



Kákya Táymut

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

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FOOD "PREPARATION" BY AN AMERICAN CROW

In the May 2008 issue of the Kákya Táymut, we reported on Russ and Connie Betts' observations of unusual behavior exhibited by a crow in their neighborhood of SW Pendleton. Connie informed us that she drained the water from their birdbath on May 12 because an American Crow had developed the unfortunate habit of depositing "eggs, baby bird parts, mutilated mice and, in general, making a terrible mess" in the water in the birdbath. "Removing the water apparently solved the problem, at least temporarily."

Curious about the crow's behavior, which they had never previously witnessed, Connie and Russ followed up by researching the question of crows stashing food in water. Initially, they could find no documentation on this kind of behavior in American Crows.

Persistence paid off, however, and they eventually got their answer from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Anne Hobbs, Public Information Specialist at the Cornell, sent the following email to the Betts:

Dear Russ and Connie,
Thanks for your patience in waiting for a response while I was on vacation. One of our staff members has been studying crow behavior for the last 20 years. Here's what he has to say on the subject:
Crows and all members of the family Corvidae will store excess food. Sometimes you can see crows bury

things in the grass of the yard (usually covering it up with a leaf or plucked grass; sometimes looking at it several times and using a number of different coverings before being satisfied that it really is hidden). They also hide food in trees or rain gutters, or whatever is a handy spot. At this time of the year (April), crows are nesting, and the female breeder



American Crow. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

sits all day on the eggs or young nestlings. She leaves the nest only infrequently and the male and the helpers bring her food. Food is easy to bring (all pecked into pieces and stashed in the throat under the tongue), but water is harder. So, crows often will dunk dry foods in water and take the moistened food to the nest. It is likely that that is what is going on in the birdbath. In my experience

with several captive crows, some individual crows also seem more inclined to put food in water and leave it there than others. Perhaps they want it to rot a little to improve the flavor a bit before they eat it (just like we do when we "age" beef).

You can learn more about crows at www.allaboutbirds.org and lots more about them at www.birds.cornell.edu/crows. The latter is where the information above was taken from, in the FAQ section. If you've found this information useful, I hope you'll consider supporting our work on behalf of birds and other wildlife. In addition to knowing that



you'll be making a difference for conservation, you'll receive our award-winning *Living Bird* magazine and informative *BirdScope* newsletter four times a year. Just call us at 1-800-843-2473 or visit our web site at:

<https://secure.birds.cornell.edu/eCommerce/Member/Start.do?lk=mbr&pl=box>

Bird Club Picnic at Harris County Park – Saturday, June 28, 2008

The club's annual picnic is less than a week away. This year's picnic will be held at Harris County Park along the South Fork Walla Walla River. The park is located about 12 miles southeast of Milton-Freewater. We will start the picnic at noon, light the barbecues at 12:30, and eat around 1 p.m. Please bring your choice of meat to barbecue, buns if required, and all table service. Also bring a salad, dessert, or item of choice to share. Condiments and iced tea will be furnished.

Our summer picnic provides an opportunity to get acquainted with new friends or new birders, so please invite guests. It will also be an opportunity to experience a new birding area. Harris County Park is in a beautiful setting in the spectacular valley of the South Fork Walla Walla River. Bird species diversity is very high because of the wide variety of habitats: stream, riparian brush, mixed conifer, and dry hillsides with rocky outcrops. Plan on arriving early to do some birding; you won't be disappointed!

Arrange your own transportation or car pool. If anyone needs a ride, call Lorna Waltz, 276-6353.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Picnic

Saturday, June 28, 2008

Harris County Park

We will start the picnic at noon. Come early for some good birding in the beautiful setting of the park and along the South Fork Walla Walla River.

For more information, see article in this newsletter or call Lorna Waltz, 276-6353

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., October 9, 2008

**Program and Location
To be Announced**

Bird of the Month – Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)

Bullock's Oriole and Baltimore Oriole were once considered to be a single species under the name Northern Oriole. They are geographically separated; the Bullock's being a breeding species in the western United States, and the Baltimore being the eastern counterpart. Even though the two birds are closely



Bullock's Oriole. Photo by Dave Herr.

related, more recent studies have shown they are two distinct species. Bullock's Oriole was named after William Bullock, an English amateur naturalist.

