



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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



Volume 9, No. 4 Pendleton, Oregon April 2010

It's Official....Great Blue Heron!

THE PENDLETON CITY Council voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the River Parkway Arts Committee to place a bronze statue of a Great Blue Heron on the Umatilla River Parkway. The committee presented the recommendation to the City Council at their regular meeting on April 5.

Pendleton Bird Club members Aaron Skirvin, Jack Simons, and Diana LaSarge attended the meeting in support of the statue. In order to reach a recommendation to present to the City Council, the Arts Committee had tallied votes from a public opinion poll and taken in consideration comments and letters published in the *East Oregonian*. The opinion of members of the Arts Committee mirrored that of some of the public comment, that the subject of the statue should reflect and represent the habitat of the Umatilla River. The majority of the votes had preferred the statue of a bird or animal at the River Parkway.

The Arts Committee will be seeking an artist and deciding on a concept for the statue. They welcome input from the Bird Club at their meetings the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm at Prodigal Son Brewery.

Submitted by Diana LaSarge



Photo by Neal Hinds, McNary WNA, 2-19-11

Calendar of Events

Bird Club Field Trip

GREAT GRAY OWLS AT SPRING CREEK

Saturday, May 7, 2011

Meet at 7 a.m. at
Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)
For more information contact
Dave Herr: 541-276-6413 or
dsherr1@mac.com

Bird Club Field Trip

EARLY MORNING AT MISSION PONDS

Saturday, May 21, 2011

Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Mission Ponds
For more information contact Jack Simons:
styletoil@eoni.com

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday, May 12, 2011

AMONG PENGUINS

by Noah Strycker

Pendleton Presbyterian Church
201 SW Dorion St., Pendleton

Bird Club Field Trip

AN EVENING WITH THE HUMMINGBIRDS AT MCKAY CREEK

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Meet at 6 p.m. at
Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)
For more information contact Aaron Skirvin: 541-
215-0761or umatbirder@yahoo.com



Bird Club Field Trip

UKIAH AND TOWER BURN BIRDING

Saturday, June 11, 2011

Meet at 6 a.m. at
Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)

For more information contact Aaron Skirvin: 541-
215-0761

or umatbirder@yahoo.com

Bird Club Picnic

Saturday, July 23, 2011

Meet at 7 a.m. at
Pendleton Safeway Parking Lot (NE Corner)
for birding at Tollgate and Summit Road.

Or meet at Emigrant Springs State Park
at 1:00 p.m. for the picnic.
For more information contact Aaron Skirvin: 541-
215-0761

or umatbirder@yahoo.com

Bird Club Meeting

**7:00 p.m., Thursday, October 13,
2011**

TRAVELS OF THE BURROWING OWLS AT THE UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT

by Mike Gregg

Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton

Little League Heronry Update

By June and Duane Whitten

THE GREAT BLUE HERON HERONRY across from the Little League Baseball Park in Pendleton is again active this year. This is very good news, especially since possibly part of the decision to have a bronze statue of a Great Blue Heron near the new park on the River Parkway closer to downtown was based on the number of herons living along the Umatilla River.

As far as it is possible to view the nests from the River Parkway (across the river), even with a scope, the exact number of nesting herons may not yet be known for this year. One thing is certain, there are 13 nests and on April 15, there were herons in 9 of these nests. At least two pairs of herons appeared to be mending or doing a little construction on their nests, bringing in sticks and working them into the existing nest. This would appear to indicate these two nests do not yet have eggs. The other 7 herons were well nestled-down into the nests and may be brooding eggs.



It is very easy to view the heronry from the end of the road just on the far (east) side of the Little League Park. By walking up the ramp to the Parkway and a short distance along the paved path, the heronry is very visible across the river.

It is quite possible that our “impossible” spring weather has adversely affected the nesting success of the herons or caused some to nest later than usual. The rain and cold weather may have caused some nest failures but to give the herons credit, most of them look very determined to maintain a successful nest.



