



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Káymut

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

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BIRDING IN PANAMA

At the February 12 Bird Club meeting, June and Duane Whitten and Betty Klepper gave a very interesting presentation about the trip they took to Panama in February, 2008 for a guided birding adventure. June and Duane each added 150 birds to their life lists on this trip, having seen what they estimated to be a total of 500 species during the trip.

Betty first spoke about how fascinating the Panama Canal is, and presented an historical overview from how it was first envisioned as a concept by the King of Spain in the 1600's, to the first failed attempt by the French to build it in the 1880's, to its completion by the United States in the early 1900's, opening in 1914. We saw photos the group took of a ship passing through the canal, and Betty explained how ships move through the locks under their own power but are protected by mechanical "mules" from scraping the locks. Ships are guided through three locks up to Lake Gatun and then three locks down, taking only 8 minutes to fill each lock with 23,000,000 gallons of fresh water (about the time it takes to fill a bathtub).

June described the route of their trip, which began in the Chiriqui Mountains in the western region of Panama. There they experienced very cold nights and saw cloud forests and shade-grown coffee plantations, which provide good habitat for the birds. We saw how the bird feeders in Panama are stocked with bananas (bringing tanagers and other birds, as well as pygmy squirrels who thief from the bird feeders there just like squirrels do here). Their trip took them to the Canopy Tower and a Canopy Lodge (beautiful lodgings) from which they had open views of forest and birds. Their guide Kevin Zimmer was energetic, driven and verbose, and was very skilled at locating rarer species of birds for them to look at.

Unfortunately, your author is somewhat of a birding novice, and does not recognize the names of many of these birds, but they included the Resplendent Quetzal, trogons, Rufous-crested Coquettes (a species of hummingbird), motmots, and I can attest to how beautiful theirs and all the other photos were.

Duane told us about the mammals they encountered on this trip, which included agouti, howler monkeys, 3-toed and 2-toed sloths, coatimundi, 9-banded armadillos, anteaters, kinkajous, and Geoffrey's tamarins, many of them seen at close distances. They also saw a Fer-de-lance snake, one of the most dangerous pitvipers in the world, near the Canopy Tower.

Betty described their fascinating interaction with leaf-cutter ants who farm fungus, are very specialized, live in nests with up to 8 million inhabitants, and carry leaf sections (many times larger than themselves) they excise from trees over huge distances to their nests. She also described the group's interaction with a swarm of army ants. These non-nesting, nomadic carnivores move through the forest in groups of several hundred thousand, driving insects and spiders before them. The insects and spiders attract feeding birds, giving the birders some of the best views they had of traditionally hard-to-spot birds. If you hear the warning cry, "Ant Swarm!" you get out of the way of the swarm, and then you keep an eye out for the birds!

They finished by sharing some of the local crafts they brought back with them. It was a great vicarious trip to Panama.

Contributed by Katrina Susi



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 12, 2009

QUEST FOR THE ROSEATE SPOONBILL

By Bruce Mayfield and Katrina Susi

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., May 14, 2009

BURROWS FOR BURROWING OWLS

By Mike Gregg, James Rebholz, and
Don Gillis

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting & Potluck

6:30 p.m., April 9, 2009

FIRST ANNUAL HUMONGOUS BIRD ID CHALLENGE

By Jack Simons

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Bird Club Field Trip

Sunday, May 31, 2009

Birding at Tower Burn, Ukiah, Battle Mountain, and Albee Bluebird Trail

Meet at 6:00 a.m. at the NE Corner
of Pendleton Safeway parking lot

Bird Club Field Trip

Saturday, April 18, 2009

Birding at Cabbage Hill, Emigrant Springs State Park & Meacham

Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the NE Corner
of Pendleton Safeway parking lot

Upcoming Regional Birding Festivals

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival – 12th annual festival will be held on the weekend of March 20 to 22, 2009, at Othello, WA. For further information about the festival visit

<http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/> or call 509-488-2802.

John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival – 28th annual festival runs from April 3 – 5, 2009 at Burns, OR. The link below leads to the schedule of events for the John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival in Burns, Oregon. Registration started on February 9. The featured speaker this year is Kenn Kaufman, who has authored several birding books and field guides



and writes articles for birder magazines. For further information call 541-573-2636 or visit <http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com/index.htm>

Burrowing Owls at the Umatilla Chemical Depot

Contributed by Mike Gregg and Bruce Henrickson

The Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) population in the United States is declining. It's listed as a national "Bird of Conservation Concern" in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Pacific Region and other parts of North America. It's also listed as "endangered" in Canada and "threatened" in Mexico. In 2006, under terms of the international Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the U.S., Canada and Mexico jointly selected the Burrowing Owl as a "Species of Concern" due to loss of habitat. The international choice of the bird highlighted the need for Burrowing Owl habitat protection and development.

