



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 6, No. 1 Pendleton, Oregon January 2008

PENDLETON BIRD CLUB POTLUCK AND PROGRAM

Thirty-two members of the Pendleton Bird Club held a potluck on January 10. The large array of wonderful food confirmed that birders are also endowed with culinary skills! New Year's Resolutions temporarily forgotten, the group enjoyed the food and camaraderie. If you missed this potluck, be sure to set aside the evening of April 11 to attend the final Bird Club potluck before our summer break.

Aaron Skirvin gave a timely presentation on winter birds that have occurred, or may occur, in Umatilla County. **Common and Hoary Redpolls** were compared, and although, the Common Redpoll is more apt to be found in our area, the Hoary is also a possibility. Aaron suggested checking out birch and alder trees with catkins which the Redpolls like to feed on. **Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings** look similar, but Aaron described the principle field marks:

white bars on the wings of Bohemian, none on the Cedar; undertail coverts rusty on Bohemian, white on Cedar; Bohemian a larger bird, with solid gray-brown belly, whitish or yellowish tinge on Cedar.

American Tree Sparrow, with the rusty stripes on the head and a central spot on clear breast, is reported nearly annually each winter. Mud Springs or Alkali Canyon Roads are good locations to search out the American Tree Sparrow, usually found in brushy habitat with a few trees included. (Not too many trees along those routes, so their hiding places aren't too hard to locate.) The **Harris**

Sparrow, bright in winter with his black bib, is also usually reported annually in Umatilla County. They can be hard to find, but the McNary Wildlife Area, with a little bird seed included, regularly produces both Harris and **White-throated Sparrow**, and currently **Golden-crowned Sparrow** as well.

Lapland Longspur is probably in the county in many years, but easily goes undetected. They tend to travel with large flocks of Horned Larks and it takes perseverance to locate them. So far, we have no

verified records of this species in Umatilla County. **Snow Buntings**, with their large, white-wing patches will be easier to view, provided they are around. They are reported occasionally in Umatilla County. **Pine Grosbeaks** are another good bird to watch for, especially in the Blue Mountains around Kamela and Poverty Flats.



Harris's Sparrow. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

Aaron's Powerpoint presentation was a fitting conclusion to a great evening. The slides showed these beautiful birds in various views and plumage. Aaron's message to the group was: winter birding can be very good in Umatilla County; many birds are here in winter; and, we just need birders to brave the weather to look for them.

Contributed by June Whitten



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2007 Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 14, 2008

Jack Simons presents

**“The Artwork of John James
Audubon”**

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 13, 2008

**Book Reviews by Russ Betts,
Haval Norman,
Nancy Brown, and Jane Holmes**

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

6:30 p.m., April 10, 2008

Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m.

Program by Dave Herr

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Seventeen birders, including one feeder counter, participated in the annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count on December 29, 2007. Umatilla County's count was part of the nationwide 108th annual Christmas Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society. The goal of our count was to find, identify, and count as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period within a count circle 15 miles in diameter. The center of Umatilla County's count circle is located near the base of Cabbage Hill about six miles southeast of Pendleton.

A typical Umatilla County CBC will tally 70 to 72 bird species. The highest species total for the Umatilla County CBC was 81 species on January 3, 1992. Last year, we found 72 species and counted 9,137 individual birds in the count circle. This year, we found 69 species and 8,266 individual birds. The warm weather on count day – no wind, sunny skies (until late afternoon), and warm temperatures – was nice for the birders, but caused the birds to scatter widely, making them more difficult to find and count. Rules for the Christmas Bird Count allow the addition of species found during “count week” — three days immediately prior to and three days after count day. This year, one additional species, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, was seen within the count circle during count week but not on count day.

Participants in this year's count were: Jenny Barnett, Connie Betts, Russ Betts, Marilyn Cripe, Tanya Harrison, Betty Klepper, Craig Kvern, Diana LaSarge, Bruce Mayfield, Dolly Robison, Jack Simons, Aaron Skirvin, Lorna Waltz, Ruth Whittaker, Duane Whitten, June Whitten, and Dale Wilkins.