Bird of The Month: Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

By June Whitten

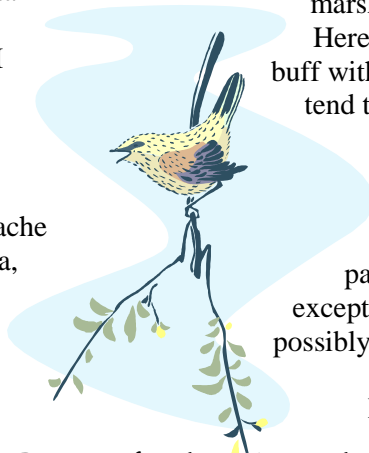
FIRST SIGHTINGS OF SOME LIFE birds make an indelible impression while others are given a more fleeting recognition that may not be retained after many years. I remember in detail my first encounter with Black Terns, although I did look up the date! Duane and I were traveling in British Columbia in a small caravan of friends in recreational vehicles.

On August 3, 1995, at a rest stop between Cache Creek and William's Lake, British Columbia, Duane and I walked down a slope toward a small wetland complete with cattails and a small pond. We were very much novice birdwatchers, but we did know we hoped to see Black Terns on this trip. Sure enough, we spotted a pair of Black Terns in the cattails and swooping over the water. This was very thrilling to us to find a "Life Bird!"

In our excitement, we continued walking toward the wetland with our binoculars focused on the terns. I remember saying something like, "Oh, great! They are coming closer!" Yep, they were coming closer and closer! I finally had to put my binoculars down as one of the terns swooped down and brushed the top of my head. The second tern soon followed suit and was swooping down on us brushing the tops of our heads. We did have enough "bird sense" to figure out we were way too close to the terns' nest and we carefully backed up the hill. Encounters such as these make wonderful memories that last a lifetime!

Black Terns are wonderful, graceful fliers, and a joy to watch (at the correct distance) as they swoop and turn over a lake or pond while devouring their favorite insects. Black Terns do not dive for food but skim the water mostly for insects and an occasional amphibian or fish plucked from the surface of the water.

A Black Tern is small, 9 to 10 inches in length, and sleek. In its breeding plumage, with a black head and neck shading to gray; gray back and wings; short dark legs; and a long, slender black bill, this tern is easily identified. The feeding



Bird of the Month

behavior is diagnostic as well as most other terns dive into the water for food. In non-breeding plumage, the underparts are mostly white with a white forehead and dark cap and "earmuffs."

The breeding habitat for Black Terns is fresh-water wetlands across most of Canada and the northern United States. They nest on floating material in the marsh or on the ground very close to water.

Here 2 to 4 eggs, which are dark olive to buff with brown splashing, are laid. Both parents tend the nest and the young.

Probably due to loss of wetland habitat, the overall population of Black Terns has diminished over the past thirty years. The nest success is exceptionally low in the upper Midwest, possibly due to use of agricultural chemicals.

Black Terns are migratory, going to their breeding grounds in mid-spring. The winters are spent mostly along the coast of northern South America. A European form is common in parts of Europe. Their appearance is decidedly different and time (and DNA testing) may prove them to be different species.



Black Tern at Blind Lake, Yukon. June 17, 1996.
Photo (c) 1998 - Cameron Eckert.

May is the prime time to find migrating Black Terns in Umatilla County. They usually make the Pendleton Bird Club's annual species list. It is probably safe to say some Black Terns migrate through Umatilla County with brief stopovers annually. Of course, their brief stop can be missed if no one is in the right

place at the right time. Good places to watch for Black Terns include Mission Ponds and McKay Creek NWR. Cold Springs NWR (Memorial Marsh) would also be an excellent location for migrating Black Terns.

