



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 7, No. 12 Pendleton, Oregon December 2009

In Memoriam: Russell M. Betts 1936 – 2009

One of our long-time Bird Club members, Russell M. Betts, passed away suddenly on Sunday, December 6, 2009 at St. Anthony's Hospital in Pendleton, Oregon. Russ was diagnosed with lymphoma in August and was undergoing periodic chemotherapy treatments at the time of his death. The doctors had given Russ a very good prognosis, so his sudden passing came as a shock to family and friends.

A tall, lanky, energetic man, Russ was a true outdoorsman. Growing up in Moscow and Wallace, Idaho, in the 1930's and 40's, he took up skiing, fishing, hiking and climbing at an early age. Fishing and kayaking were probably his favorite outdoor activities, and he taught others how to flyfish and use a kayak. He had kayaked or floated many of the major rivers in the western United States.

Russ had a wealth of knowledge, gained over a lifetime of outdoor experiences, on the natural environment and was willing to share it with anyone who expressed an interest in nature. He turned his passion for the outdoors into a career with several federal resource management agencies including the National Park Service (Sequoia National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Lava Beds National Monument), Bureau of Land Management (Carson City, Nevada), and Forest Service. Russ began his career in 1962 and retired from the US Forest Service, Umatilla National Forest, in 1994. He and his wife, Connie, made Pendleton their retirement home.

Everyone marveled at Russ's seemingly boundless energy and capacity to help others. He loved helping friends and family remodel their homes, build sheds, re-roof houses, pour concrete, install tile, and assist in numerous other home or church projects, often working on multiple projects at the same time. Yet he always found time for fishing with friends and fellow members of the Blue Mountain Flycasters.



Russ standing at the edge of Kigor Gorge on Steens Mountain in September of 2005.

Russ took up birding later in life, mainly at the prompting of his wife, Connie. Together, they worked on their yard and garden to make it bird friendly and enjoyed watching birds in their yard and at their feeders. They birded frequently in their SW Pendleton neighborhood and nearby Pendleton Community Park. Russ helped Connie develop the "Checklist of the Birds

of Pendleton Community Park," which can be found on the Pendleton Bird Club's website, www.pendletonbirders.org. They regularly visited the park and recorded their bird observations, continuing to update the checklist. Just a few days prior to Russ's death, they added their 85th species, the Pileated Woodpecker, to the checklist.

Russ and Connie became members of the Pendleton Bird Club at the first meeting of the club on April 10, 2003. Being active members of the club through the years, they participated in most field trips, helped with



the local Christmas Bird Count, attended most meetings, gave programs, and occasionally wrote articles for the club's newsletter. On field trips Russ was always there with a helping hand, ready to assist with loading and unloading gear, preparing meals, cleaning the quarters, and doing whatever else needed to be done.

Russ was a generous, humble, kind man, and he is dearly missed by all who knew him.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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, please 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!!!

Bragging Rights: Highlights of Last Year's Christmas Bird Count

Submitted by Aaron Skirvin

Our 23rd annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count is nearly upon us; it's only a little over three weeks away. Of course, the results of our count are sent to the National Audubon Society along with hundreds on other counts across North America. These useful, abundant data do not just get shelved but are analyzed by researchers who study trends in winter bird populations. Thus, the results of your participation in the Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count go to a great scientific cause to help our understanding of winter birds and changes in their abundance over time and across the continent.

As noble as that cause is (and it is a good cause), it's a little esoteric for most of us who just like to get outdoors and do a little more (than usual) coordinated, systematic birding in a social setting with fellow birders for one day. If we can't "wrap our heads around" the utility of our little count and its

significance to understanding the continent-wide, winter bird population, maybe we can view the results in a more local way – a way that puts some context to the species and numbers of each species that we report. In other words, we can look at our count in a local perspective to see how the birds in our count circle measure up.

