



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 7, No. 11 Pendleton, Oregon November 2009

Raffle/Auction Fundraiser at December Meeting

DOORS FOR THE DECEMBER MEETING open at 6:30 pm. to allow people to bring in and place their items for the annual fundraiser before we begin the program at 7:00 pm. The meeting will feature a raffle and auction to raise money for club needs like funding the website and purchasing software to make it easier and more efficient to generate and transmit the monthly newsletter.

Raffle tickets will be available for \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00. A few items will be placed into a silent auction where progressively higher bids will vie for the item. Be thinking about what you want to contribute to this annual event!

Home-made items like

bird houses,
jewelry,
bird feeders,
cakes and cookies,
jams and jellies,
paintings,
trinkets were popular last year.

How about **store-bought**

sacks of bird feed?
blocks of suet?
calendars?
books about birds or birders?
T-shirts?
bird centerpieces for Christmas?
posters?
bird games?
bird puzzles?
coffee mugs featuring birds?

Put your thinking cap on and get started on any items that you would like to bring! Invite a friend who would enjoy a fun evening with folks who love birds and birding!

For more information, please contact Betty Klepper (276-8416), Lorna Waltz (276-6353), or Jeanne Jenson (276-7510).

Submitted by Betty Klepper

Calendar of Events

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., December 10, 2009

**NEWSLETTER DISCUSSION
followed by
THE ANNUAL FUND RAISER**

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**



Christmas Bird Count

January 2, 2010

We need your help to count birds on
the 110th Christmas Bird Count.

For more information, contact

Aaron Skirvin umatbirder@yahoo.com
or 541-276-1948

Bird Club Meeting

6:30 p.m., January 14, 2010

**POTLUCK DINNER followed by
2009 UMATILLA COUNTY
BIRDS: THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

Slides and Discussion

Presented by Aaron Skirvin

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 11, 2010

BIRDS OF ECUADOR

Presented by Dave Herr

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count Saturday, January 2, 2010

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR THE 23rd official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is scheduled for **SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2010**. This local count is part of the national 110th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. If you are interested in the history of the Christmas Bird Count and count data accumulated for the hundreds of counts across the country, visit Audubon's website (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>).

During our count last year (January 3, 2009), 21 bird counters saw 67 species of birds, and tallied a total of 9,383 individual birds in our circle. The Umatilla County count circle is 15 miles in diameter, with the center located about 7 miles southeast of Pendleton. We welcome **everyone**, from beginning birder to expert, to help count birds on January 2, 2010. There are no major changes in Audubon's rules from last year as to how we conduct our count. The participant fee remains at \$5 per birder for those participants older than 18 years of age, and each participant will receive a CBC issue of *American Birds*.

Our count circle is divided into four areas, and each area has a Coordinator (see below). Each Coordinator is responsible for organizing and managing the bird counters in his/her area. To get involved and help count birds, each interested participant must contact one of the Area Coordinators to join that group for count day. The Coordinator will set a place and time for his/her team members to meet on count morning. If you want to help count birds on January 2, please contact one of the Coordinators listed below.

- ◆ **Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek, Patawa Creek and Riverside)
Jack Simons — home: 276-8566
- ◆ **Area 2** (Umatilla River and Cayuse)
Bruce Mayfield — cell: 969-8444
- ◆ **Area 3** (McKay Reservoir, Upper McKay Creek, and Birch Creek)
June and Duane Whitten — home: 276-9019
- ◆ **Area 4** (Mission, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats)
Aaron Skirvin — home: 276-1948; cell: 541-215-0761



Bird enthusiasts can also choose to do feeder counts if you have an active feeder in the count circle. If you want to do a feeder count, contact Aaron Skirvin (see contact information below). All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the count results. Abby's Pizza on Southgate in Pendleton has reserved the banquet room for us from 4:30 – 7:30 pm that evening. Please contact Aaron Skirvin (276-1948, home or umatbirder@yahoo.com) if you have any questions about the areas or feeder counts or how to participate.