*Some of the information for this article came from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Tern*

April Meeting - Birds of the Columbia Basin

By Barbara Clark

THE APRIL MEETING OF THE Pendleton Bird Club began with a totally satisfying potluck dinner of tasty salads, entrees and desserts. Bird Club leader Aaron Skirvin listed the many birding activities and opportunities coming up in the next few months. See the Calendar of Events section of this newsletter for dates and times of the wide variety available.

The program for the evening featured "Birds of the Lower Columbia Basin", an hour of photos by MerryLynn Denny and commentary by her husband, Mike Denny. Thirty-two members of the club saw at least as many birds on the screen, and heard stories, a few bird call imitations, interesting history and facts



Mike and MerryLynn Denny from the Walla Walla Audubon Society. MerryLynn provided excellent photos while her husband Mike gave the audience a fascinating perspective of birds found here in the Columbia Basin.

about the lives of the birds that have come to frequent areas of the lower Columbia basin including the Wallula Gap area, the Walla Walla River Delta, and McNary Refuge. For example, did



you know that Bullfrogs are death on ducklings? Or, that the Blue Goose which shows up now and again with flocks of Snow Geese is common in the Midwest and is actually a color phase of the Snow Goose? Have you seen the breeding horn on the American White Pelicans that now frequent places such as McKay National Wildlife Refuge and the waters off Wallula Pump Mill and Badger Island? Mike informed us that when the testosterone levels of the pelican decline the horn is shed. The horn is a flat fibrous plate in the middle of the upper mandible. Some of us wondered what that thing was the first time we saw it...was it a disease or a piece of nasty plastic caught on the bill, or what?

With programs like this and others we've been having, you won't want to miss a single Pendleton Bird Club gathering!!

The next meeting on May 12 will feature Penguins. This meeting will be held at the Pendleton Presbyterian Church at 201 SW Dorion in anticipation of a larger audience. We hope you will bring your friends and relatives to this presentation on birds that do not visit our basin. The young speaker has also authored a book on his subject that will be for sale at the meeting. Stay tuned for updates and announcements on this next presentation.

Oregon Field Ornithologists Annual Meeting in Pendleton, June 17 -19

By Aaron Skirvin

GREAT NEWS: Pendleton is hosting the Oregon Field Ornithologists' (OFO) Annual Meeting on **Friday evening June 17** through **Sunday morning, June 19**. This is a wonderful opportunity for local birders to meet new friends/birders from around the state and from Washington as well. The event will be held at the Pendleton Center for the Arts, both Friday and Saturday evenings. Event organizers have lined up two outstanding after-dinner speakers, Mike Denny on Friday evening and David Johnson on Saturday evening. Mike has spoken to our group at least 3 times in the past few years, including the last Bird Club meeting. An expert birder and renowned conservationist, Mike always captures the audience with his pointers and humor on bird behavior and life histories. David Johnson is an expert on owls, oversees the Burrowing Owl study at the Umatilla Chemical Depot, and is the keynote speaker on

Saturday evening. His talk will be on owls of the Pacific Northwest. You won't want to miss either of these presentations.

In addition to the two dinners and guest speakers, the event features several local field trips to Tower Burn, Upper Umatilla River, Tollgate, and the Chemical Depot. To register for the meeting, you must fill out the registration form that is on the OFO's website: www.oregonbirds.org. You don't have to be a

member of OFO to attend the events, but you must register. Register soon to reserve your place at the dinners and on the field trips. If you want to go on the field trip to the Chemical Depot (it's highly recommended) you must sign up well in advance and go through a security check. The procedure is described on OFO's website. If you've never been on the Depot, this would be a great time to visit and learn about the wildlife there.

