



Pendleton Bird Club

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April Meeting

Dave Herr's slide and audio presentation of "The Songbirds of Umatilla County" was the highlight of the Pendleton Bird Club's second official meeting held March 10th. Dave is a ten year resident of Pendleton who began his birding career in 1982. He is a gifted (and very patient) photographer of birds, but his primary passion is the recording of their songs and sounds. Many of his recordings are included in the prestigious Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds / Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Thirty-one people were present Thursday evening and everyone who attended must have gained new knowledge from his professional and very entertaining presentation.

Dave wowed us with his photographs: the beautiful Lazuli Bunting (they should be migrating through Umatilla Co. beginning about May 5th), the Bullock's Oriole (the Oriole builds a hanging nest), the Yellow Rumped Warbler, (a year round resident that's quite drab in winter but is changing into its bright spring breeding plumage now), and the not quite as colorful Savannah Sparrow that is commonly found near Coombs Canyon. He taught us to listen to the two introductory notes that proceed the Vesper Sparrow's song, to hear the resemblance between the Robin's song and that of the Western Tanager (the Western Tanager sounds like a robin with a sore throat), and how the Dark Eyed Junco's verbalizations are similar to, but more musical than the dry staccato of the Chipping Sparrow.

Dave then went on to express his "appreciation of the Starling" (did he say Starling?) He is fascinated by birds' sounds remember and the Starling is a master of mimicry he explains. They are very versatile in their mimicry and often imitate the sounds of birds in the territory that they currently inhabit; he has heard them mimicking Ferruginous Hawk and California Quail in Juniper Canyon and at Malheur Wildlife Refuge it is common to hear them mimicking Willets, Greater Yellowlegs and Sora Rails. Dave also played for us his recording of the song of my personal favorite, the Swainson's Thrush. Spending time in our Umatilla Forest, one can hear the Swainson's Thrush tirelessly sing its beautiful song, which I think in a way resembles the sound of moving water, a very soothing to the soul kind of song. Thank you Dave.

Thank you also to the members of the First Christian Church for allowing us the use of its Fellowship Hall which is a very comfortable and inviting place to meet. Our next meeting will again be in the Fellowship Hall, on June 12th at 7:30pm.

Calendar of Events

May 3, Pendleton Bird Club's first field trip – Exploring the Upper Umatilla River. This trip is changed from the original plan to travel to McNary Wildlife Area, because McNary should

provide better birding in the fall and winter. Meet at the northeastern corner of Pendleton's Safeway parking lot at 7:30 a.m. We should return to Pendleton by noon.

May 3 - 6, Field trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge – Birders who want to attend have the option to stay at the Malheur Field Station. The cost is approximately \$20. per person per night. Make reservations with June Whitten before April 17th. Bring breakfast food, lunches, pillows, towels & bedding. A refrigerator, coffee maker and sink are available in the dormitory.

May 10, North American Migration Count. We are hoping to have at least four teams to cover Umatilla Co. People can bird for ½ day or a full day. Bring binoculars and a lunch. For more information, contact Kevin Blakely (276-2344), Aaron Skirvin (276-1948), or Dave Herr (276-6413).

May 17, S.U.R.E. River Clean up. Stewards of the Umatilla River Environment (S.U.R.E.) is hosting a river clean up in Pendleton, a bird walk along the River Parkway starting at 7:00 a.m., and a lunch for the volunteers. The river clean up will begin at 9:00a.m., be sure to bring gloves, a hat, and comfy shoes. For more information, contact Betty Klepper, 276-8416.

June 12, Pendleton Bird Club meeting. 7:30 p.m., Fellowship Hall, downstairs in the First Christian Church, across from the Pendleton Arts Center. Program to be announced. There should be much discussion about sightings on various field trips.

Birding Terminology

From the glossary of Stokes Field Guide to Birds – Western Region

Call – A short instinctive vocalization.

Song – An extended complex vocalization that is in part learned.

The 2003 Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

Othello is a small agricultural community located north of Tri-cities, about a two-hour drive from Pendleton. The Sandhill Crane Festival first began in 1998, initiated by the Othello Chamber of Commerce and the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. It is designed to celebrate the annual spring stopover of thousands of Lesser Sandhill Cranes in the local area.

There are a wide variety of activities scheduled during the three-day event. Numerous field trips are designed to acquaint the visitor with the wildlife as well as other unique features of the area. One-hour lectures are held all day Saturday, with a banquet Saturday evening. The lectures cover a wide variety of topics and it is hard deciding which to attend (they are all interesting). In addition to the lectures and field trips there are many activities designed specifically for young children. It was fun seeing all the kids walking around wearing the Sandhill Crane masks they made.

I participated in two field trips. Saturday after a lecture outlining the Burrowing Owl research being done in the area, we took a bus ride to several known nest sites. We saw at least 10 different owls within 5 miles of Othello. This place has lots of Burrowing Owls.

