



Kákya Táymut

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

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“Spring Time” Birding in Colorado

June and Duane Whitten took a birding trip with the Wings Birding Tours to Colorado in mid-April. It was an 8-day trip and covered 2,500 miles, essentially circumscribing the state of Colorado. One of the target birds for this trip was the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, but along the way the birders found 155 species and for the Whitten – 6 life birds.

The tour included 11 birders in two vans, with two guides. But, what guides they were! One was Paul Lehman from Cape May, NJ (Pete Dunne’s backyard). Paul helped draw the range maps in David Sibley’s book, The Sibley Guide to Birds, as well as other field guides. Among the 11 birders, one was a doctor who had lived in South Africa; another was an English gentleman, Daniel Gruneberg, who has 640 ABA life birds; 2 were Canadians from Ontario; a father and son from Washington State; and the only other woman on the trip was from California.

June said she was in awe of the people in the group. They all seemed to be well educated, well traveled and knowledgeable about the bird they were going to see. At the same time, they were friendly, outgoing and the guides made sure that every single person saw every rare bird there was to see.

The first bird the group looked for was the White-tailed Ptarmigan. On the third stop, at 11,000 feet elevation in the Rocky Mountains west of Denver, to look for the ptarmigan, and with the snow blowing, a single White-tailed Ptarmigan walked onto the parking lot right in front of the group. Birds can show up anywhere! And, this one seemed to be posing just for the group in the middle of the parking lot. Do you want me to pose this way or how is this?

In the next few days, they saw 12 Sharp-tailed Grouse at a lek, a Rock Wren and a Canyon Wren sharing the same rock and fighting about it, and a Carolina Wren (extremely rare in Colorado) that came when called. Other notable species they saw in southwestern Colorado included Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Scaled Quail, Black-throated Sparrow, and a White-breasted Nuthatch.

The gentleman from London wanted to keep track of all the animals that they saw. So they counted black-and white-tailed prairie dogs, coyotes, squirrels, chipmunks, deer, elk, antelope and on and on and on. He got his money’s worth! Ask June and Duane how many species of squirrels there are in Colorado!

They found only one Dusky Grouse during the trip, but it posed sitting on a limb in scrub-oak habitat until everyone got to see him. At 10,000 ft. elevation, again in a snow storm, they heard a Boreal Owl.

The trip to see the Gunnison Sage-Grouse was quite an undertaking. Your day starts by getting out of bed at 3:30 a.m. You are in the van by 4:40 a.m.; if you’re late, too bad, you get left behind. You have to arrive at the lek before the grouse arrive, and you can’t leave until all the grouse have left. And, that’s any time between 2 and 4 hours after the first birds arrive on the lek. The permit to visit the lek costs \$10.25, and you have to show a drivers license (or a passport). Once you get to the lek, you can’t get out of the van, you can’t make any noise and you can’t take any photos. But, you will do all of this to get a life bird, even if you are feeling ill!

The guides were well connected to many of the birders who live in Colorado. That is how on one snowy morning, the group ended up at a backyard



full of Rosy-Finches at a residence in Crested Butte. There were an estimated 300 Brown-capped Rosy-Finches, several Black Rosy-Finches, and a few Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches, all in the same backyard.

June and Duane noticed that Blue-winged Teal numbers increased the farther east they were in Colorado. Cinnamon Teal, however, became very rare in the Rockies and eastward. Pine Grosbeak, Eastern Phoebe, Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, and Lewis Woodpeckers were just some of the other neat birds they saw in the eastern part of Colorado.

Getting to see the Lesser Prairie-Chicken is a business. For 4 weekends only each year, the little town of Wray, Colorado, offers birders a package of one night motel stay, an ordination and a 4:45 AM bus ride to the lek. At the lek is a blind with cushioned seats (thank God!). Again, you arrive in the dark, and you don't leave until all the grouse have left the lek. The bus then takes you to breakfast and all of this is on a private, 20,000-acre ranch. This town has figured out how to save their birds and make money at the same time. Duane played a tape to the audience of the calls of the Lesser Prairie Chicken and Greater Prairie Chicken. What a noise, lots of hoots and other weird sounds, but they didn't quite sound like chickens. Duane also performed a little demonstration of the male grouse's strutting dance on the lek.