New Bird Arrivals from mid-April to mid-May

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue-winged Teal Lesser Yellowlegs Solitary Sandpiper Spotted Sandpiper Franklin's Gull Forster's Tern Wilson's Phalarope White-throated Swift Vaux's Swift Calliope Hummingbird Rufous Hummingbird Black-chinned Hummingbird Lewis's Woodpecker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Kingbird Western Wood-Pewee Gray Flycatcher Dusky Flycatcher Western Flycatcher Hammond's Flycatcher Warbling Vireo Cassin's Vireo Barn Swallow Bank Swallow House Wren Yellow Warbler Townsend's Warbler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nashville Warbler Orange-crowned Warbler Wilson's Warbler MacGillivray's Warbler Western Tanager Chipping Sparrow Brewer's Sparrow Grasshopper Sparrow Black-headed Grosbeak Lazuli Bunting Bullock's Oriole Bobolink Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (peak of spring migration)
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March PBC Field Trip

By June Whitten

A FIELD TRIP SPONSORED by The Pendleton Bird Club to Echo and Stanfield Meadows took place on March 26, 2011. Aaron Skirvin led the trip accompanied by 16 birders.

The target birds were Sandhill Cranes and Long-billed Curlews and both species were located. The curlews were feeding in a pasture and while two



flew, one remained for very good views as it probed and pecked in the grass. Later, a few more curlews were spotted flying but didn't remain for good looks. Two Sandhill Cranes were in one field and four in another. Not a lot of cranes, but very good views of those we found. We were hoping for large flocks of



cranes, but apparently they had been bribed with corn to make them hurry to Othello, WA, for the annual Othello Sandhill Crane Festival.



Waterfowl, including Redheads, Pintails, Wigeons, and Green-winged Teal, were prominent in the ponds along Emert Road and Stanfield Meadows Road. Also in the vicinity were Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Great Egret. Other species, which were seen on the way home via Mud Springs and Coombs Canyon Roads, were Great Horned Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Barn Owl, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Horned Lark.

March – April Bird Sightings

By Dave Herr

I KNOW IT MUST BE SPRING because the **Violet-green Swallows** have returned to downtown Pendleton, but I sure wish the temperature would warm up a little. Still, lots of new migrant birds have been arriving and birding is only going to get better.

A number of folks have reported seeing **Townsend's Solitaires** recently, clearly migrating birds. March 22, Jack Simons found one on his walk along the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission, and I (Dave Herr) have been seeing them periodically on Mount Hebron in NE Pendleton. Jack reports there are lots of waterfowl now on Mission Ponds, primarily **Mallards, American Wigeon** and a few **Green-winged Teal**. Jack also reports the **Great Horned Owl** is nesting across the river from Mission Ponds for the second year in a row.



Bird Sightings

Dr. Mark Rhodes reported the first of the year **Caspian Tern** near the Bridge over the Umatilla River at the edge of Umatilla on March 21. March 23, Nancy Brown was surprised to see a scrap between 3 **Black-billed Magpies** and a **Ferruginous Hawk** in her Hermiston back yard. The hawk wanted to perch in some of her large trees, but the magpie chased the hawk away after about 5 minutes of dive-bombing and other aerial feats. March 25, Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) reported one **Osprey** was perched on a power pole 2 poles west of the nest at the east end of Pendleton. Aaron notes the bird was a little early this year; usually the Osprey return on April 1, give or take a couple of days.

The **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** have returned. Aaron found 3 males perching on the cattails along the edge of the Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds on March 31. Neal Hinds reported his mother had one at her Hermiston home on April 2. April 1, Marilyn Cripe was surprised to see a **Chukar** in her yard along Upper McKay Creek. Marilyn has a great bird garden in her yard and has seen **Gray Partridge** there in the past, but the **Chukar** was a surprise.

Joy Jaeger visited her cabin at Poverty Flats April 1, and found 3 **Violet-Green Swallows**. They were checking out some of the nest boxes Joy and Steve have installed, but **Western Bluebirds** kept coming around and harassing the swallows. While there, Joy also saw a **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Common Ravens**, **American Robins**, **Dark-eyed Juncos** and the **Song Sparrow** who lives down by their pond. A week later Joy reported the **Western Bluebirds** continue to defend their territory every time a **Violet-green Swallow** checks out a nest box.