Located in Umatilla and Morrow Counties, the 20,000 acre U.S. Army Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) consists of shrub-steppe habitat and provides a home for a small population of burrowing owls (*A. c. hypugaea*).

Because of a lack of natural burrows, the owl population is limited to a handful of breeding pairs. Don Gillis, UMCD natural resources manager, partnered with the FWS to start a Burrowing Owl habitat improvement project. The project was initiated in May 2008 with the installation of 18 artificial burrows.

FWS Biologists (Mike Gregg and James Rebholz), UMCD Environmental staff, and volunteers partnered to construct new owl burrows from modern materials that mimic desirable features of those abandoned badger dens including the prerequisite darkness and dirt floors. The artificial burrows have several advantages including easy access points for banding or counting owls, plus predator-proof construction.

The burrows are built in the depot Environmental Division shop using plastic barrels and



Kakya Taymut, Pendleton Bird Club Newsletter

buckets, flexible drainage piping, construction adhesive and other hardware. The artificial burrow design is based on one developed by Hanford's Volpentest HAMMER Training and Education Center in Richland, Wash. To construct an artificial burrow, a 55-gallon plastic barrel is cut in half. A hole matching the diameter of a 5-gallon bucket is cut in the top of the barrel. The bottom of the bucket is cut out and then inserted part way into the hole in the barrel and glued to create a "tunnel" for easy access to the underground burrow for counting birds or eggs, banding chicks, and condo housekeeping such as cleaning out rodent remains.

Burrowing owls are highly susceptible to coyote predation. To prevent coyotes from invading the burrows, the "owl condos" are designed to be coyote-proof. Eight to ten feet of six-inch diameter "flexpipe" drainage pipe is installed at the burrow site as the entrance to the condo. The pipe is too small for a coyote to enter and longer than a coyote would want to dig to get to its prey.

The burrows are installed in the vicinity (about 100 feet) of an active breeding pair of owls. Once the young fledge they hopefully will imprint on the artificial burrow and return the following year to



Burrowing Owl. Photo by Bob Tapley

breed. At the site of each artificial burrow, the first step is to excavate a hole with a backhoe. The half-barrel is placed upside down in the hole in the ground. A hole in the new top of the half-drum matches the size of a hole in the bottom of a 5-gallon bucket. The two are glued together. The flexpipe entrance tube is then added at the burrow site. It has the bottom cut off so owls walk only on

dirt, which mimics abandoned badger dens or other owl burrows. To cover the hole at the top, another 5-gallon bucket filled with dirt is placed inside the permanently mounted 5-gallon bucket, which darkens the condo, won't blow away in the strong winds typical of the depot, and protects the burrow from predators.

Finally, the entire owl condo is re-covered with earth by the backhoe and hand shoveling. The vegetation removed during installation is replaced to make it look natural except for the flexpipe entrance and a small mound of dirt on top of the 5-gallon bucket

access hole. The earth covering protects the burrow from heat, too. A dead tree branch is also positioned to provide a natural perch for the owls.

The burrows are placed in groups of three. Of the 18 artificial burrows installed so far, 14 were occupied by Burrowing Owls within a couple days after installation. Activity is defined as a visual sighting, owl pellets, preened feathers or beetle parts spotted in front of the burrow entrance. The real test will be this spring (2009) when the owls return from wintering grounds. Hopefully, the new artificial burrows will be home to several breeding pairs that will produce young.

Depending on the success of these artificial burrows, more will be installed this coming spring. There are also plans to install a low-light video camera that will be linked to a website so anyone can log on and see inside a burrow. The camera and website will provide a great educational opportunity for the general public of all ages. Vista Engineering, a contractor at the depot, will provide engineering recommendations for a power source for the new low-light video camera. Solar power will likely be used due to the remoteness of the burrows.

Mike Gregg and Don Gillis will be presenting the project at the Pendleton Bird Club meeting on May 14th. The presentation will also include results of the spring surveys to determine success of the artificial burrows.

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Mike Gregg is Land Management and Research Demonstration Biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Burbank, WA.