**LET'S GO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTING
ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2010!!!**

BIRD OF THE MONTH—SORA

(Porzana carolina)

Submitted by June Whitten

RAILS ARE NOTORIOUSLY SECRETIVE and Soras are no exception. Extremely well-adapted to their fresh water marshes they stay almost exclusively in cattails and swamp grass where they hide, feed, and nest. With long toes and light bodies, Soras walk easily on oozy mud, lily pads, or cattail trails. They can swim well and even dive, if necessary, and often swim across narrow strips of water rather than fly.

When disturbed, the Sora usually slips back into the cattails and disappears. It may flush and rise in a fluttery, feeble flight just over the tops of the reeds. With legs dangling and looking a bit awkward, it soon drops back into the marsh. This gives the impression that Soras are poor fliers. Not true. When migrating, Soras fly with strong wing beats in flocks of 5 to 100 or more. Soras are very sensitive to cold and tend to leave the northern marshes at the first indication of frosty weather.

Soras are the most widely distributed rail in North America. During the breeding season, they are common in every Canadian province, every continental US state, and much of Mexico, Central

America and the West Indies. Soras are also popular with sportsmen and were extensively hunted in the past. When there were no bag limits, they were killed by the hundreds.

Soras are mostly shades of brown with some streaking allowing them to blend in with marsh grasses. The neck is gray; the short, sturdy bill is yellow, and has some black around the base. Soras are most often located by their “whinny” call that consists of 12 to 15 short whistles, clear in tone. The first 8 or 10 whistles are given in a rapidly descending scale. This series is usually followed by a number of harsher notes. It is believed both sexes give the “whinny” call. Adult Soras feed on small mollusks, aquatic insects, and some vegetable substances. Later in the summer, the Soras may be seen pecking seeds of various aquatic plants on mud flats in order to store fat for their migration. Despite the general reduction of wetland habitat, Soras have maintained their population and have survived in small marshy areas.

Their nests are well hidden among the cattails where water and mud are fairly deep. The nest, about 6



inches in diameter, is a well-made basket of dead cattails and grasses situated up to 6 inches above the water and concealed under arching vegetation. Soras lay 10 or 12 brown and buff eggs about 1.2 inches long. Both parents incubate and keep all of the eggs at correct temperature for development. The eggs are often in two layers and incubation begins with the first laying. This means that after 10 to 12 days some chicks are hatched. A nest may contain eggs in several stages of development, from young birds just hatched to others just hatching. The young are precocious, leaving the crowded nest soon after hatching.

Young Soras feed themselves on small insects and vegetation.

There are many predators in the marsh, including cranes, herons, egrets, aquatic mammals such as mink and muskrats, snakes, frogs, fish, and turtles. There may be a balance between the



large number of chicks hatched and the percentage that survive to adulthood.

Some of the best places to see, or hear, Soras in Umatilla County are near Woodward Campground at Langdon Lake and around Camas Creek just out of Ukiah. In addition, they can be found in most of the county's marshy areas.

Some of the material for this article was taken from <http://www.birdsbybent.com/ch61-70/sorarail.html>.

Locations of Burrowing Owl Artificial Burrows At Wanaket Wildlife Area

By Bruce Mayfield and Aaron Skirvin

IN AUGUST 2009, SIX BIRD CLUB members assisted Umatilla Tribal, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Umatilla Chemical Depot biologists in installing four artificial nest burrows for Burrowing Owls at Wanaket Wildlife Area. Owls formerly nested at Wanaket, but no Burrowing Owls have nested there in seven years. For more information on the Burrowing Owl project see the September 2009 Bird Club newsletter.