The Bullock's Oriole is about 9 inches long with a 12-inch wingspan. The male is distinctive with bright orange face, rump, outer tail feathers, and underparts



and a black cap, nape, chin, and supercillium. A large white wingpatch also separates the Bullock's from the Baltimore Oriole, which has only white wing bars. The females are very similar to each other; pale gray belly; yellowish throat, head and tail; gray-brown back with white wing bars.

The song and raucous calls of the male Bullock's Oriole often give away his presence. Usually, he gives a dry chatter and a short series of rich, whistled notes that have a variable pattern. This past May, a male Bullock's Oriole arrived in our (June and Duane Whitten's) yard. His chatter was very noisy and hard to miss for three or four days. Then, his lady-love arrived, possibly in response to his persistent, loud calls, and he quieted down somewhat.

Orioles are fond of nectar, oranges, grape jelly, some new buds from plants, and insects and spiders. The male oriole in our yard had perfected drinking out of the hummingbird feeders and spent time on the deck. The female was not successful at drinking from the hummingbird feeders at first. She was content to sit on the railing and carefully watch the male. An oriole feeder was added to the array of feeders on the deck, but the male continued to prefer the hummingbird feeder. The female now drinks nectar from the oriole feeder and possibly the hummingbird feeder as well. She has been seen attempting to do so any way.

The nest of the Bullock's Oriole is a real piece of art. The nest is attached to a branch and woven of plant fibers. It takes anywhere from 5 to 15 days for the pair to weave their pendant nest and line it with fine grass or hair. (The nest of the above mentioned pair of orioles has yet to be discovered, but probably is in the neighbor's yard. Once the trees leaf out, the nest can be quite obscure.) Orioles nest in open and riparian woodlands, most often in deciduous trees. The female usually lays 4 or 5 pale, grayish eggs, marked with darker colors. The nestlings are fed insects for protein by both parents. They fledge when they are about 4 weeks old.

Bullock's Orioles are migratory and arrive in Umatilla County each spring in late April or early May. Most leave Umatilla County by September and spend the winter in the warmer, southern United States, Mexico, and Central America.

Bullock's Orioles are fairly common during the breeding season in the lower elevations of Umatilla County. They are rare, however, in the Blue

Mountains. Any riparian area with deciduous trees is a good place to look for Bullock's Orioles. The deciduous woodlands along the Umatilla River, even in Pendleton, are good places to look for orioles. McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs are two other locations popular with orioles.

Contributed by June Whitten

May – June Bird Sightings

The flurry of spring migrant birds passing through our area has tapered off during this reporting period. Our latest arriving species, such as Common Nighthawk, Willow Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Veery, and others, were all reported in Umatilla County by mid-June. Nesting is now in full swing, and an early morning birding trip to Cold Springs NWR, the brushy draws in the foothills, or the Blue Mountains will produce a wide variety of breeding birds.



Black-necked Stilt. Photo by Rose Scott.

Hopefully, you will have the opportunity to visit some of your favorite areas to see what birds are nesting there. Please report your sightings to Dave Herr, our Bird Sightings editor.

On May 21, I (Aaron Skirvin) noted a **Forster's Tern** at Mann's Pond (west of Stanfield) and later in the day about **250 Bank Swallows** at Mission Ponds. June and Duane Whitten reported their first **Black-headed Grosbeak** of the season on May 22; it was enjoying the sunflower seeds in their feeder in SW Pendleton. June added to her report that the male grosbeak "is vying with the male **Bullock's Oriole**" for the most "Beautiful Yard Bird." Also on May 22, I located 3 **Common Loons** and 2 **Black-necked Stilts** at McKay Reservoir.