Results of the count are as follows: Canada Goose 919, Wood Duck 2, Gadwall 6, American Wigeon 467, Mallard 793, Northern Shoveler 1, Green-winged Teal 7, Ring-necked Duck 26, Common Goldeneye 156, Hooded Merganser 16, Common Merganser 35, Ruddy Duck 2, Ring-necked Pheasant 173, Wild Turkey 11, California Quail 61, Double-crested Cormorant 1, Great Blue Heron 23, Black-crowned Night-Heron 4, Bald Eagle 5 (2 adults and 3 immatures), Northern Harrier 15, Sharp-shinned Hawk 7, Cooper's Hawk 2, *Accipiter* sp. 3, Red-tailed Hawk 64, Rough-legged Hawk 23, Golden Eagle 3 (3 immatures), American Kestrel 57, Merlin 1, Prairie Falcon 1, Virginia Rail 1, American Coot



66, Ring-billed Gull 21, Rock Pigeon 437, Mourning Dove 217, Great Horned Owl 4, Short-eared Owl 2, Belted Kingfisher 5, Downy Woodpecker 10, Northern Flicker 40, Pileated Woodpecker 1, Northern Shrike 1, Steller's Jay 13, Black-billed Magpie 381, American Crow 9, Common Raven 100, Horned Lark 61, Black-capped Chickadee 25, Mountain Chickadee 10, Red-breasted Nuthatch 8, Brown Creeper 2, Bewick's Wren 6, Golden-crowned Kinglet 15, Townsend's Solitaire 3, American Robin 2, European Starling 1593, American Tree Sparrow 8, Spotted Towhee 6, Song Sparrow 80, White-crowned Sparrow 286, Dark-eyed Junco 868, Red-winged Blackbird 123, Western Meadowlark 30, Brewer's Blackbird 160, House Finch 162, Pine Siskin 14, American Goldfinch 143, House Sparrow 274.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

JUNCO

You died because I invited you here,
with food for you and all your friends
You died because I love light and view,
but not rain and dust and bugs,
You died because for just an instant you forgot about glass.

Even inanimate, you are still a miracle
Who could imagine feathers so tiny,
color so subtle,
A form so tangible, yet weightless?

You died because I loved you, and your kind,
and asked you to come here.
What, now, am I to do with your tiny form?
How can a thing that once flew be placed in a dumpster?
Who puts a miracle in the trash?

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Bird of The Month — Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

The Hooded Merganser is a small to medium-sized, diving duck that is often wary and secretive. The name merganser comes from the Latin words "mergus", meaning to dive or plunge and "anser", which means goose.



Kakya Taymut, Pendleton Bird Club Newsletter

The striking plumage of the male combines black, white, and brown, with the distinctive head pattern of black and white. The white crest covers the sides of the head behind the eye and is surrounded by black on the head and neck. When flying, the white crest appears more as a white line, but can be larger than the duck's head when fully erect. The female has a reddish-rust crest on a brown head and neck.

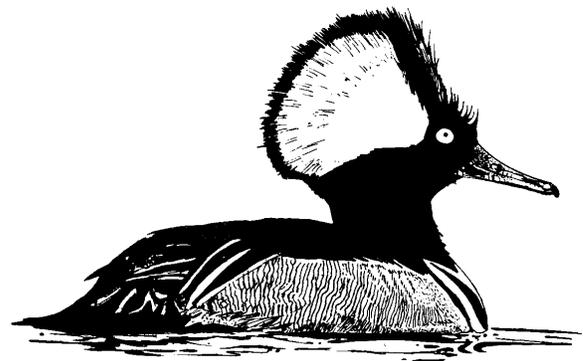
VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

Hooded Mergansers are medium-sized ducks, a little larger than teal. They are about 18 inches long, with a 24-inch wingspan. They are all dark on the back and wings, like a Wood Duck, except for their white, secondary wing feathers. Their medium size, all dark back, white secondaries, and very rapid wing-beat aid in identification when they are flying. Their long, serrated bills are perfect for catching small fish when they dive. They also dine on frogs, tadpoles, snails, crustaceans, and aquatic insects.

Hooded Mergansers nest across much of the northern United States and southern Canada; they do not occur in any other country. Their breeding habitat is forested areas near water: ponds, streams, lakes, and marshes or estuaries. They prefer nesting in tree cavities but may use unoccupied Wood Duck nest boxes at times. The pair bonds are formed early in winter, but the male does not assist at the nest or raising the babies. Females may lay eggs in other



Hooded Mergansers' nests, and occasionally in a Wood Duck's nest, resulting in some large broods and possibly some mixed broods. The white eggs are unusual in that they are almost spherical and have a thick shell so they are sometimes compared to cue or golf balls. The females with babies are very good at

staying out of sight and moving very fast under overhanging brush around the pond or waterway.

Hooded Mergansers are short-distance migrants and winter in the United States where there are ice-free ponds with a food supply. They are fast flyers and usually quite wary when approached. The very best time to see Hooded Mergansers in Umatilla County is during the fall and winter. They are occasionally seen at Mission Ponds, Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds, and the Ukiah sewer ponds, when ice-free. The best viewing location in the county is the wildlife ponds at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area. There have been several pairs on the ponds this winter, and they are somewhat accustomed to people passing by on the trails around the ponds, so by approaching slowly, they tend to only swim away.

