



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 5, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August 2007

Fall Shorebirding in Umatilla County

This is the season for shorebirding in Umatilla County. The first south bound shorebirds show up at McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge (McKay Reservoir) in late June, provided the reservoir level is low enough to expose mudflats. However, numbers and species diversity increase in August as more birds are moving south and they have more feeding area due to increasing mudflats. McKay Reservoir is located along Hwy 395 about 5 miles south of Pendleton.

The other fall shorebirding hotspot in the county is at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Cold Springs NWR is located four or five miles east of Hermiston. Cold Springs' mudflats don't open up until early August, but this refuge attracts more individual and more species of shorebirds than McKay Reservoir, but both sites offer good shorebird viewing.

The mudflats at the upper end of McKay Reservoir can now be reached by the west side road. To get to the good shorebird habitat at Cold Springs, park at parking lot D (pick up a brochure at the entrance to Cold Springs NWR to find the location of parking lot D) and walk northward on the gated roadway to the reservoir. The northern part of Cold Springs Reservoir is closed to public access, and is shown on the brochure. If you walk out onto the mudflats, look for the boundary of the closed area, which is marked by an indistinct row of metal fence posts that extends into the reservoir.

If you have a chance to do some local shorebirding this late summer and fall but are not sure about

shorebird identification, take along your favorite field guide and the following guide to the shorebirds of Umatilla County. Bird identification takes practice, lots of looking at lots of birds in the field. Now is the time to take advantage of fall bird migration to hone your skills on local shorebirds.

GETTING STARTED WITH SHOREBIRD IDENTIFICATION: FALL SHOREBIRDING IN UMATILLA COUNTY

Smaller than Killdeer

1. **Peeps** = Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper – Dark, often black legs; long, tapering, down-curved bill; brownish gray back, often with rufous on scapulars. Common to Abundant.



Baird's Sandpiper, breeding adult.
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

Least Sandpiper – Greenish or yellowish green legs; short, slightly down curved bill; back often brownish; brownish streaks on upper breast. Common.

Baird's Sandpiper – Black legs and bill; slightly but noticeably larger than Western and Least Sandpipers; brownish breast; juveniles have buffy head; wings noticeably longer than tail. Uncommon to common.

Semipalmated Sandpiper – Dark or black legs; short, blunt bill (though some overlap in bill length with Western Sandpiper); grayer back than Western Sandpiper, usually no rufous on scapulars. Rare, but annual, and can be difficult to distinguish from Western.



2. **Spotted Sandpiper** – A little larger than the peeps; pale legs; spotted (breeding adults, only sandpiper with spotted breast and belly) or white beneath (juveniles and winter adults); constantly teeters/bobs; white streak on shoulder. Uncommon

3. **Semipalmated Plover** – Killdeer-like, but much smaller; one dark breast band; small bill. Rare to uncommon.

4. **Sanderling** – Black legs; black, straight bill; very pale white and gray (salt and pepper pattern); black spot at wing bend. Rare, but annual, mainly at Cold Springs NWR.

5. **Dunlin** – Black legs; longish black, downturned bill. Plain gray-brown back. Often in flocks and rare before mid-October, arriving after most other shorebirds .

Similar in size to a Killdeer

1. **Killdeer** – White beneath; white collar; 2 black breast bands; orange rump and tail. Common to abundant.

2. **Pectoral Sandpiper** – Yellowish legs; overall brownish color (except belly); heavily streaked breast down to white belly. Uncommon.

3. **Solitary Sandpiper** – Legs olive-greenish; prominent white eye-ring (our only sandpiper with eye-ring); white-dotted wings and back; occasionally bobs/teeters. Uncommon to Rare.

4. **Wilson's Phalarope** – Yellowish or grayish legs; gray and white body; needle-like black bill; swims, wades, and forages on mud. Uncommon to Rare.

5. **Red-necked Phalarope** – Black patch around and behind the eye; usually swims; short, needle-like bill; brownish or brownish-gray, with buffy or whitish stripe on each side of back.

Larger than Killdeer

1. **Greater Yellowlegs** – Long yellowish or orangish legs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; long, bill, about 1.5 times the width of head; bill thick at base and often two-tone, appears slightly

upturned. Uncommon to Common.

2. **Lesser Yellowlegs** – Long yellowish or orangish legs; smaller than Greater Yellowlegs; grayish/brown upper parts, white below; thin, straight, blackish bill, a little longer than the width of head. Uncommon.

3. **Black-bellied Plover** – A tall, long-legged plover, noticeably larger and taller than Killdeer. Gray and white plumage, with black axillary (wingpit) feathers, which are noticeable in flight. Uncommon but annual at Cold Springs NWR.

