of the County with Andrew and Barbara Clark on April 14, had a great day. Some of the more interesting birds included **Gray Partridge**, **Great Horned and Barn Owl**, **Ferruginous**, **Rough-legged**, and **Swainson's Hawk** and several sparrow species including **Vesper**, **Savannah** and **Lincoln's**.

Birding at McKay Reservoir April 15, Connie Betts again found the 20 **Snow Geese** and 2 **Common Loons** reported earlier by Aaron. Some of her other sightings included **Canada Geese**, **Common Mergansers**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Double-crested Cormorant**. Connie has also reported seeing both male and female **Yellow-rumped Warblers** as well as a **Say's Phoebe** in the Pendleton Community Park.

Checking out the Southern part of the County on April 18, Bob and Dannell Tapley found a large number of species. Their list for the day included **Violet Green Swallows**, 3 **Say's Phoebes**, a **Western Kingbird**, a nesting **Great Horned Owl**, 4 **Rough-legged Hawks** and both **Western and Mountain Bluebirds**. At the Ukiah sewage ponds they found **Redheads**, **Greater White-fronted Geese**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Ruddy Ducks**, and **Common Goldeneye**.

For the next couple of months I am going to take a break from compiling the Newsletter bird sightings. Jenny Barnett has agreed to take over the job, so please send your sightings (both common species and rare) to Jenny Barnett at pdtgrouse@uci.net

Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant

Editor for April: Aaron Skirvin

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