Joel Geier, an Oregon birder and member of the Oregon Field Ornithologists, analyzed the results from all 45 count circles in Oregon last year. In his analysis, Joel determined which Oregon count circles recorded the highest number of each species reported from all of the Oregon counts. *Hmmm, that's intriguing.* Are you getting curious about whether our Umatilla County count circle produced any of the highest state-wide totals for individual species? And, if so, which species?

Well, the answer is yes. Our count circle produced the highest state-wide count for five species. Before you read on to find out which species, maybe you'll want to take a minute to guess which species they might be. At least three of the five species make logical sense based on their range and habitat preferences in Oregon. We barely missed having a sixth high-count species (Short-eared Owl). The Silverton count circle reported five Short-eareds, while we had four birds.

Thanks to Joel's analysis, and it must have been a monumental task to develop the spreadsheet for 45 count circles and about 280 species state-wide, the Umatilla County count circle had the highest state-wide count for Ring-necked Pheasant (250), Rough-legged Hawk (85), Golden Eagle (8), Black-billed Magpie (416), and Horned Lark (1092). Those are our "bragging rights" from last year's count – and a pretty good list of birds, too!



VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

**Bird Checklists, ID Challenge,
Club Member's Photo Gallery,
Calendar of Events, **Online
Newsletter** and more.**

www.pendletonbirders.org



Which species will be our “bragging rights” for this year’s count? Of course, we don’t know the answer. But, to earn those bragging rights, we need bird counters – the more the better. The more counters we have, the more birds we find and report. Please sign up to help count our local birds during the 23rd annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count on January 2, 2010. It’s easy to sign up; see the article in this newsletter on how to participate in the Christmas Bird Count.

Bird of the Month:

Greater White-fronted Goose

(Anser albifrons)

By June Whitten

Greater White-fronted Geese are seen in Umatilla County during migration, usually in the fall and winter. They nest in the tundra of the far northern and eastern parts of Alaska. According to David Sibley, there are three distinguished populations: “Tundra breeders are smallest and palest; Taiga breeders, especially Tule Goose (nesting in south-central Alaska and wintering in California) are 10 percent larger, longer-billed, and darker brown; and Greenland breeders are medium-size and darkest overall (winter in Ireland and Scotland).” Recent ecological studies suggest the Greenland birds should probably be considered a separate species. These geese have a very narrow white tip to the tail, more black barring on the belly, and usually have an orange (not pink) bill. There is also a smaller, but very similar, Lesser White-fronted Goose, found in northern Asia and Europe.

Greater White-fronted Geese are about 28 inches long with a wingspan of 53 inches and weigh over 4 ½ pounds. The bill is pinkish and the legs are quite orange. The wings and neck are mousy brown with quite a lot of barring or speckling on the belly. This gives them the colloquial name of “Specklebelly.” The white front name comes from the conspicuous white around the base of the bill.

Greater White-fronted Geese have strong family ties. The pairs stay together for years and migrate together, along with their offspring. White-front family bonds can last longer than in most geese,

and some young stay with their parents through the next breeding season. Parent and sibling associations may continue throughout their lives. The nest is a scrape in the ground lined with plant material and down feathers. The clutch size varies from 1 to 8 white to tan eggs. The young hatch covered with down and eyes open. The babies are ready to leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching and have the ability to swim and feed on their own, while staying close to the parents.

Greater White-fronted Geese winter in agricultural lands feeding on grains, grasses, and foraging in shallow water, tipping up to obtain grasses from the water. On the tundra and other northern breeding habitats, they eat grasses, sedge, seeds, and berries.

The population of Greater White-fronted Geese appears to be increasing. The Pacific population had a severe decline in the 1970’s and 1980’s, but is recovering. The Tule Goose subspecies is the most vulnerable because of its low population size and restricted distribution.

Breeding across the tundra from Nunavut to Siberia, across Russia, and in Greenland, the Greater White-fronted Goose has one of the largest ranges of any species in the world. In North America, however, it is common only west of the Mississippi River, where it may be found in large flocks in wetlands and croplands during migration.