Mary Cole noticed an unfamiliar bird in her yard near Pendleton High School on May 23. It turned out to be a **LEWIS'S WOODPECKER**, an unusual species for Pendleton. This species was probably more common around Pendleton prior to the 1980's, but with the increase in Starlings and decrease in nesting snags, Lewis's Woodpeckers are difficult to find in Umatilla County outside the Tower Burn area SE of Ukiah.

On May 24, I conducted a bird survey at the Umatilla Army Depot, which straddles the Umatilla-Morrow County line. Species of note in the Umatilla County included 2 **Brewer's Sparrows** and a pair of **Loggerhead Shrikes** feeding nestlings. On the Morrow County side, the highlight was a singing **BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** and 2 **Burrowing Owls**. Later in the day, I found 2 **Franklin's Gulls** and 1 **Red-necked Grebe** at McKay Reservoir.

In spite of the drizzle on May 24, June and Duane Whitten birded the brush patch along old Hwy 30 about halfway up Cabbage Hill, and their highlights included: the first of season **Yellow-breasted Chat** and **Gray Catbird**, **Lazuli Buntings**, **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Spotted Towhees**, and **Fox Sparrows**. The weather was still dreary on May 25, but June and I looked for birds around Mission, McKay Reservoir, and Coombs Canyon Road. We found a pair of **Blue-winged Teal** at Mission Ponds; a singing **Sage Thrasher** along Coombs Canyon Road; and 1 **Red-necked Grebe**, 2 **Horned Grebes**, 5 **Eared Grebes**, several **Western Grebes**, and 3 **American Avocets** at McKay Reservoir. On May 25, Joy Jaeger reported finding **Cassin's Finches**, **Pileated Woodpeckers** and a **Hairy Woodpecker** at her property near Albee.

Neal Hinds spent several hours birding at Cold Springs NWR on May 26 and located about 50 species of birds, including several **Eastern Kingbirds**, 2 **Great Egrets**, and 1 **GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE**. Also on May 26, Tanya Harrison and I birded the southern part of Umatilla County where we found 3 **Short-eared Owls** between White Eagle Grange and Whittaker Flat, 2

Eurasian Collared-Doves at Pilot Rock, and 1 **Dusky Grouse** and several **Green-tailed Towhees** in the Tower Burn.

The riparian habitat along the Umatilla River in the Thorn Hollow area is a reliable spot for Red-eyed Vireo each spring. On May 28, I checked the area and found one singing **Red-eyed Vireo**, a couple of **Gray Catbirds**, a **Willow Flycatcher**, **Yellow-breasted Chats**, and some **Warbling Vireos**. Tanya Harrison on May 28 reported a late migrant **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at Wanaket Wildlife Mitigation Area, which is located of couple of miles east of McNary Dam.

Birding in the west county on May 31, Neal Hinds found 5 **Great Egrets** in the Hermiston area. Neal is wondering if the egrets nest somewhere near Cold Springs NWR. Although Great Egrets nest near the Tri-Cities, to date, there are no breeding records of Great Egret in Umatilla County.



Lewis's Woodpecker. Photo by Tom Munson.

Delores Bjerke reported seeing 13 **American White Pelicans** in the Umatilla River at the east end of Pendleton on June 1. On June 4, Craig Kvern found a male **Western Tanager** near Thorn Hollow and a female **Blue-winged Teal** at Mission.

Bette Husted photographed two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in her SW Pendleton yard on June 8. This is the second year in a row they've seen the doves in their neighborhood. Bette reported that "We have seen four adults at a time, earlier this spring. They stayed quite late in the fall [2007] too, and I thought they were going to stay all winter. But, then they grew scarce, late November I think, and we didn't see them again until about late March [2008]. We hear them calling all around us."

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org



Russ and Connie Betts are still keeping an eye on the birds at Pendleton Community Park. On June 9, they found a **Dusky Flycatcher**, a **Cedar Waxwing**, two **Great Blue Herons**, numerous **Starlings** and **American Crows**, baby **House Sparrows** and **House Finches**, 2 **American Goldfinches**, and a **Western Tanager**. Jack Simons reported the first **Common Nighthawk** of the year, flying over his pasture between Pendleton and Mission on the evening of June 9.