4. **Long-billed Dowitcher** – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; white back (in flight); solid dark cap. Uncommon to Common.

5. **Wilson's Snipe** – Stocky and brownish; very long bill; whitish stripes on back; whitish streak on crown. Uncommon.

6. **American Avocet** – Long, blue-gray legs; faded rusty (in fall) head; black and white body; up-turned bill. Rare.

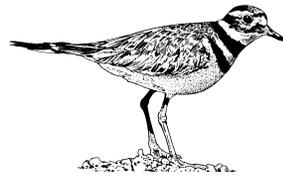
7. **Black-necked Stilt** – Very long reddish legs; black and white body and head; straight thin black bill. Rare.

Other shorebirds rarely seen (or that might be seen) in the fall at Cold Springs and McKay Reservoirs: Long-billed Curlew (wrong habitat), Marbled Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Red Knot, American Golden Plover, and Ruddy Turnstone.

Shorebirds Known to Breed in Umatilla County

Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Phalarope. (Upland Sandpiper may still breed in Umatilla County near Albee/Ukiah.)

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin



Killdeer



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Picnic

Saturday, September 22, 2007

Shorebirding at Cold Springs NWR

followed by

Picnic at McNary Wildlife Area

Meet at the Pendleton Safeway parking lot, NE corner at 9:00 a.m.

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., October 11, 2007

“Birds of Malheur NWR”

By Terry Steele

Pendleton First Presbyterian Church
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton

The Big Sit! Bird Count

Sunday, October 14, 2007

Enjoy a few hours or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam at Umatilla or Cold Springs NWR, east of Hermiston. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! Bird Count, so put October 14 on your calendar! Want to participate? We hope so!

For further information, contact June Whitten: 276-9019

Bird Club Meeting

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

Program to be announced.

Pendleton First Christian Church

N. Main Street, Pendleton

BIRDS OF THE MONTH — RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) and WILLIAMSON’S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)

Both of these sapsuckers breed in the Blue Mountains of Umatilla County as well as other mountainous areas of Oregon (mainly east of the Cascade crest) and other western states. The Red-naped Sapsucker migrates to California, Arizona and Mexico for the winter. Some Williamson’s spend the winter along the coastal mountains of California, but most go farther south to the southwestern U. S. and Mexico. There are a couple of records of Williamson’s Sapsucker in Umatilla County in the winter.

Sapsuckers don’t actually suck sap, but they do sip it! Their tongues are shorter than most woodpeckers, and they cannot extend it as far out. The tip of the tongue has small, hair-like projections that enable the birds to pick up sap, much like a paintbrush holds paint. The sapsuckers drill a series of holes in a sap-bearing tree and return to the holes to eat both sap and insects caught in the sap. These sap wells attract other sap feeders, such as hummingbirds and various insects.

The plumages of male and female Red-naped Sapsuckers are similar: red nape, forehead, and throat and white and black barring on the back. In the Williamson’s, however, the plumages of the sexes are very different, which is unique among our woodpeckers. At first glance, a female Williamson’s resembles a small Northern Flicker with a yellow belly and no red feathers. A male Williamson’s has much less red than does a Red-naped and only on the throat; the belly is bright yellow and the back is solid



black, which is a good distinguishing feature. Both species have large white wing patches, except the female Williamson's, which has no white in the wing. Both sexes of each species show a white rump in flight. The male Williamson's has delicate white lines behind the eye and bill on an otherwise black face, while the Red-naped has more pronounced white lines.

Both Williamson's and Red-naped nest in tree cavities in coniferous forest habitats, especially ponderosa pine and mixed conifer. It may take up to three or four weeks to drill the nest cavity, but they often use the same nest for two or more years. The Red-naped seems to have an affinity to nest in aspen groves and is more often found in riparian areas than is Williamson's. Both lay usually 4 white eggs, 1 inch in diameter. The fledglings are taught to feed in the drilled sap holes and do not remain dependent on the parents very long.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

Drumming, rather than singing, is the method males use to attract mates. These two sapsuckers may be distinguished in the field by the pattern of the drumming. Williamson's has an initial burst of fast drumming followed by loud taps with longer spaces in between. The Red-naped also has an initial rapid drum of about five taps, followed by decreasing taps and occasional double taps.

Some good areas to find both Red-naped and Williamson's Sapsuckers include Battle Mountain State Park and the vicinity around the park. An aspen grove on the east side of Hwy 395 just south of Battle Mountain summit is a very good location for these woodpeckers. They also nest near Emigrant Springs State Park, along Summit Road, Yellow Jacket Road, Target Meadows, and many other areas in the Blue Mountains.