Bruce Henrickson is public affairs officer for the US Army Umatilla Chemical Depot in Hermiston, Ore.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org



Tucson Tease

Editor's Note: Earlier this month, club members Gene and Marilyn Cripe visited friends in Tucson, AZ, and spent a few days birding in the area. Marilyn summarizes the highlights of their visit in the following article.

Gene and I were fortunate to be house guests of special friends in Tucson, AZ, in early February. Susan and Don live adjacent to the NW city limits, surrounded by desert and orange and grapefruit trees. The first morning offered Broad-tailed Hummingbirds flashing their brilliant red throats outside the dining room window, Harris's Hawks nesting in a huge pine tree, Gambel's Quail scurrying around, Gila Woodpeckers on a palm tree, and White-winged Doves. About 5 that evening, I was outside alone watching a glistening Phainopepla on the power line, and as I turned around, enjoyed a "stare down" with a bobcat about 30 feet away! The cat gingerly backed up, turned and trotted away.

On Don's only day off while we were there, he drove us to the Saguaro National Park. The first mystery bird appeared at our picnic table. (I then learned the importance of taking a NEW bird book on vacation!) Luckily, when I described the bird's distinctive peach-colored lower belly, rusty cap and dark breast spot to a park ranger, it was no doubt it was a Canyon Towhee. The noisiest birds of the day were Cactus Wrens; other new birds were the Northern Mockingbirds, and the "gorgetous" Costa's Hummingbird and Curve-billed Thrasher.

Susan then took over the driving. The longest day trip was southeast across the flat desert between "islands" of mountain ranges to The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve. Hiking mid-day to the 6,200' pass in 70 degree sunshine was just wonderful for seeing the diverse habitat, but not the variety of birds it is famous for later in the year. Special birds were the White-breasted Nuthatches, Acorn Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Wild Turkeys, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Hermit Thrushes.

The next day, we drove to The Nature Conservancy's Sonoita Creek Preserve to find it closed. Birding nearby along the creek produced Lesser Goldfinches and Vermilion Flycatchers. The nearby Patagonia Lake State Park offered a great birding trail. The Elegant Trogon had been seen for several days, but new discoveries for the mid-day birders were the Double-crested Cormorant, Common Moorhen,

Cinnamon Teal, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Bridled Titmouse, Bewick's Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and Black-throated Sparrow.

The Arizona Woodpecker and Mexican Jays were the only new birds we discovered in Madera Canyon on the final excursion south. Gene enjoyed the javelinas along the trail!

Before taking the direct flight back to Seattle, we visited the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. This museum is a fantastic outdoor experience and provides an excellent introduction to the flora and fauna of the area. If you want to know what birds we saw along the trails, in the aviary, hummingbird enclosure and exhibits, you will have to go there.

Contributed by Marilyn Cripe

Bird of the Month – Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)

Williamson's Sapsuckers are unusual in plumage for woodpeckers because the male and female are completely different. Because the plumages are so different, when they were originally named, they were classified as two different species. In 1852, John Cassin first described the Black-breasted Woodpecker (*Picus thyroideus*) from a female specimen. John Newberry in 1857 described the male and named it Williamson's Woodpecker (*Picus williamsonii*).¹ "[Spencer] Baird appropriated the name *Sphyrapicus* as the genus for both in 1858. In 1873 Henry Henshaw clarified this matter and recognized them as the same species."² Williamson's Sapsucker's name was derived from Lieutenant Robert Stockton Williamson, who was the leader of a surveying expedition which collected the first male.²

It is little wonder they were thought to be two different species. Most woodpeckers differ only slightly from male to female, with the male usually having a bit of red on the head, throat, or nape. But the Williamson's male is black with bold white wing patches and white rump, white face stripes, red throat, and yellow belly. The female has a brown head with black (or brownish-black) and white barring all over, a black breast band, and a yellow belly. The juveniles look like their parents, only the colors are less bold.

Sapsuckers earned their name because they drill a series of small holes in tree bark and return to the holes to drink sap and collect any

insects trapped in the sap. Williamson's Sapsuckers exhibit seasonal specialization in feeding. Before many insects appear, usually very early in the spring, the sapsuckers feed mostly on tree sap. After the young hatch, their diet is almost exclusively insects, including ants, beetles, flies, and aphids. They may even exhibit fly-catching routines, flying out in small loops from a tree to catch insects in mid-air.