Contributed by June Whitten

December – January Bird Sightings

Our renowned Bird Sightings editor, Dave Herr, has been away from Pendleton on a birding trip to East Africa. So, you are stuck with me as temporary editor in Dave's stead this month. Some of us, including Dave, take special note of the first bird species we see on New Years Day. Dave welcomed in the New Year in Kenya and, gloating a little (well, maybe a lot) proudly announced that his first bird of the New Year was a White-bellied Go-Away Bird – yes, that is a REAL species of bird. Dave even took its photo. They must have been desperate for bird names when they came up with that one. Well, I too noted my first bird of the New Year - in Pendleton - and I am proud to announce that it was NOT a European Starling – I'll let it go at that!

In addition to his photograph of the White-bellied Go-Away Bird, Dave reports that he took about 2000 other photos on his trip to Africa. Be sure to circle April 10 on your calendar because Dave will give us a program on his Kenya trip at the Bird Club meeting that evening. Knowing Dave, it will be a great program.

Winter's bite made itself felt this morning (Jan. 22), with a temperature of 6°F in Pendleton. Due to the chilly temperatures combined with a little snow cover, I suspect many of you are seeing an increase in birds at your feeders. This morning, I noticed a group of **Dark-eyed Juncos** searching for open ground

around the base of some pine trees near my office in Mission. They were looking for food and were acting a little frantic. So, keep your feeders full of seeds and suet to help the birds get through this frigid weather.

Dannell and Bob Tapley spent part of Christmas Day birding south and west of Pendleton (Coombs Canyon, Alkali Canyon, Vinson, and Echo), where they saw quite a few hawks, including **16 Red-tails**, a couple of **Rough-legs**, and some **American Kestrels**. They also found several groups of **Dark-eyed Juncos** and a flock of about **100 Red-winged Blackbirds** near Echo. I also had a chance to do a little birding between Pendleton and Pilot Rock on Christmas Day. I found quite a few raptors, too, and was pleasantly surprised to find a family group of **3 Tundra Swans** (2 adults and a juvenile) on the ponds along Hwy 395 about a mile north of Pilot Rock.

During his walk on December 28, Jack Simons reported seeing **3 Bald Eagles** flying over the Umatilla River near Mission. Jack also discovered the remains of a recently deceased **Pileated Woodpecker** near the river. After examining the carcass, Jack concluded that the bird had probably died of natural causes as there was no indication of blood or gunshot wounds on the body.

On December 28, Russ and Connie Betts counted **4 American Wigeons** in McKay Creek in southwest Pendleton. On January 5, they reported that the “**Mallards** are back” along the creek, when they counted a total of 38.

Recuperating from shoulder surgery, Mayanna Porter, who lives on the SE edge of Pilot Rock, has spent more time than usual watching birds at her feeders this winter. Mayanna and her daughter, Patty Bowers, observed **2 Eurasian Collared-Doves** munching on sunflower seeds at the feeders on December 30. The next day, a juvenile **Northern Shrike**, perhaps also “bird watching”, sat in the tree above the feeders for a short time. Everyday, Mayanna sees **White-crowned Sparrows, House Finches, American Goldfinches, Red-winged Blackbirds, Mourning Doves, Dark-eyed Juncos, California Quail, and Ring-necked Pheasants** (up to 12 birds) using her feeders. On January 3,



Mayanna again saw the juvenile **Northern Shrike** in her yard; obviously, it knows the best “birding” place in Pilot Rock. A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** is a regular visitor at Mayanna’s feeding station, too. Considering the number and variety of birds visiting her feeders, Mayanna must “see” the local feed store dealer on a regular basis to replenish the fast-depleting, bird seed supply!

Getting a jump on his 2008 bird list, Neal Hinds found 42 species of birds around the Hermiston area on January 1. Among the birds he spotted were 2 **Great Egrets** along Sagebrush Road, 2 adult **Bald Eagles** below McNary Dam, a **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Hermit Thrush**, and **Varied Thrush** at Cold Springs NWR.

June Whitten, Betty Klepper, and I birded the western part of Umatilla County on New Years Day. Some of the more interesting finds were 6 **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** along Speare Canyon Road, 1 lost **SAGE THRASHER** along Mac Hoke Road, 2 **Great Egrets**, 2 **Merlins**, and a **Peregrine Falcon** in the Stanfield, Hermiston, and Umatilla area.

On January 5, Neal Hinds located an adult **HARRIS’S SPARROW** at the main parking lot at McNary Wildlife Nature Area, just below McNary Dam. This bird has been seen several times since then, with the latest sighting on January 21. The same day, Stephanie Jensen, daughter of Lyle and Jeanne Jensen, saw two adult **Bald Eagles** feeding on a (deer?) carcass along Hwy 74 about 4 miles west of Nye Jct.

