



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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



Volume 9, No. 9 Pendleton, Oregon September 2011

“Courting Blue Herons Grace Court Street”

GO TO THE INTERSECTION of SW Court Ave and SW 4th Street in Pendleton, take the stairs to the levee from the Riverfront Plaza and behold, you are at the bronze sculpture of the Courting Great Blue Herons.

Back in the April issue of this newsletter we announced that votes from a city-wide public opinion poll along with comments and letters published in the *East Oregonian* supported the desire that a bird and/or fish statue be placed along the Umatilla River Parkway. Many Pendleton Bird Club members responded in that poll and bird club leader, Aaron Skirvin became an advisor to the final selection of the sculpture which was chosen to best represent the habitat of the Umatilla River.

The bronze sculpture artist of the courting herons, Michael Maiden, began his bronze career in the Walla Walla area and now resides in Sandy, Oregon. His submission was selected from 15 proposals by artists across our nation. A temporary art committee was established by the city of Pendleton to make the selection and work with the artist. Michael’s

sculpture was selected based on the authenticity of the anatomy and posture of the birds. The courting herons represent the wildlife inhabiting the Umatilla River area along the River Parkway. A



Bronze sculpture by Michael Maiden.

heronry at the eastern end of the Parkway on the opposite side of the river has delighted bird-watchers for many years. Over 125 other bird species have been seen along the Parkway including Ring-billed Gulls, Yellow Warblers, Black-capped Chickadees, Belted Kingfishers, Gray Flycatchers, and Osprey. More information about the Parkway and riverine habitat can be found on a plaque that stands along the levee near the sculpture. The plaque has photos of some of the plants and birds to be seen along the river. Dave Herr, editor of our

monthly bird sightings article, has been sited as one of the photo contributors for the plaque.

The City of Pendleton is looking for funds to assist with an ongoing project to place more sculptures along the River Parkway. Donations can be sent to the City of Pendleton Arts Fund in care of the mayor’s office. Do take a walk along the River Parkway and enjoy the “The Courting Herons”these will not fly away!

By Barbara Clark

Calendar of Events

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**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., Thursday, November 10, 2011

BIRDING UP THE TEXAS GULF DURING SPRING MIGRATION

by Terry Steele

**Pendleton First Presbyterian Church
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton**

“THE BIG SIT”

by June Whitten

ONCE AGAIN MEMBERS of The Pendleton Bird Club will have the opportunity to participate in “The Big Sit” bird count. The date this year is Sunday, October 9, from midnight to midnight. The rules are to observe as many species as possible from a 17-foot diameter circle. Observers may leave the circle to check an identity if the bird was originally heard or seen from within the circle.

The birders may be pretty sparse (absent) from the circles during the night hours. However, there will be some birders at the circles from about 7:30 to noon. The circles include one at Cold Springs NWR, one at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area, and a third one at Mission Ponds near Pendleton. At Cold Springs, park in Parking Lot D which has a short roadway to the reservoir. Aaron Skirvin will have a circle set up a short walk onto the mudflats north of the end of the roadway. The circle at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area will be near Frog Pond 1 in order to have a view of the pond, the Columbia River, and the surrounding brush and trees. Duane and I will have this circle set up. Bring your “Birder’s Guide to Umatilla County, Oregon” if you need explicit directions on finding either of the sites in the Hermiston area. Jack Simons will be manning the Mission Ponds Circle so give Jack a call if you need directions.

“The Big Sit” is an annual, international birding event sponsored by Bird Watchers Digest with Swarovski Optiks as the corporate sponsor. The species list for each circle is turned in and a “master” species list is compiled for all of the circles. Swarovski Optiks offer a \$500 prize to a circle which draws the “Golden Bird.” From the compiled master list, one species is randomly drawn to be the Golden Bird. Again, a drawing is held to determine which circle will receive the \$500 prize.



“The Big Sit” is a fun day (or part of a day) of birding with friends. So, grab a lawn chair, some snacks, and a thermos of coffee or hot chocolate and join us for the camaraderie and maybe some good birds as well.