Greater White-fronted Geese are often seen at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge during the fall and early winter. They are often in mixed company with Canada or Snow Geese. They also frequent pastures where there may be grain or corn remaining after harvest.

Some of the information for this article was taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GreaterWhite-fronted_Goose and

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/GreaterWhite-fronted_Goose/lifehistory.



December Auction & Raffle Fundraiser a Super Success!

A round of applause goes to Betty Klepper, Lorna Waltz, and Jeanne Jensen, organizers of the Pendleton Bird Club 2009 Annual Auction & Raffle Fundraiser. They thank all of the Pendleton Bird Club members who donated an incredible array of items for both the auction and the raffle tables. A special thanks goes to our guest auctioneer, Sandi Hinds, who did a fabulous job promoting the bidding of the live auction. And finally, thanks to those who provided the refreshments; cookies, punch, coffee, and onion soufflé with baguette.

The fundraiser netted just over \$1100.00 for purchase of a \$300 bulb for the Bird Club's digital projector used for our meeting programs. The proceeds will also support funding the website and purchasing software to make it easier and more efficient to generate and transmit the monthly newsletter with more photos.

Birding the Pacific Northwest: The Oregon Coast

Submitted by Barbara Clark

From the December Questionnaire (with responses from 25 Pendleton Bird Club members at the December monthly meeting), the Malheur Wildlife Refuge and the Oregon Coast rose to the top of the list of favorite places to bird in Oregon. For those who love birding the coast and for those who want to start some birding along the bays, estuaries, and shores, there is a fabulous website: Oregon Coast Birding Trail. The website is <http://www.oregoncoastbirding.com/>

The website divides the coast into four sections that list 173 birding sites, numbered from north to south. Their guide includes maps, site descriptions, directions, and a listing of the birds you may see along with site services and facilities. A coastal birding checklist shows 250 birds most likely to be seen and the ease of finding them.

The Oregon Coast Birding Trail Website is broken down into seven PDF files and requires Adobe Acrobat Reader (www.adobe.com) to view them.

What do you know about 517, 307, and 253?

The answers are just here...

517 different species of birds were recorded in Oregon by Oregon Bird Records Committee as of May 2009 (Oregon's official checklist of Oregon birds). 517 species is about 54% of those recorded for all of North America.

307 different species of birds have been confirmed and recorded in Umatilla County as of September 2009. 307 species is about 32% of those recorded for all of North America.

253 different species of birds have been recorded in Umatilla County by the Pendleton Bird Club for 2009 as of December 14th. 253 species is therefore about 26% of all the North American species that live or pass through our Umatilla County!

Where did this Umatilla County information come from? Our own website, manned by our own Jack Simons!! [This and much more is available to you at www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)

Birding Hot Spots

Hot Off the Press

Grant County Bird Club has compiled a "Birding Hot Spots" brochure with a map and directions to 11 of their favorite Grant County birding spots. These include Moon Creek Preserve, John Day Fossil Beds, South Fork John Day River, Bear Valley, Magone Lake, Swick's Old Growth, and more. The map also includes lists of the commonly seen birds at each site.

The Grant County Club has given permission for Pendleton Bird Club to reproduce their brochure for all of our members. Come to the January meeting to receive your copy. When Spring arrives there are at least 11 birding adventures to be had right next door in Grant County!

Thank you to the Grant County Birders who put the brochure together and to Tom Winters of Canyon City for passing it on to us.



November - December Bird

Sightings

Compiled by Dave Herr

Although the weather was fairly moderate in November, by December 7, temperatures had really dropped. I (Dave Herr) found with the lower temperatures, activity at my bird feeders really increased, especially a huge increase in the number of **House Sparrows**. I'm curious if this is happening just at my feeders or if others have noticed an increase in the number of **House Sparrows** at their feeder as well. Drop me an email if you are seeing more **House Sparrows** than normal. A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** is also making frequent visits to my feeding station in NE Pendleton, but unfortunately the **House Sparrows** are too smart and the hawk concentrates on the less cautious **Dark-eyed Juncos**. Now that there is snow on the ground I've found several perches where he has plucked a junco meal.