Contributed by June Whitten



Kakya Taymut, Pendleton Bird Club Newsletter

JULY – AUGUST BIRD SIGHTINGS

With fall migration picking up during this reporting period, bird reports have picked up as well.

One **Clark's Grebe**, a rare but annual species in Umatilla County, was present at McKay Reservoir in late July. It was originally reported by Aaron Skirvin on July 15, and June and Duane Whitten saw one there on August 1.

Birding along the Gurdane Road on July 29, June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin found 42 species, including a **Golden Eagle**, several **Chukars** and **Gray Partridges**, a **Loggerhead Shrike**, about **80 Brewer's Sparrows**, about **170 Vesper Sparrows**, **4 Grasshopper Sparrows**, and a juvenile **Green-tailed Towhee**.

On August 1, June and Duane Whitten found a Great Egret at McKay Reservoir. If the Whittens had seen the egret the day before, they would have the distinction of finding the first Great Egret in Umatilla County in July, ever!

Russ and Connie Betts gave this report from their neighborhood in the McKay Creek area of southwest Pendleton: August 1st - **11 Double-crested Cormorants** flew over the Pendleton Community Park; August 2nd - **4 Yellow Warblers** and **2 Dusky Flycatchers**; August 5th - **7 Northern Flickers** in the park; and August 6th - **1 American Goldfinch** at their birdbath.

In early August, Common Nighthawks, which have been scarce this summer, showed up in force, especially in southwest Pendleton. On August 6, Russ and Connie Betts reported **15 Common Nighthawks** around their house. Jenny Barnett reported a dozen flying around her house in the Rice Park neighborhood of Pendleton on the same day, and June Whitten saw 8 at Rick Park the same evening. Russ and Connie also reported a **Calliope Hummingbird** at their house on August 7. It gave them plenty of opportunity to view it, and chased away baby **House Sparrows** that got too close to the feeder.

August 8 was a productive shorebirding day for Aaron Skirvin and Russ and Connie Betts at McKay Reservoir. They spotted 2 county year birds:

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Baird's Sandpiper and **Red-necked Phalarope**. They also found the usual suspects including **Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Killdeer, Wilson's Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Northern Pintail, Mallard, Canada Goose, Green-winged Teal, Caspian Tern, American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorant** and **Savannah Sparrow**.

Russ and Connie had about a dozen **Common Nighthawks** circling their house on the evening of August 12. On August 13, they spotted a **Great Egret** in the ponds along the freeway near Stanfield. They also reported a **Swainson's Hawk** near the Umatilla River around Stanfield Meadows.

On August 12, Tanya Harrison, June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin went shorebirding at McKay Reservoir. They spotted **Semipalmated Plover** (county year bird), **Semipalmated Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalaropes**, and all sandpipers common this time of year (**Spotted, Western, Least, and Baird's**). Seeing a **Great Horned Owl** was a bonus. Aaron and June then headed up toward East Birch Creek and Pearson Creek Roads (USFS Road #54), where they found 12 **Brewer's Sparrows**, a **Northern Pygmy-Owl**, a **Northern Goshawk, Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, Swainson's Thrush, Townsend's Warblers**, and **Townsend's Solitaires**. At Ukiah sewer ponds they spotted about 25 **Red-necked Phalarope**. On the way back to Pendleton they saw a **Clark's Nutcracker** at Battle Mountain and a **Barn Owl** just west of Pilot Rock. Aaron set a personal record, by seeing all three species of accipiter on the

same day (**Coopers Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Northern Goshawk**).

August 18 was a productive day of birding for June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin. Driving a route including Juniper Canyon, Stateline Windfarm and Cold Springs NWR, they found **Brewer's Sparrows, Lark Sparrows, Chukars, Loggerhead Shrikes, Lesser Yellowlegs** (county year bird), **Black-necked stilts, Red-necked Phalaropes, Orange-crowned Warbler** and over 200 **Western Sandpiper**.

On August 19, Aaron found 4 **Gray Partridges** along Wegner Gulch Road and an **American Avocet** at McKay Reservoir.

As summer draws to a close, birds are still migrating, so birding will continue to be good. Here's a reminder about the friendly competition between the Pendleton Bird Club and the Walla Walla County birders to see which county records the most birds each year. Umatilla County birders have tallied 231 species so far. The Walla Walla group isn't far behind with 228 species reported this year. Keep birding and watch the website for county year birds, and maybe we'll win the competition this year.

With this article, my temporary assignment as bird sightings editor draws to a close and I return the duty to Dave Herr's capable hands. So send your county year birds and other interesting bird sightings to Dave at dsherr@oregontrail.net

Contributed by Jenny Barnett

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