Drumming can be a good way to find sapsuckers by identifying the location of the sound. The Williamson's drumming is fairly rapid, described as a steady roll of taps followed by single, loud taps at irregular intervals. New nests are excavated each year predominately in montane Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, or ponderosa pine forests, usually with quaking aspen nearby. They nest from mid- to high elevations in the mountains.³

Their breeding range extends from southern British Columbia south through the mountainous areas of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The most northern populations migrate to California, Arizona, or Mexico during winter. Some of the southern populations remain in their territory year-round.

Males appear to excavate the majority of the nest cavity, working several hours a day for 3-4 weeks. Inside the cavity, a layer of wood chips and shavings serve as the bed for the eggs and chicks. Usually 4-6 pure white, slightly glossy eggs are laid, one per day. Incubation begins before the clutch is complete, and lasts 12-14 days. The adults approach the nest by landing above the nest hole and descending jerkily to the level of the hole. Both parents brood the young and feed the nestlings, rotating brooding and foraging activity for the first 2 weeks. This species does not regurgitate food, but carries insects, mostly ants, in the mouth and bill to feed the babies. The nestlings leave the nest cavity 31-32 days after hatching. Once all the nestlings have fledged, they do not reenter the nest cavity, but fly to nearby trees to beg food from the parents.³

Males defend their territory, especially during establishment, often chasing conspecific males. Intruding males and resident males often drum and exchange *churr* calls, culminating in the retreat of the intruder. Williamson's Sapsuckers have six different calls, the *churr* call functioning as territorial announcement or pair formation and often accompanied by drumming. The *chatter* call is usually given softly, probably as communication between mates. A *ch-hah* call is given at the beginning of a territorial or



courtship interaction, or may be an alarm call. The *rattle* call is often at the end of a territorial or courtship interaction but also used as an alarm call. They also have a *scold* or *alarm* call, consisting of a short, sharp hoarse guttural roll dropping in pitch, and a *scream* call, usually given when a bird is trapped.³

Williamson's Sapsuckers begin arriving on their Blue Mountains breeding areas in mid to late March. They are quite active and vocal, both drumming and calling as they sort out breeding territories. There are several locations in the Blue Mountains to observe Williamson's Sapsucker, especially during the breeding season; the Battle Mountain area is good as well as Yellowjacket Road. They can also be found in the Tollgate, Meacham, and Pearson Ridge areas. Where the elevation and habitat are correct, the Williamson's Sapsuckers will be present.

¹ http://ag.arizona.edu/research/azfwru/cjc/publications/Books_Chapters_Monographs/Dobbs_Martin_and_Conway-1997-The_Academy_of_Natural_Sciences.pdf

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Williamson's_Sapsucker

³ <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/bfl/speciesaccts/wilsap.html>

Contributed by June Whitten

January – February Bird Sightings

Birding this time of year can be pretty slow and the length of this month's birding report reflects this fact. However, even with the foggy, cold weather, several good birds have been added to the County year list, including **Snow Goose** and **Clark's Nutcracker**. It is still possible to find some of the other winter visitors, such as White-winged Crossbills, which have been sighted just north of us in the Tri-Cities. So keep looking and see if you can find any unusual birds.

On January 16, June Whitten and Betty Klepper saw a single **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in Adams. On January 17, Jack Simons reported that a mature **Bald Eagle** briefly perched in a snag behind his home between Pendleton and Mission before being chased off by a **Red-tailed Hawk**. The fog did not seem to keep the birds from Connie Betts' bird feeder and on January 17, she reported "tons" of **House Finches** and **European Starlings**, as well as a **Northern Flicker**, **Morning Doves**, **American Goldfinches**, **Dark-eyed Juncos** and one **American Robin** in her SW Pendleton yard.



While Mike and MerryLynn Denny and Ginger and Rodger Shoemake were conducting their northern Umatilla Raptor Survey near Milton-Freewater on January 18, the fog lifted and once again they tallied an impressive number of raptors. Highlights included **189 Red-tailed Hawks** and a **Northern Pygmy-Owl**. The **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was a new species for this survey route.

On January 19, Connie Betts estimated there were over **300 American Robins** in and around the Pendleton Community Park. Jack Simons found a **Northern Pintail** on his pond near Mission on January 21. Jack notes he has never seen a **Northern Pintail** on his property before, much less in January. Jack also reported that 2 **Canada Geese** returned to his pasture. He assumes this is the same pair that has returned for the last 11 years. Jack will keep us updated and let us know if they are indeed the famous "Gabby" and "Geezer".

January 22, Aaron Skirvin found a single **Snow Goose** with a flock of over 200 **Canada Geese** at Wildhorse Golf Course. A **Snow Goose** is a difficult bird to find in Umatilla County at any time of the year. It is great to have this species added to the county year list this early in the year.