Since public access to Wanaket is not permitted most of the year, including the Burrowing Owl breeding season, viewing the owls must be done from



Highway 730. A word of caution, however; traffic travels at high speed, often 60+ mph, on Highway 730 and there are no pullouts immediately adjacent to the burrow sites. Find a safe place to pull off the highway and use a spotting scope to look for owls. If the project is successful in attracting breeding owls,

check the area beginning in March. The breeding season extends through June or July. Wanaket artificial nesting burrows are 0.1 mile north of the fence that runs along Highway 730. The two-box sets are 0.4 mile apart. The GPS coordinates of the burrows are

1. 45 54.219N 119 11.777W
2. 45 54.215N 119 11.794W
3. 45 54.281N 119 12.255W
4. 45 54.290N 119 12.238W

The Goggle Earth photo below shows the locations of the burrows. Please note the date and time of the photo source. The field and roads may look very different with change of seasons.

Birding in the Pacific Northwest: Turnbull NWR

Submitted by Barbara Clark

ON YOUR NEXT TRIP TO SPOKANE consider a birding opportunity at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Plan at least a half day for a good look around.

Jill Wyatt and her mother, Ann Wyatt, recommend Turnbull NWR for birding from the car as well as walking a network of trails, some of which are wheel-chair accessible. Turnbull NWR is located four miles south of Cheney, Washington and twenty miles southwest of Spokane. The refuge encompasses 15,568 acres of which approximately 2,300 acres are designated for public use. It is open year-round during daylight hours. There is a \$3.00 per car fee charged during the months of March through October. Winter months have free admission.

Turnbull NWR consists of channeled scabland topography (ref. Missoula Floods) with abundant marshes, ponds, and wetlands. There are excellent wildlife viewing opportunities in the Public Use Area with its numerous trails that loop through wetlands and pine forest habitats. There is also a 5.5-mile Auto Tour Route to drive, bike, or walk to access scenic views of the refuge environment as well as short trails and a wheelchair accessible boardwalk that loops to the edge of Black Horse Lake. The refuge ecosystems are quite varied, ranging from sagebrush and grasslands to ponderosa pine forests. The diverse habitats at Turnbull make it a high quality site for breeding and migratory waterfowl including 27 duck



species. Because Turnbull is a true wildlife sanctuary, hunting and fishing are not permitted on the refuge. A total of 13,000 acres are dedicated to wildlife preservation, with disturbance even by refuge staff kept to a minimum.

According to the Fish & Wildlife web site there are many birding opportunities year-round on the Turnbull Refuge. Over 200 species of birds have been observed at Turnbull NWR and more than 100 nest here and may be observed during spring and summer. An additional 76 species pass through the Refuge during spring and fall migration. Even during the winter, over 40 resident bird species that may be observed. A complete bird list is available on the Turnbull NWR web site.

Jill and Ann reported seeing swans, American Bittern, Great Horned Owl, Nuthatches, Osprey, and Western Bluebirds during their visit. Facilities available to visitors include: public restroom, four vault toilets, Environmental Education classroom, and the Friends of Turnbull NWR bookstore.

Turnbull NWR information extracted from the US Fish and Wildlife: Turnbull NWR website and the Friends of Turnbull NWR web site. Thanks to Jill and Anne Wyatt for alerting us to this birding opportunity.

A BIG THANK YOU !!!

....to Jack Simons and June Whitten for their program "Steens Mt. to Malheur: More than a Mountain and a Marsh" at the November 12, 2009 Pendleton Bird Club Meeting. Jack spoke on the geology of Steens Mountain. His presentation included photos of the flora and fauna of the area seen by the group during the September Bird Club Field Trip. June described the birds seen on the Malheur Refuge; their locations, habits, and interesting facts.

....And special thanks to Dave Herr for providing Jack and June with many of the photos used in their Steens/Malheur program.



October – November Bird Sightings

Compiled by Dave Herr and Aaron Skirvin

I (DAVE HERR) JUST GOT BACK from a four-day trip to Malheur Wildlife Refuge and was surprised at the number of birds of prey present. The numbers seemed much higher than in previous years when I visited this time of year. Perhaps it's a good year for mice and voles in that area. It remains to be seen if

raptor numbers will increase in our area this winter. The Denny's and Shoemake's just completed their first raptor count of the season near Milton-Freewater, which includes the area along Stateline Road and reported only an "average" count for this area.