April 4, Dolly Robison reported the **Say's Phoebe** has returned to the Forest Service warehouse near Washington School and that there was a large flock of **Violet-green Swallows** flying over the Umatilla River nearby. April 4, Jack Simons spotted his first **Turkey Vulture** of the season along the Umatilla River behind his home. Jack laments the **Turkey Vultures** lost their favorite resting place when their favorite snag in his back pasture fell down this winter. In early April, Ron Louderback birded along the Stanfield and Echo Meadows roads. He found 20 **Wilson's Snipe**, 4 **Black-necked Stilts**, 2 **American Avocets** and several **Greater Yellowlegs**. April 4, Dan Baum spotted a **Black-necked Stilt** at the west end of Mann's Pond. The following day there were 2 of them. Dr. Mark Rhodes reported seeing several dozen **Snow Geese** on the Umatilla National Wildlife

Refuge west of Irrigon in early April.

Birding in the western part of the county April 6, Aaron found a male **Eurasian Wigeon** on Mann's Pond (north side of Stanfield Meadows Road) and a **Black-necked Stilt** in a flooded field in the SE corner of the Stanfield Meadows and Echo Meadows road intersection. April 6, Sharon Simons saw a new species at the front pond in their pasture. Checking her bird book, Sharon identified the pair of birds as a male and female **Common Goldeneye** – a new first for the Simons' front pond. Another new species for this pond was a pair of **Hooded Mergansers** that Jack saw



Caspian Tern. Photo by Mike

April 13.

As they were walking out to their cars at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton on April 8, Aaron, June, and Jack Simons spotted a pair of **Lesser Goldfinches**, a couple of **American Goldfinches**, and 3 male **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in a flowering crabapple tree. April 9, Neal Hinds found **Cliff Swallows**, **Least Sandpipers** and **Dunlin** at the Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. April 10, Ken Thompson noticed the **Cliff Swallows** had returned to nest on the cliffs overlooking the Lewis &

Clark Trail and Columbia River about 700 feet east of McNary Beach Recreation Area's east gate. Ken notes that within days, there should be hundreds of the birds performing their aerobatics at the cliff.

April 9, Jack Simons reported he spotted his first **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at Mission Pond for the year. The bird was flying over the pond and settled into the willows on the east pond. Jack reports almost always a pair will raise young birds that end up learning how to find food on the

river just a hop away. **Red-winged Blackbirds** are on territory around the ponds and the female **Red-tailed Hawk** was on her nest in the cottonwood thicket at the NE corner of the ponds. Jack hopes she has a good brood this year after having been kicked



Black-crowned Night-Heron. Photo by Bob Tablev.



out of her nest the past two years by **Great Horned Owls**.

On April 12, Jack spotted a lone **American White Pelican** on the Umatilla River near his home. This was Jack's first sighting of this species for the year. The following day walking along the dike road, Jack saw a "yellow shafted" **Northern Flicker**, the first he had seen in several years.

Checking her bird feeders near McKay Dam on April 12, Barbara Clark reported seeing **White-crowned** and **House Sparrows**, **American Goldfinches**, her "returning" **Western Meadowlark**, a **Spotted Towhee**, **House Finches**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, a **Northern Flicker**, a **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Collared** and **Mourning Doves** and **California Quail**. Barbara said that Andrew is seeing an **American Kestrel** and a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** when he is working outside and this spring the Clarks had the first ever **American Crow** in their yard.

June Whitten and Betty Husted were at Stanfield Meadows April 13, finding lots of waterfowl, many paired up and preparing to nest. There were several **Black-necked Stilts** and a flock of **Dunlin**. They also spotted a pair of **Cinnamon Teal** in beautiful breeding plumage. Birding at Memorial Marsh at Cold Springs NWR April 16, Neal Hinds was able to photograph several **Dunlin** in breeding plumage, a **Black-necked Stilt**, **Killdeer** and a **Greater Yellowlegs**.