On January 23, I visited the McNary Wildlife area. There were a large number of waterfowl on the ponds, but I found only expected species. I did take a picture of an unusual "white duck." I showed it to Aaron and Jack Simons, and they believe it was a wild female **Mallard** with leucistic characteristics.

January 24, Neal Hinds reported finding a **Wilson's Snipe** below McNary Dam. Since January 26, Mayanna Kopp has noted 4-6 **Black-billed Magpies**, several **White-crowned Sparrows**, **American Goldfinches**, **House Finches**, **Pine Siskins**, **Morning Doves**, **Eurasian Collared-Doves**, **Ring-necked Pheasants** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** visiting her Pilot Rock feeders. On a drive up Wegner Gulch Road (located just SE of Pilot Rock) she found 50 deer as well as **25 or more Ring-necked Pheasants**.

January 21, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten checked the area around Milton-Freewater. Although birding was slow, they did find several hawks, including one **Prairie Falcon**. Looking through a flock of over 1,000 blackbirds near Umapine, Aaron and June estimated there were 95% **Brewer's Blackbirds** and

2% **Red-winged Blackbirds**, with 3% **European Starlings**.

In early February, Connie Betts reported that it was almost possible to predict the weather by the number of birds she found in the Pendleton Community Park. It seems the birds enjoy clear weather just like us. On February 2, Connie and Russ made an exciting find. After hearing a weird cry, they checked and found a juvenile **Bald Eagle** sitting in one of the tall trees in the park. Connie said she was surprised the local ducks appeared to ignore the eagle.

Checking nest boxes along the Albee Bluebird Trail on February 1, Aaron Skirvin, June and Duane Whitten and Jack Simons found birding slow. Aaron did report they found about **20 Clark's Nutcrackers** and **2 Northern Shrikes** along the road and several **Pine Siskins** in Ukiah.

February 3, Jack Simons reported his wife, Sharon, spotted a **Great Egret** in the Umatilla River behind their home. This is the first sighting of this species in this location for over a year. Checking Cold Spring NWR on February 7, Neal Hinds found 15 species of waterfowl including at least one **Snow Goose** and 21 **Swans** too far away to determine species. Neal also reported finding a male **Eurasian Wigeon** and a **Harris's Sparrow** at McNary Wildlife Nature Area. Birding in the Meacham area on February 7, Aaron and June found **8 Evening Grosbeaks**, **13+ Steller's Jays**, **1 Cassin's Finch**, a couple of **Mountain Chickadees**, and several **Dark-eyed Juncos** near the store in town.

During the week of February 8, Jack Simons reported seeing a sub-adult **Bald Eagle** near his home between Pendleton and Mission.

Aaron reported finding a pair of **Canvasbacks** at Mission Ponds and 4 pairs of **Common Goldeneyes** at Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds on February 13. Canvasbacks are very uncommon in Umatilla County, with only a few reports each year. On February 13, Jack found a flock of about **40 Green-**

winged Teal on Mission Ponds. This must be the largest flock of Green-winged Teal ever reported at the ponds.

On February 14, June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin found 3 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** among a mixed flock of **Brewer's Blackbirds**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **European Starlings**, and **Brown-headed Cowbirds** near the intersection of W. Progress and W. Spearman Road a couple miles NE of Hermiston. Along the Columbia River the same day, they reported seeing a **Peregrine Falcon** and a **Killdeer** near Umatilla Marina, 2 male **Eurasian Wigeons** (one at McNary Wildlife Nature Area and the other at Hat Rock State Park), and five species of gulls: **Ring-billed**, **Mew**, **Herring**, **Glaucous-winged**, and **California**.

On February 16, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten reported finding 3 **Tundra Swans** resting on an unnamed farm pond about 3 miles west of Mann's Pond. Also on February 15, Craig Kvern reported seeing a **Varied Thrush** at a feeder near the intersection of Hwy 204 and Lincton Mountain Road.

Although winter is still here, spring migration is just around the corner. **American Robins** by the scores (and sometimes hundreds) have been moving through the area during the past two to three weeks. The first migrating **Sandhill Cranes** and **Tree and Violet-green Swallows** will move through Umatilla County by the end of February. Aaron noted that **Say's Phoebes** and **Killdeer** should be showing up soon in the Pendleton area and other species will be following shortly. Keep your eyes open and please report all your sightings, common or rare, to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or 276-6413.

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Original art work by John Green
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