Connie Betts reports lots of birds around her home near Pendleton Community Park. October

21, she reported a pair of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** spending time in a cedar tree in her yard. She reports over 100 sparrows eating seed and a dozen **American Goldfinches** using her thistle feeder.

October 24, June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin began their birding day looking for **Mountain Quail** in the mountains south of Ukiah. A couple miles south of McKay Dam, they noticed 12 **Snow Geese** and 3 **Greater White-fronted Geese** in a field on the east side of Hwy 395. Although they never found any **Mountain Quail** they did locate several other interesting birds. Checking the Tower Burn they found 3 **Varied Thrushes**, 2 **Northern Shrikes** and a very tame **Dusky Grouse**. Aaron noted that the grouse's entirely black tail feathers (not the barred white-and-black undertail coverts) indicated it was a male bird. There were at least 3 and possibly 4 **American Dippers** along the North Fork of the John Day River. **Clark's Nutcrackers** were the most obvious birds in the Ukiah Valley.

Checking along the Columbia River October 25, Aaron and June found 2 **Horned Grebes** at Hat Rock, several **Eared Grebes** in the Columbia River, a female **Red-breasted Merganser** and a **Red-necked Grebe** below McNary Dam. They estimated there were about 250 gulls below the dam, mostly **California**, but a few **Herring** and one **Thayer's**

Gull. Checking the same area, Mike and MerryLynn Denny and Andy and Ellen Stepniewski found an adult **Western Gull**, 2 **Mew Gulls**, one **Bonaparte's Gull** and over **85 Western Grebes** above the dam. Checking Cold Springs later in the day they found one **American Golden Plover**, 3 **Black-bellied Plovers**, **Pectoral Sandpipers**, **Long-billed Dowitchers**, 2 **Dunlin**, both **Lesser** and **Greater Yellowlegs**, 8 **Western Sandpipers**, a **Spotted Sandpiper** and an amazing **700 or more Killdeer**.

Birding along the Columbia River on October 28, Aaron and Bruce Mayfield found one **Common Loon** below McNary Dam and 4 more at Warehouse Beach Recreation Area. At the island below the dam they noted numerous **Ring-bill** and **California Gulls**, one **Bonaparte's** and one **Herring Gull**. Last year, Aaron found an immature **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Hat Rock, and reports this year the goose has returned in full adult plumage. Since the bird is quite tame, Aaron states this is a good opportunity to study this species at close (like 10 feet) range.

Birding at McNary Wildlife Nature Area October 31, Neal Hinds found a **Harris's Sparrow** at the main parking lot. Aaron noted that three Harris's Sparrows spent most of last winter at the Nature Area, and he believes it is likely that the one seen by Neal is one of the three from last winter. Later, Karen Baxter was able to photograph the sparrow Neal had found.

November 1, Jack Simons had a **Eurasian Collard-Dove** share his bird feeder with 3 **Mourning Doves**. The odd colored **Mourning Dove** that visited Jack's feeder last spring returned to his feeder for another visit in early November. Jack also reports **Hooded Mergansers** have returned to Mission Ponds.

Although not a bird sighting, Jack and Sharon Simons invited folks to participate in **SALMON VIEWING FIELD TRIPS** in early November. Jack and Sharon hosted six different groups, taking folks along the Umatilla River behind their home to view spawning **SALMON**. What a great sight to see these huge fish with their backs out of the water, as they complete their reproductive cycle, building nests and laying eggs.

On November 4, Craig Kvern saw and photographed 29 **Tundra Swans** at Indian Lake. Driving through Pendleton on November 7, Dolly Robison spotted a lone **Tundra Swan** on the pond along Interstate 84 (just east of Exit 207) near the trailer manufacturing plant.

Connie and Russ Betts birded the Pendleton Community Park on November 10. There were six **Mallards**, one **Varied Thrush**, and a **Northern Flicker** along with the more common birds. Connie reported the **Eurasian Collared-Doves** have left her yard, but a **Mourning Dove** remains. She also notes a very active **Sharp-shinned Hawk** is keeping the birds at her feeder jumpy.