The Whittens' life birds were: White-tailed Ptarmigan, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, Mountain Plover, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, and the Greater Prairie-Chicken. If you get a chance, talk to June and Duane about this great trip, there is so much more to tell than this short article covers.

Thank you, June and Duane, for entertaining and educating us about the "spring time" birds of Colorado.

Contributed by Nancy Brown

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Picnic

Summer Picnic - Date and Location To Be Determined

Field Trip to Malheur NWR

September 6 - 9, 2007

The Pendleton Bird Club will have join with the Salem Audubon Society for a joint trip to Malheur and Steens Mountain in early September.

To participate, you must register by June 1.

Limit of 12 club members.

See details in this newsletter.

Bird Club Meeting

October 11, 2007

Terry Steele will present a slide program on

Birds of Malheur NWR

Pendleton First Christian Church on

N. Main Street in Pendleton

Visiting Great Horned Owls

We've had the pleasure to watch some new neighbors move into our environment along Little Greasewood Creek about eight miles northeast of Pendleton. Two adult Great Horned Owls took up residence in a former Red-tailed Hawk nest in a cottonwood tree at the end of February 2007. One, presumably the male, could be frequently seen in an adjacent cottonwood tree. By mid-April, he was not spending as much time in the second cottonwood, but an adult owl was always visible in the nest. On April 25, I was able to view two fluffy, buff-colored birds in the nest with an adult on a nearby branch. There was some wing-stretching and the appearance of feathers along with their grayish-blue faces. After a short time the adult returned to the nest and a little bit of fluff, moving in the breeze, was visible. The next evening, I observed two adults sitting on adjacent fence posts near the



nest and heard their hooting for a few minutes. I hope to witness the flying lessons in the near future.

Following the significant wind in early May, the nest was visibly disrupted and none of the owls were apparent. Several days later I again observed two adults on a nearby fence post and located one fledgling in the tree in which they had their nest. The next day I heard a quiet, 'soft' call and located another, larger fledgling on the ground among some bushes across the creek from the adults. When I approached the fledgling it began making a 'clacking' sound and one of the adults flew to the tree with the smaller fledgling and nearer to me. The larger fledgling and I both moved.

On May 12th all the birds had moved up the creek. Fortunately they were dead cottonwoods, which allowed me to see all of the family, which includes two adults and THREE fledglings. Their varying size, color, amount of feathers versus down, and 'ear' development are remarkable. I hope they remain in the neighborhood.

Contributed by Pat Tempinski

Pendleton Center for the Arts Features Bird Paintings

The Pendleton Center for the Arts has had a long relationship with local artist Hiroko Cannon, exhibiting her work in the community gallery and selling reproductions of her watercolor paintings depicting birds of the northwest. This month, the Center is unveiling two projects of very different scale that celebrate the artist's talent.

The first is an Artist Advocacy Project that funded the creation of an edition of fifty reproductions of a Cannon created called "Great Blue Heron". Ten up \$200 each and will receive the first ten images. The reproductions are the same original work, which measures 33 inches high and 21 inches wide.



of fifty painting patrons put receive the repro-size as the measures

The reproductions were created by Steve Clark at Cracked Melon Editions in Walla Walla. Clark works with a super-high resolution 40-inch flatbed scanner and a large-format printer that created archival images on artist-quality cotton rag paper.

Cannon was trained as a graphic designer in her birthplace of Japan and has honed her skills by studying the flora and fauna of the high desert plateau where she's made her home for almost 20 years. Her watercolor paintings are known for their high level of detail, and the large format of the Great Blue Heron allows for every feather and surface variation to be articulated.

One of the pieces will be framed and hung in the café at the Arts Center and the remaining thirty-nine reproductions will be available for sale at the Center's Pendleton Foundation Trust Craft Gallery for \$200 each. Pieces may be reserved by calling the Center at 278-9201.

The other project that the Center is featuring is a series of original miniature paintings of birds and animals Cannon. The painted images are on fine art paper that measures eight by ten inches – perfect for museum-style frames available at Bi-Mart and other reasonably-priced department stores. The original paintings are \$60 each, and each one is unique.



original miniature birds and animals Cannon. The painted two to three inches tall paper that measures inches – perfect for museum-style frames

For more information about Cannon's work, visit the Center online at <http://www.pendletonarts.org>.