Big Sit Questions? Call June Whitten, 541-276-9019



BIRD OF THE MONTH – Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

AS THE FALL MIGRATION progresses to late October, it is time to look for returning Pacific Loons. While they have been scarce the past two or three years, they no doubt pass through Umatilla County annually. Keeping a watchful eye out for them on the Columbia River anywhere around McNary Dam or upstream from the dam could reward the observer with a nice view of this loon.

Pacific Loons breed on fresh water tundra lakes. The nest is often just a depression in the grass where 1 or 2 eggs of variable shades of brown and olive green are laid. The chicks are downy and active, leaving the nest, which is adjacent to water, within a day or two. After spending about 3 months in the Arctic tundra, the Pacific Loons migrate southward and spend most of the other 9 months on the Pacific Ocean. Like other loons, the Pacific Loon is very awkward and walks poorly on land mostly due to the placement of their legs far back of the abdomen. They spend most of their lives in the water where they dive for fish, tracking their prey visually, and



Pacific Loon. Photo by Corey Ellingson, USFWS.

clasp it in their bills. They require 30 to 50 meters of open water, flapping to gain momentum, to take flight.



Bird of the Month

In alternate (breeding) plumage, the Pacific Loon has a striking gray head and nape with some black and white streaking on the side of the lower neck, a dark purplish patch on the throat, and a dark body with small stripes of black and white on the back. The head appears rounded and the bill is small compared to the Common Loon. The basic plumage of Pacific Loons is rather plain with dark bodies and heads and identification is a little more difficult. The smaller size (25 inches in length while Common Loons are about 32 inches) and smaller bill are good field marks. Most adult Pacific Loons also have a remnant of a necklace on the white throat.

Pacific and Arctic Loons are similar and were once considered the same species. In western Alaska, the Arctic Loon has a greenish patch on the throat. Arctic Loons from Eurasia have purplish throats similar to the Pacific Loon. These loons may forage together in the waters off Japan in late winter. Japanese fishermen have taken advantage of their cooperative foraging where schools of sand lance (a small fish) were pushed into small areas. The fishermen could then catch great numbers of sea bream that gathered to feed on the sea lance. The Japanese fishermen worshipped the loons as messengers from heaven. Due to unexplained declines in the loon populations, this practice has now ceased to be effective.

Pacific Loons have a memorable, rather mournful yodeling call —o—lo—lee, given mainly on the breeding grounds. Other similar calls are given throughout the year.

Hopefully, this will be a good year for finding some Pacific Loons. The more people that are out looking for them will increase the chance of adding this loon to the 2011 bird list for Umatilla County.

Some of the information for this article is from: <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Pacific-Loon/lifehistory>

By June Whitten



Oregon Cascades Birding Trail

DID YOU KNOW THAT an Oregon Cascades Birding Trail with nearly 200 stops from Crater Lake to Mount Hood has been designed by a consortium of groups including the Audubon Society of Portland? Some of the stops are to be found in the lowlands, at the base of the mountains, such as along the edge of the Columbia River, and others are at higher elevations where Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers, Mountain Quail, the Hermit Warbler, Gray-crowned Rosy Finches and Clark's Nutcracker may be found. For more information got to:



www.oregonbirdingtrails.org/cascades.htm or contact the Audubon Society of Portland (503-292-6855).

From *Audubon's Field Guide to Birding Trails* by Ken Kaufman

August – September Bird Sightings

NOT SURPRISINGLY, most of the reports this period focused on shorebirds. Local reservoirs have finally started to drop providing feeding habitat on the exposed mudflats. Although the overall number of shorebirds appears to be down, a good diversity of species has still been reported.

Checking Memorial Marsh at Cold Springs NWR on August 27, Neal Hinds was able to add

Short-billed Dowitcher to the county year list. The following day Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) relocated the dowitcher and also found the first **Baird's Sandpiper** for the year.