On November 11, Aaron checked the area around the Columbia River. Although he did not add any new birds to the County year list, he did find 8 species of gull including, **Bonaparte's**, **Mew**, **Ring-billed**, **California**, **Herring**, **Glaucous-winged**, **Thayer's** and **Western**. He also located 5 **Common Loons**, several dozen **Western Grebes**, 2 **Eared Grebes** and several **Horned Grebes** above and below the dam. Aaron noted the duck numbers are increasing at McNary Wildlife Nature Area, but it will be another few weeks before they fully populate the ponds for the winter.

November 11, Mike and MerryLynn Denny and Roger and Ginger Shoemake completed their first northern Umatilla County hawk count for the winter season. Mike reports numbers were about average with a total of 276 birds of prey tallied including 186 **Red-tailed Hawks**. Other finds included a **RUSTY BLACKBIRD** (first report of this species in the County this year) along Rencken Road and an amazing **42 Eurasian Collared-Doves** just north of Umapine.

Driving near Rice Park in SW Pendleton on November 13, Barbara Clark noticed two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in a yard next to SW Perkins Avenue. November 14, Mike Denny led a Washington Ornithological Society field trip. Passing through the McNary area the group found **34 Snow Geese**, 4 **Bonaparte's Gulls** and 10 **Black-crowned Night-Herons**. Also on November 14, Barbara Clark watched a **Downy Woodpecker** forage in the trees in her yard located near McKay Dam.

On November 15, Andy Stepniewski (birder from Yakima) spent several hours birding around McNary Dam and at Cold Springs NWR. Highlights at Cold Springs included a few thousand **Canada Geese**, a few **Cackling Geese**, **400+ Snow Geese** and one **ROSS'S GOOSE** (first report of this species in Umatilla County this year). Andy reported the Ross's was not mingling with the Snow's but was amid a sea of Canadas, and he had good scope views of the



goose until an immature **Bald Eagle** passed by putting all of the geese into flight. He saw at least two leucistic or albino **Canada Geese** in the goose flock, 15 **Tundra Swans**, and 10 **American White Pelicans**. Scanning the reservoir and mudflats on the east side of the reservoir, Andy found **Western Grebes**, **Northern Pintails**, **Common Mergansers**, **Northern Shovelers**, four **Herring Gulls**, one **Bonaparte's Gull**, 200+ **Killdeer**, 40 **Dunlin**, and 2 **Long-billed Dowitchers**. At the main parking lot of the McNary Wildlife Nature Area, Andy relocated the winter adult **Harris's Sparrow** originally reported by Neal Hinds. Gull diversity was high at the dam, and Andy identified eight species: **Bonaparte's**, **Mew**, **Ring-billed**, **California**, **Herring**, **Glaucous-winged**, **Western** and a 1st-year **Thayer's**.

Walking along Pendleton's River Parkway on November 11, John Chess spotted an immature **Tundra Swan** swimming in the Umatilla River. John reported the swan was still present on November 14.

Tanya Harrison's bird feeders in her Pendleton North Hill yard have attracted a pair of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** the past few weeks. Barbara Clark reported finding a dead **Varied Thrush** in McKay Park in SW Pendleton on November 16.

Now that winter is near, it is a great time to be feeding the birds. Please keep checking your feeders and send all your sightings, both common and rare to me, Dave Herr, at dsherr1@mac.com or 541-276-6413.

Newsletter Editor: Barbara Clark, 541 278-1252

Email Address: bainbrid@gmail.com

Technical Editor: Aaron Skirvin, 541 276-1948

Email Address: umabirder@yahoo.com

Field Sightings Editor: Dave Herr, 541 276-6413

Email Address: dsherr1@mac.com

Photo Editor: Jack Simons, 541 276-8566

Email Address: styletoil@eoni.com



Original art work by John Green
Copyright 1989, Dover Press