Pendleton Bird Club and Salem Audubon Plan Fall Malheur Trip

The Pendleton Bird Club and Salem Audubon Chapter are planning a joint trip to Malheur NWR on September 6 – 9, 2007. The plan is to limit the total number of participants to a "manageable" 24, 12 from Pendleton and 12 from Salem. The Pendleton group will carpool from Pendleton on Thursday, September 6 and return to Pendleton on Sunday, September 9. We will stay at the Field Station in Owl East, Owl West, and The Pelican, and the dorm or possibly one trailer. For most of the birding at the refuge, we will divide into two mixed groups (some from Salem and some from Pendleton) so there will be no more than about 12 people birding together.

There have been some price and policy changes at the Field Station in the past year. The rooms will average about \$24 per person per night, and we are required to send fifty percent of our total to hold reservations. Therefore, we are requesting a \$40-deposit per person to hold the reservation. Since



space is limited, we will accept the first 12 payments we receive to hold a reservation. When we know the exact number of rooms to hold, we will let you know the balance due. Their policy says we are to pay the balance on arrival at the Field Station. Any additional persons (over the limit of 12 from Pendleton) wishing to attend will be placed on a waiting list, but their deposits will be returned if spaces do not free up. There will be no refunds to the 12 people who make an early deposit. Hopefully, you will be able to fill your space from the waiting list if you should not be able to attend.

The long weekend will be spent very much as in the past. Thursday, September 6, will be a travel day. We will spend Friday and Saturday (September 7 and 8) birding the various areas around Malheur. One of those days will be a trip to Steens Mountain and hopefully see the Black Rosy-Finches. Sunday will be a travel day to return to Pendleton.

The only way to make a sure of our reservation is to send a deposit to the Field Station very soon. Because Malheur NWR is such a popular birding destination, the longer we wait the more likely the available space will be filled by other groups. Therefore, we need to send in our deposit as soon as possible. June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin are in charge of planning for the Pendleton group, and we are coordinating with Glen Lindeman of the Salem group. We are setting June 1 as the deadline for you to sign up (pay the deposit) for the trip. Please mail deposits (\$40/person) to June Whitten, 1837 S.W. Athens Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. You may make checks to June, and she will send one check to the Field Station, or, if you prefer, make your check to Malheur Field Station. More details (e.g., transportation, departure place and time, meals) will follow. Please ask any questions you may have. June or Aaron should be able to give you answers: June Whitten 276-9019 or Aaron Skirvin 276-1948

Bird of the Month – Yellow-breasted Chat **(*Icteria virens*)**

Yellow-breasted Chats don't look like warblers, and they don't act like most warblers, but they are, at 7½ inches long, the largest warbler in North America and a member of the wood warbler family. If DNA testing didn't prove this fact, the chat would seem more likely to belong to the mockingbird or thrasher family.

Icteria means yellow bird and the bright yellow breast and throat of the chat are very prominent. *Virens* means green. While green doesn't seem to apply to chats, they are a brownish, olive-green on the upper parts. The tail is long and the bill, unwarbler-like, is thick. The broken, white eyering and white spectacles show up well on the darker face. Most western chats also have a white malar stripe, but this is absent in the eastern birds.

Chats sing their complex song, usually from the top of a small tree, and then drops into the brush out of sight. They are secretive, skulking birds and are more often heard than seen. The song is more like a mockingbird's with a series of chuks, whistles, and hoots. They are even known to mimic other birds.

The nest is usually well hidden in very brushy areas, often near a stream. The nest, usually less than 5 feet off the ground, has a base of dead leaves or dry grasses. Then, a tightly woven inner nest of bark or fine weed stems is built inside the loose outer nest. After lining the nest with fine grass, it is ready for 3 to 6 creamy white eggs, which are quite large at 0.8 inches. Both adults attend the nest and care for the young. The adults eat berries and insects and feed the babies crushed insects. They may raise two broods a year.