Checking McKay Reservoir the evening of September 2, Aaron and June Whitten (June) did not find a large total number of shorebirds (16) but did find a number of different species including: **Lesser Yellowlegs, Killdeer, Sanderling, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper** and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper**. The **Sanderling** was the first seen in the



county this year. September 3, Neal Hinds reported there were few shorebirds at Cold Springs, but was able to photograph two **Western Sandpipers** and an **Osprey**.

On September 3, Aaron and Diana LaSarge birded around the Tollgate area. Although Aaron reported it was a gorgeous day in the mountains, birding was slow. Highlights of their trip included 5 **Lincoln's Sparrows** at Woodward Campground, one **Common Goldeneye** on Langdon Lake, one **Osprey** fishing over the lake and one "ratty", adult male **American Three-toed Woodpecker** near Target Meadows Campground.

September 4, June and Aaron birded in the NW portion of the county. At Cold Springs NWR, June reported not much going on, but they did see 5



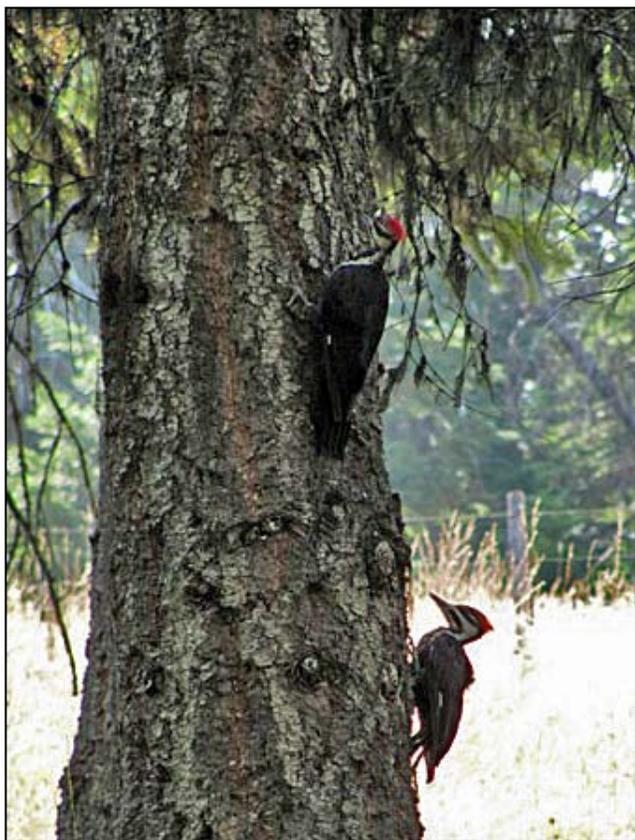
Cassin's Finch (female). Photo by Joy Jaeger.

Baird's Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Western Sandpipers, Killdeer, Northern Shovelers and both **Western** and **Clarks Grebes**. There were 3 **House Wrens** and 3 **Bewick's Wrens** along the path to the reservoir. They also found a flock of **White-crowned Sparrows** at Hat Rock State Park.

September 5, Jack Simons reported that birding was slow around his home along the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission. He believes that a lot of the birds have already moved south, possibly due to several recent 32-degree mornings at his home. With all of the grasshoppers in his pasture, Jack said the **Ring-necked Pheasants** and **Black-billed Magpies** are doing well and he has been seeing an

occasional **Turkey Vulture**, but expects to see more later in the month.

In late August, Joy Jaeger reported a flock of at least 22 **Mourning Doves** around her and husband Steve's mountain cabin above Albee. There were 6 **Steller's Jays** eating the sunflower seed she put out around the cabin and she saw 3 **Pileated Woodpeckers** in one group. She has also been seeing **Dusky Grouse** around the cabin including one group of five.



Pileated Woodpeckers. Photo by Craig Kvern.

Driving along the Yellow Jacket Road in early September, Joy found a lot of birds of prey including **Red-tailed Hawks**, **American Kestrels** and **Northern Harriers**. Joy notes that the **Cassin's Finches** and **Bluebirds** that were around her mountain cabin have disappeared, but she was able to photograph several **Red Crossbills** there. She also counted several **Mourning Doves** and **Steller's Jays** and at least 2 male **Williamson's Sapsuckers**.