June and Duane were in the same area April 17, and saw mostly the same species of birds. However, there were 4 **American Avocets** among literally dozens of **Black-necked Stilts**. **Dunlin** were again present as were 8 **Greater**



Wilson's Snipe. Photo by Karen Baxter.



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo by Jov Jaeger.

Yellowlegs. On April 17, Aaron observed a small flock of **Dunlin**, many in breeding plumage, at the Athena sewer ponds.

April 17, Barbara Clark had the year's first **Rufous Hummingbird** visit her feeder. April 18, Connie Betts had a beautiful pair of male **Yellow-rumped Warblers** visit her yard in SW Pendleton. Connie reports lots of **White-crowned Sparrows** mixed in with the **Dark-eyed Juncos**. The following day Connie saw a **Cassin's Finch**, a new species for Connie's yard. I have also recently had **Cassin's Finches** visit my feeder. These are migrating birds, probably headed to the mountains to breed.

Ron and Carole Louderback have been checking out the Stanfield and Echo Meadows areas. He is finding **Black-neck Stilts** and **Dunlin** to be fairly common in the area right now. They report that quite a few ducks and geese are still in the area. In a marshy area at the junction of Echo Meadows and Stanfield Meadows road he has been seeing a concentration of **Wilson's Snipe** and on April 17, reported **Sandhill Cranes** at the junction of Emert and Rosenberg roads. Ron also reports there is a **Red-tailed Hawk** nest and a **Great Horned Owl** nest (with 3 owlets) along Whitehouse Road.

Checking the Wildhorse Golf Course ponds on May 20, Aaron found a pair of **Ruddy Ducks** and a pair of **Redheads** and both species breed at the ponds. Also on May 20, June and Kris Andrews (visiting birder from British Columbia) spotted a **Barn Owl** nest in the cliff along Hwy 395 a couple miles west of Pilot Rock; a late-staying **Rough-legged Hawk**, a pair of **Swainson's Hawks**, and 3 **Short-eared Owls** along Alkali Canyon Road; a **Red Fox Sparrow** in the brush near the north end of Mud Springs Canyon Road; and a **Lesser Yellowlegs**, amongst many **Greater Yellowlegs** and **Dunlin**, at Echo Meadows. The Whittens reported the first **Calliope Hummingbird** of the year, when a male

showed up at their feeder in SW Pendleton on May 20.

May is probably the most exciting single month for birding. Lots of new birds will be arriving and most males will be in beautiful and distinctive breeding plumage. Now is the time to get out and do some birding and please send all your sightings to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or call 541-276-6413.

Newsletter Editor: Barbara Clark, 541 278-1252

Email Address: bainbrid@gmail.com

Technical Editor: Aaron Skirvin, 541 215-0761

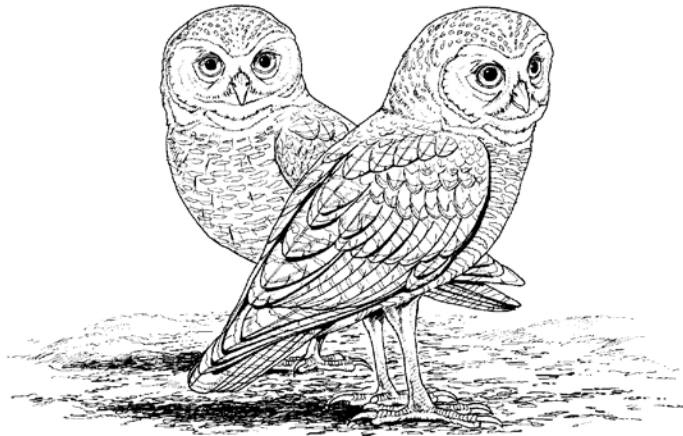
Email Address: umatbirder@yahoo.com

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



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Pendleton Bird Club
Pendleton, OR 97801