Chats occur across most of the United States from late spring throughout the summer. They migrate to far southern states and Mexico for the winter. Like so many other species, their numbers are dwindling, especially the eastern population. Loss of habitat is the current explanation of their decreasing numbers.

Yellow-breasted Chats have been seen on the Pendleton River Parkway, along the upper Umatilla River, and numerous other brushy habitats. One of the better places to observe chats is the old Emigrant Road (Cabbage Hill), where there is abundant brush about half-way up the hill.

Contributed by June Whitten

Short-eared Owls Return

During the spring and early summer of 2005, large numbers of Short-eared Owls nested in the grassland habitats southwest of Pendleton at Whittaker Flat, Alkali Canyon Road, and Mud Springs Canyon Road. For the past two years, however, Short-eared Owls have been difficult to find in Umatilla County. The presumed reason for the drastic changes in the owl



populations is their response to the changes in mice and vole densities from year to year.

This spring, it appears that the owls have returned in fairly large numbers to breed again in the same areas as in 2005. For the next few weeks, if you take an early morning or evening birding trip along Mud Springs Canyon Road or Alkali Canyon you will likely see a few Short-eared Owls perched on fence posts and sign posts or flying over low the grassy fields along the route.

While you are looking for the owls, watch for Western Meadowlarks, Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows, Red-tailed Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Northern Harriers, Ferruginous Hawks, and Long-billed Curlews. All of these species and more use the grasslands during the breeding season.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

April – May Bird Sightings

Aaron Skirvin reported 2 **Short-eared Owls** and 2 **Rough-legged Hawks** along Mud Springs Canyon Road on April 21. He also reported a **Ferruginous Hawk** along Coombs Canyon Road, about 3.5 miles east of Mud Springs Canyon Road.

On April 23, Connie Betts reported 13 occupied nests at the heronry near Little League Park in Pendleton. On April 24, Connie and Russ Betts saw a **Greater Yellowlegs** behind the Brian Whitten's home and approximately 12 **Mallard** nests along McKay Creek in southwest Pendleton.

April 25, June Whitten reported the first **House Wren** of the year, looking over the new nest boxes Duane installed in their yard. They also had a **Rufous Hummingbird** in their yard. Ginger Shoemaker of Walla Walla saw a **House Wren** on Foster Road (a few miles east of Milton-Freewater) on April 27.

On April 25, John Annear, who lives in Hermiston, reported a pair of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in his back yard. They had frequented his feeder for 10-14 days.

White-crowned Sparrows invaded the county in large numbers in late April. John Annear reported 20-25 in his Hermiston yard, 2-3 times the normal number for this time of year. Dave

Herr also reported a large number of **White-crowned Sparrows** at his feeder - at least 50 on April 26. On the 27th, the sparrows decided to gang up on him - he had to give up counting after reaching 200! Russ and Connie Betts reported hundreds in their SW Pendleton neighborhood and the nearby park on the same day. Nancy Brown reported a large number at her Hermiston residence on April 30. Dave continued to be plagued with them as well, reporting "zillions" April 29 and "large numbers" on May 1.

Apparently tiring of White-crowned Sparrows, Dave Herr headed to Mission Ponds on April 27, where he found a brood of newly hatched **Canada Geese**.

Russ and Connie Betts reported the first local **Barn Swallows** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** of 2007 - at Pendleton Community Park - on April 27th, and Nancy Brown saw 2 **Pine Siskins** in her Hermiston yard on April 30.

The **Great-tailed Grackle** continued to delight local birders. Aaron Skirvin saw it at Mission Ponds on April 21. He flushed it into Jack Simon's pasture, and then called Jack on his cell phone, to see if Jack could see the bird and distract it so Aaron could get another look. The plan worked, and Aaron and Jack watched it peck at Jack's left-over horse food. Aaron and Jack both saw the **Great-tailed Grackle** near Mission Ponds on April 28, too.

Barbara Clark got into the first bird-of-the-year action, locating the first **Lazuli Bunting** of the year - at her feeder near McKay Reservoir on April 28.