Connie Betts checked out McKay Reservoir the evening of September 6. She found no shorebirds but reported about 1000 **Canada Geese**, 100 **Mallards**, 2

American White Pelicans, 3 **Osprey**, **Mourning Doves**, **California Quail**, an **American Kestrel** and a few gulls. At the parking lot near the end of the road she found a **Great-Horned Owl** sitting about 6 feet above the ground next to the road.

September 8, Craig Kvern and Ron Lee were able to photograph 2 **Pileated Woodpeckers** and heard a third calling at Indian Lake. September 10, Neal Hinds photographed several **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Cold Springs Reservoir.

Katrina Dielman, who has a bird friendly yard on the North Hill in Pendleton, reported some of her recent sightings. These included: August 26 and September 10 a male **Lesser Goldfinch**; September 8, several **White-crowned Sparrows**; September 9, a **Western Flycatcher** and a **Western Wood-Pewee**; and on September 9 and 10, a **Wilson's Warbler**.

Aaron, June and Diana LaSarge birded at Cold Springs September 11. They found the **Pectoral Sandpipers** reported earlier by Neal Hinds, also one **Sanderling**, 2 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 3 **Greater Yellowlegs**, at least 50 **Western Sandpipers** and several **Least Sandpipers**. At Hat Rock State Park there was one juvenile **Golden-crowned Sparrow** with a flock of **White-crowned Sparrows**. There was one **Western Scrub-Jay** at McNary town site and another **Western Scrub-Jay** flying into one of the oak trees next to the Fish Viewing Room at McNary Dam. The following day, Connie Betts reported **White-crowned Sparrow** had finally arrived at her yard.

Jack Simons still had a female/juvenile **Black-chinned Hummingbird** in his yard between Pendleton and Mission on September 12. June and Duane Whitten also had two **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** in their SW Pendleton yard on September 13 and 14. On the trip to their cabin above Albee on September 14, Joy and Steve Jaeger spotted two families of **Gray Partridges** and two **Ruffed Grouse** along Yellow Jacket Road. On their return trip to Pendleton on September 16, the Jaegers saw and photographed a **Golden Eagle** near milepost 10 of Yellow Jacket Road. Also on the 16th, the Whittens reported a female/juvenile **Calliope Hummingbird** drinking at the feeder in their yard.



An astonishing find was a juvenile **SABINE'S GULL**, observed and photographed by Aaron and Diana LaSarge on September 15, while it foraged along the shoulder of Hwy 395 at "Cape Horn," which is located about 2 miles north of Battle Mountain Forest Scenic Corridor. Sabine's Gulls are rare, periodic fall migrants in Umatilla County, and are always seen near large bodies of water, especially McKay Reservoir, Cold Springs Reservoir, and the Columbia River. Why one would be foraging along the roadside in the dry grass-land habitats in the foothills of the Blue Mountains is anyone's guess.



Sabine's Gull (juv.). Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

in the park. There was no doubt that the grouse was imprinted on people – not a good thing at any time and especially during grouse hunting season, which runs through September. Also on September 18, Jack Simons observed a **Great Egret** in the river bottoms near his home along the Umatilla River. He reckons that the Great Egrets are migrating through.

Passerine fall migration is well underway as evidenced by some of the migrant birds Katrina Dielman reported in her yard. Local shorebirding should be good for at least another month. Please send all your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr at

dsherr1@mac.com or call 541-276-6413

Connie Betts had a new bird for her SW Pendleton yard list when a **Fox Sparrow** showed up on September 17. The same day, Neal Hinds photographed a juvenile, "short-billed" **Long-billed Dowitcher**, a **Pectoral Sandpipers** and 2 **Townsend's Solitaires** at Cold Springs NWR.

Aaron and Diana LaSarge reported seeing a "tame" male **Dusky Grouse** strolling the lawns of Ukiah-Dale State Park on September 18. The park hosts reported the grouse had been in the park for 3 days and was remarkably tame, even perching in the bed of a pickup. The hosts speculated that someone had raised the grouse and then recently released the bird

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Original art work by John Green
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