Becky Hiers reported seeing a **FERRUGINOUS HAWK** on January 6 perched in a tree near the eastern end of the River Parkway in Pendleton. This species is a very rare winter resident in Umatilla County. While collecting water quality samples along Wildhorse Creek (near Little Greasewood Creek) on January 8, Lloyd Barkley and Debra Doyle spotted a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** dozing in a tree above their sampling site.

Tanya Harrison reported the first Umatilla County **Pine Siskin** of the year on January 6, when one siskin visited the feeders at her home on Pendleton’s North Hill. Tanya also had 2 **Mountain Chickadees** at her feeders on January 13. She has been seeing the chickadees off and on since December 8. Although common in the nearby Blue Mountains, **Mountain Chickadees** are very infrequently seen in Pendleton.

On January 7th, Jenny Barnett reported sighting a **Say’s Phoebe** at Mission. Though rarely sighted this time of year, Say’s Phoebe is an annual winter visitor but in very low numbers.

Keeping his eye on the bird activity at Mission Ponds, Jack Simons noticed **Canada Geese** numbers increasing during the second week of January. On the 9th, he estimated **4-500 Canada’s** were on the ponds. Also on January 9, MerryLynn Denny sent a report of a **GREAT GRAY OWL** near Milton-Freewater. MerryLynn had seen the owl that day, and further reported that Gina Miller said the **Great Gray Owl** had been in the area for about two weeks. The owl is staying in the vicinity of the intersection of Triangle and Triangle Station Roads between Milton-Freewater and Umapine. Numerous birders from Oregon and Washington have driven long distances to see the owl. It’s not very wary, is photogenic, and was still in the area on January 21.

Bob and Dannell Tapley ventured to foggy Ukiah on January 13. Bird activity was low, but they did find some **American Goldfinches**, **House Finches**, a **Black-capped Chickadee**, and **Dark-eyed Juncos** at a feeder in town. On the drive back to Pendleton they spotted 2 **Golden Eagles** just north of Battle Mountain State Park.

McKay Creek in Pendleton Community Park in southwest Pendleton continues to be a duck haven. Russ and Connie Betts tallied **8 Gadwalls** and **65 Mallards** on the creek on January 14. Also, on the 14th, the Betts spotted the neighborhood **Sharp-shinned Hawk** “feasting” on a bird in their juniper tree. On January 14, Lloyd Barkley and Debra Doyle saw and photographed an immature **Bald Eagle** that



was feeding on a deer carcass next to the railroad tracks near the mouth of Meacham Creek.

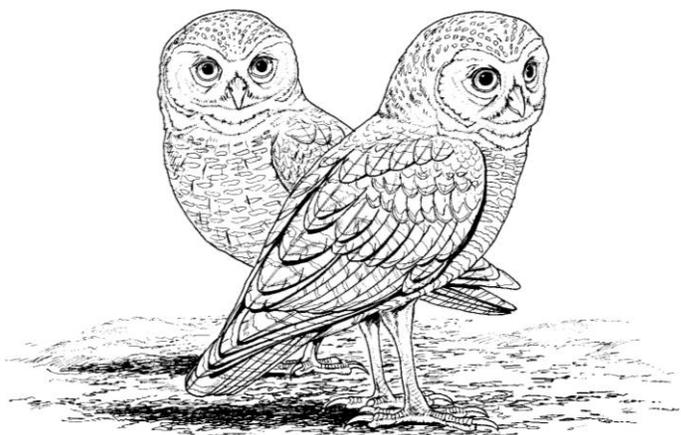
On the 16th, the Betts added a pair of **Downy Woodpeckers** to their 2008 Pendleton Community Park bird list. While walking along the Umatilla River west of Mission on January 18, Jack Simons spotted two **Wood Ducks** feeding on duckweed (how appropriate is that?!) in a backwater of the river. Phil Emert reported that one **Black-crowned Night-Heron** has been hanging out in the trees along McKay Creek near Pendleton Community Park since about January 18.

On January 21, the Salem Audubon and Pendleton Bird Club birders found the “Umatilla Bridges” **Peregrine Falcon** perching on the girders of the older I-82 bridge at Umatilla. If you are in that area in winter, look for the falcon, because it regularly

hunts from the bridge and the power transmission towers in the vicinity.

Remember, again this year the Pendleton Bird Club is keeping track of all the species found in Umatilla County. The current list, which has reached nearly 100 species, is posted at the Pendleton Bird Club website at www.pendletonbirders.org and is updated weekly. Now that Dave Herr has recuperated from jetlag, he is resuming his editorship of Bird Sightings, so please send all your sightings to Dave (including new county year birds) at 276-6413 or dsherr@oregontrail.net.

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