Aaron hit the birding trail April 28, and found the first **Yellow Warbler**, **Nashville Warbler**, **Orange-crowned Warbler**, **Chipping Sparrow**, and **Dusky Flycatcher** of 2007 - all at the bottom of Iskuulpa Creek. He reported 4 **Lesser Goldfinches** from the same area. In the afternoon he found several hundred **Cliff Swallows** along Mud Spring Canyon Road and Coombs Canyon Road. He spotted **Long-eared Owls**, **Sage Thrashers**, **Grasshopper Sparrow**, **Western Kingbird**, and **Gray Partridge** along the route as well.

Aaron continued birding April 29, with June and Duane Whitten, and reported a pair **Swainson's Hawks** building a nest along Tutuilla Road, just before the McKay Drive intersection. They saw 7 **Black-necked Stilts** and 3 **Lark Sparrows** at McKay Reservoir. Continuing south to Ukiah, they saw **Fox Sparrows**, **Lewis's Woodpeckers** and 7



Vaux's Swifts (first report for 2007). Along Highway 395, they spotted 2 **Spotted Sandpipers** (no pun intended) and watched one process a large salmon fly by pulverizing the fly on a rock before swallowing it. It's always fun to watch other species prepare their food!

Mary Combs reported a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** at her Pendleton feeder on April 30, and Russ and Connie Betts got a quick glimpse of a one at their feeder the next day. Jenny Barnett reported the first **Bullock's Oriole** of the year, along Confederated Way in Mission, May 2.

The swallows had all arrived back in the county by May 2. Aaron Skirvin reported a "mob" of **swallows** at Mission Ponds. All species were represented, including **Bank, Tree, Barn, Violet-green, Northern Rough-winged, and Cliff Swallows**.

On May 7, Aaron Skirvin reported 30 **Black-necked Stilts** at Mann's Pond and **American Avocets** in the Stanfield area. Ron and Carole Louderback, from the Tri-Cities, saw a **White-faced Ibis** and **Wilson's Phalaropes** on Mann's Pond. Jack Simons saw 6 **White-faced Ibis** fly over Mission Ponds (near his house) on May 8.

Black-headed Grosbeaks made their first appearance at Pendleton Community Park on May 9, as reported by Russ and Connie Betts.

May 13's migration count netted many new county year birds. **Cassin's Vireo, Black-headed Grosbeak, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Flammulated Owl, Calliope Hummingbird, Hammond's Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling Vireo, Townsend's Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, Western Tanager, and Yellow-breasted Chat** were reported by Aaron. Russ and Connie Betts saw a **Burrowing Owl** along Highway 395 the same day.

The first **Black Tern** of the year was spotted by Aaron (who else?) at McKay Reservoir on May 17. The tern was sporting its alternate plumage. Bob and Dannell Tapley birded along the Rieth-Echo Road on

May 19 and saw herons at the rookery at Horseshoe Bend and 8 **Common Mergansers** in the Umatilla River. They also found 2 **Red-tailed Hawk** nests, a **Short-eared Owl**, and got a good picture of **Great Horned Owlets** on a nest, all along Mud Springs Canyon Road.

On May 19, Aaron and 4 others found the first **Western Wood-Pewee** of the year, while on the club's field trip to Cabbage Hill. Other species seen included **Lazuli Bunting, Yellow Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee, Black-capped Chickadee, MacGillivray's Warbler and Fox Sparrow**.

June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin found 90 species while birding on May 20. Highlights included: 1 **Eurasian Collared-Dove** at Pilot Rock, 3 **Short-eared Owls**, a singing **Grasshopper Sparrow**, and **Lark Sparrow** (Mud Springs and Coombs Canyon Roads). County year birds included **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** (McKay Reservoir), and singing **Gray Catbirds** near Wenix Springs in the Thornhollow area. They also reported singing **Townsend's Warblers, Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Hammond's Flycatchers** (Emigrant Springs State Park).

This month's bird sightings were topped off by the discovery of a large breeding colony of **Tricolored Blackbirds** northwest of Milton-Freewater. Mike and MerryLynn Denny discovered the new colony on May 19.

Whew, late April and early May was a busy time for birds and birders alike! Nothing like a nice challenge for a first time bird-sighting editor. Keep looking, so we can report some good birds for next month! Please continue to send all your bird sightings to me, Jenny Barnett, at pdtgrouse@uci.net. Happy birding.

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Original art work by John Green
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May 2007 Page 6