Karen Baxter reports that on November 16, she and her family walked the trails in the McNary Wildlife Nature Area. They found the **Harris's Sparrow** was still at the feeding station at the main parking lot. Other sightings included **Hooded Mergansers**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, **American Kestrel**, **Great Blue Heron** and **Hairy Woodpecker**.

November 21, Aaron Skirvin

(Aaron), June Whitten (June), Bruce Mayfield and Katrina Susi birded along the Columbia River.

Aaron reports the **Common Goldeneyes** are starting to show up and they saw several. Numerous **Cedar Waxwings** were feeding on the Russian olive fruits in the McNary Wildlife Nature Area. Checking below the dam, they found 3 **Common Loons**, a **Red-necked Grebe**, **Western Grebes** and **Common Mergansers**. While they were there, a large flock of **Snow Geese** (estimated 250 birds) flew overhead, crossing over the river toward Washington. Although gull numbers were down, the group ended up finding 6 species that included: **Bonaparte's**, **Mew**, **Ring-billed**, **California**, **Herring** and **Glaucous-winged Gulls**.

November 23, Dolly Robison found a **Great Egret** along Stage Gulch Creek that runs through Stanfield. The same day, Katherine Skirvin found 2 **Varied Thrushes** in the Pendleton Community Park. Checking the park the same day, Russ and Connie Betts found 22 **Mallards**, 6 **American Crows**, a few **White-crowned Sparrows** and a very noisy **Pileated Woodpecker**. The **Pileated Woodpecker** was a new species for the park. The following day Connie reported a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** visiting her feeder in SW Pendleton. I checked the river below McNary Dam on November 23. My sightings included 5 feeding **Common Loons** and the **Red-necked Grebe** reported earlier. I was only able to find **Bonaparte's**, **California** and **Ring-billed Gulls**.



Sharp-shinned Hawk at Dave's feeder. Photo by Dave Herr.

November 27, Aaron reported seeing 2 **Red-necked Grebes** below McNary Dam. Just below the dam were 2 adult **Mew Gulls**, a few **Ring-bills** and an apparent adult **Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull**. The following day I was able to relocate one of the **Red-necked Grebes** Aaron had reported.

In late November, Jane Holmes saw a flash of a hummingbird as it flew past her NW Pendleton home. The bird disappeared so quickly, Jane did not have an opportunity to note any field marks. Normally, any hummingbird, which is seen in fall/winter in Umatilla County after late September, is NOT our regular breeding species: Rufous, Black-chinned, and Calliope. More likely, it would be an Anna's.

November 30, Aaron and June birded at various locations in the northern part of the county, including the Columbia River. Counting birds of prey along their route, they tallied **106 Red-tailed Hawks**, **16 Rough-legged Hawks**, **24 American Kestrels**, **9 Northern Harriers** and **3 Bald Eagles**. After getting a call from Neal Hinds, they drove to Cold Springs Reservoir where Neal had found an amazing **1100 Snow Geese**. Aaron notes this is by far the highest number of Snow Geese he was aware of at one time in Umatilla County. Mike and MerryLynn Denny have also reported finding an incredible number of **Snow Geese** this fall.



Birding in the Ukiah area the following day, Aaron and June noted birds were scarce. Their most notable finds included a **Bald Eagle** and 15 **Common Ravens** feeding on a deer carcass along Highway 395 and a flock of **125 Wild Turkeys** in Ukiah just east of the city limits.