Dolly Robison has been looking for **Eurasian Collared-Doves** for some time, and finally located one in her Hermiston yard. Dolly reported that she had heard a “different kind of cooing” (different from the common Mourning Doves) around her neighborhood “off and on for a few weeks” and finally spotted the **Eurasian Collared-Dove** on June 13. I birded around Tollgate on June 15, mainly to check Langdon Lake for goldeneyes. There I readily found three female and one adult male **Common Goldeneyes** feeding on the lake. I expect that they will breed at the lake again this summer.



Savannah Sparrow. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

Bird activity in Pendleton Community Park has slowed down compared to the activity in late May. On June 16, Connie Betts reported **Brown-headed Cowbirds** “once in a while”, “**Barn Swallows** are nesting under the foot bridge”, and “a **Yellow Warbler** was picking up either web material or bugs from the web so there must be a nest somewhere near the kids' bridge. Otherwise, the park is quiet except for kids and dogs.” Connie also saw a male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** in their SW Pendleton yard on June 18 and believes the hummingbirds are nesting in the neighborhood, but no one had reported finding a nest, yet.

Neal Hinds and I birded in the Ukiah area on June 21. Highlights of our trip included 2 male **Bobolinks** at Ukiah; a male **Wood Duck** and 5 **Wilson's Phalaropes** at the Ukiah sewer ponds; 1 flyover **Osprey** at a small pond near Pearson Guard Station; 8 **Clark's Nutcrackers** near Pearson Guard Station; 2 or 3 **Lincoln's Sparrows**, 2 **Warbling Vireos**, and a winnowing **Wilson's Snipe** in the meadow at Pearson Guard Station; **Green-tailed Towhee**,

Lazuli Bunting, **MacGillivray's Warbler**, **Brewer's Sparrow**, several **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, an immature **Golden Eagle**, a **Nashville Warbler**, and **Fox Sparrow** in the Tower Burn; **Willow Flycatcher** and nest-building **Cedar Waxwings** at Ukiah-Dale State Park; a male **White-breasted Nuthatch**, two **Pygmy Nuthatches** at a nest cavity in a snag, and several **Western Bluebird** nestlings in the nestboxes along the Albee-Ukiah Road; and a pair of **Williamson's Sapsuckers** at Battle Mountain State Park.

Dave Herr reported finding quite a few birds over the weekend of June 21 and 22. First he ventured out to Mud Springs Canyon Road where he found “the expected sparrows” (**Vesper, Grasshopper, Savannah, and Song(?)**), **Short-eared Owl**, **Sage Thrasher**, and **Northern Harrier**. At Wenix Spring, which is located near Thorn Hollow, he found

“**Catbirds, Veerys, Vireos** (Cassin's, Warbling, and Red-eyed(?)) and lots of other stuff singing,” including a **Western Flycatcher**. On June 22, Dave birded in the Tollgate area, where he reported there is still considerable snow in spots and enough drifts to block some of the back roads. Nonetheless, he reported finding **American Three-toed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird**, and **Dusky Flycatcher**; all, except the **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, posed while Dave took their photographs.

Our local song birds are currently in the midst of breeding, but the first southbound shorebird migrants, such as adult Western Sandpipers, will begin moving through Umatilla County before the end of June. They have already nested (or attempted nesting) in their Arctic breeding areas and are returning to their wintering grounds. The young sandpipers will begin their migration a month or so later. Check any mudflats for these earliest southbound shorebirds. Because of the wet spring, the best sites for “fall” shorebirding are still inundated: McKay Reservoir and Cold Springs Reservoir. Other places to look for the early migrants would be Mann's Pond and the ponds in the southeast corner of Cold Springs NWR.



Whatever birds you find (shorebirds, songbirds, waterfowl, raptors, etc) during your outings or in your backyard, please send your sightings to Dave Herr, at dsherr1@mac.com or call 276-6413.

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