December 2, Jack Simons reports it is “pretty quiet” at his feeders, which are located just east of Pendleton. He, too, has been seeing a lot of **House Sparrows**, but only a few **Mourning Doves** and **Black-capped Chickadees**. Walking along the Umatilla River behind his home on December 5, Jack reported seeing 2 immature **Bald Eagles** chasing each other down the river. Later while walking home, he saw an immature **Bald Eagle** perching in a dead cottonwood tree in his pasture. A moment later, a mature **Bald Eagle** displaced the immature bird from its perch.

Barbara Clark noticed that bird activity in her yard near McKay Dam has picked up since the temperatures dropped in early December. On December 7, she reports feeding “many” **House Sparrows** as well as **House Finches**, **Dark-eyed Juncos** and about 100 **California Quail**. And, she reports that there is a very bold **Sharp-shinned Hawk** staking out her feeders, and a **Great Horned Owl** has been visiting her neighborhood.

On December 12, Neal Hinds reported finding a **Varied Thrush** and a **Redhead** at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area. The same day, Barbara found a lone **Spotted Towhee** scratching under her feeders near McKay Dam.

December 13, Neal Hinds reported a friend in Stanfield had taken several pictures of a small white-headed bird visiting her feeder. Neal emailed pictures of the bird around and Aaron identified it as a partially leucistic **House Finch**.

Braving the wintery weather December 13, Bruce Mayfield and Aaron birded their way from Pendleton to the McNary Wildlife Nature Area. Aaron noted the snow gradually decreased as they proceeded northwest and found there was no snow at the Wildlife Area. Some of their sightings included a female

Ruddy Duck, **Northern Shoveler**, several **Mew Gulls**, a **Red-necked Grebe** and 3 **Wilson’s Snipe**. There were at least **73 Black-crowned Night-Herons** roosting in the trees and bushes in the usual spot in the Wildlife Area. There were several hundred ducks at the Port of Umatilla, mostly **Common Goldeneyes**, but they were able pick out two drake **Canvasbacks** and 2 **Barrow’s Goldeneye** in the flock. Several hundred **Snow Geese** landed in the middle of the Columbia River off Warehouse Beach Recreation Area.

When all was shrouded in ice on December 14, Barbara Clark reported record activity at her bird feeders: 1 **Fox Sparrow**, 1 **Mourning Dove**, 1 **White-crowned Sparrow**, 3 **American Goldfinches**, 1 **Red-winged Blackbird**, over 100 **California Quail**, a small mob of **European Starlings**, the usual bunch of **House Sparrows**, **House Finches**, and **Dark-eyed Juncos**. Just beyond the feeders in the trees were a **Downy Woodpecker**, a **Northern Flicker**, and the **Sharp-shinned Hawk** who has been nearby for the past couple of weeks.

December 14, Jennifer Karson-Engum and husband Micah reported that a hummingbird had been coming to their feeder in SE Pendleton during the cold spell we had last week. Although Aaron told her it was probably an **Anna’s Hummingbird**, Jennifer wasn’t sure of its ID. Aaron notes that Anna’s Hummingbirds have been expanding their range and this year have been seen in Walla Walla, Tri-Cities and near Spokane. On December 15, the hummingbird was conclusively identified as a female **Anna’s Hummingbird**, and photos were obtained as it regularly visited the feeder throughout the day. This is only the 4th record of Anna’s Hummingbird in Umatilla County.

Between the unseasonably cold weather in early December and the recent snowfall, fewer folks have been out birding and consequently this report is shorter than usual. Hopefully the weather will soon moderate and more folks will be out looking for winter birds. Please continue to send your sightings of both common and unexpected birds to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or call 541-276-6413.



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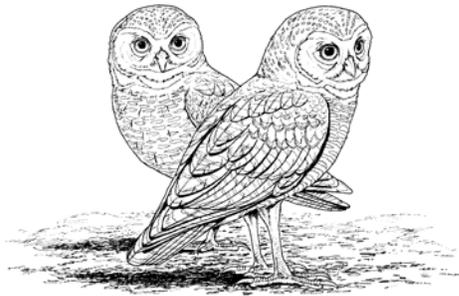
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