Sunday I went on a tour of the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. Randy Hill, the Refuge Biologist and Mike Denny, noted Walla Walla County birder and naturalist led the tour. We saw lots of birds, but for me the highlights of the trip was seeing Washington ground squirrels and thousand of Sandhill Cranes moving from their morning feeding grounds to their daytime roost.

Although I am not sure of the exact dates for the 2004 Festival it will be held in late March. If you are looking for a fun weekend with lots of bird related activities, I would highly recommend attending. *Written by Dave Herr*

Changing Seasons: Bird Arrivals & Departures

The month of May brings a flurry of migrant birds into Umatilla County, where many of them find suitable habitat for breeding. Many of these species are “neotropical migrants”, which means the birds have spent the winter in Central and South America (the tropical regions of the new world). In the vicinity of Pendleton, observers have recorded the following arrival times for these migrant species.

Western Wood-Pewee – A few of these conspicuous flycatchers arrive in early May, but most arrive after May 15.

Western Flycatcher – A few years ago the Western Flycatcher was divided into two species: Cordilleran Flycatcher and Pacific-slope Flycatcher. Unfortunately, these two species are nearly indistinguishable in the field. Possibly most birds in the Pendleton area are the Cordilleran variety, but both species probably occur locally and could hybridize. The high-pitched song of the males of these two species will distinguish them from the other similar *Empidonax* flycatchers. If you are daring enough to try to sort out this difficult group of flycatchers, look for the Cordilleran/Pacific-slopes in early May, with a few passing through during late April. For most of us, we’ll be on the safe side and call them “Western Flycatcher”.

Western Kingbird – This common breeding bird in Umatilla County begins arriving in late-April, but most kingbirds return to the area in May.

Cassin’s Vireo – These handsome birds breed in the coniferous forests of the Blue Mountains, but during migration, a few vireos pass through Pendleton in early and mid-May.

Warbling Vireo – This drab, riparian dweller arrives in early May. Unless the males sing, Warbling Vireos are difficult to find in the dense tree canopies along the Umatilla River.

Bank Swallow – Early stragglers return to Pendleton in late April, but the peak of migration occurs in mid- to late-May.

Nashville Warbler – Look for Nashville Warblers as they pass through Pendleton at the very end of April and early May.

MacGillivray’s Warbler – This species breeds in brushy areas, usually along streams, in the Blue Mountains. Watch for the first migrants to arrive in mid- to late-May.

Wilson’s Warbler – Some years, a few Wilson’s Warblers arrive in late April, but the earliest migrants usually are seen in early May.

Yellow-breasted Chat – This large warbler skulks in dense, brushy thickets. However, the male’s loud, distinctive song advertises its presence. They begin arriving in mid-May, and a few stay to nest along the river in Pendleton.

Western Tanager – A common summer resident of the coniferous forests of the Blue Mountains, the Western Tanager migrates through Pendleton throughout May.

Black-headed Grosbeak – A few pairs of Black-headed Grosbeaks nest along the river in Pendleton. Seen in good light, the orange and black males are very striking. Look for the first arrivals in early to mid-May.

Aaron Skirvin contributed this month's "Changing Seasons".

John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival & Art Show: Malheur Wildlife Refuge

Our annual birding trek to the John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival and Art Show at Burns, Oregon was FUN-AS-USUAL for birdwatchers Bostwick, Frasier and Friends. Friday, April 4th, we loaded the "Big Rig" with warm clothing, binoculars, bird books and enough Trail Mix to last the weekend. Despite a snowstorm, we arrived in Burns in time for dinner at The Pines Restaurant and then checked-in at The Silver Spur Motel. As usual, we were warmly welcomed by Betty Ashlock, the owner of the Silver Spur. She knows about festival events, birds and Harney County.

Rather than going on the Festival Tours as we have done in the past, we traveled the Malheur refuge roads to seek the more than 130 species of birds that nest there or are just passing through on their way further north. As novice birders, we did well to identify about 40 species of waterfowl, shorebirds, song birds and raptors. We saw sandhill cranes grazing in the fields while nearby swarms of snow geese, difficult to differentiate from tailings of snow, demonstrated their lift-offs and touch-downs for our appreciation. It was thrilling for us to see mountain and western bluebirds feeding in open fields near the roadsides. We had never seen them in our 12 years of birding at Malheur. That confirms our status as amateurs!

The Art Show at the Bird Festival was in the gymnasium of the Burns High School. We browsed, renewed acquaintances with previous vendors, met new ones and made purchases. There were choices of paintings, carvings, books, jewelry, pottery, and more. As usual, we left the Art Show with treasures to load in the back of the "Big Rig" and take home to Pendleton. They will serve us as reminders to plan a return trip to the John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival in the spring of 2004. Perhaps that will be the year Bostwick, Frasier & Friends will dance with the cranes!

Carolyn Frasier contributed her take on the Festival at Malheur!

Bird Sightings

Please report your bird sightings to Dave Herr at 276-6413 or by email, dsherr@oregontrail.net.

Club Organizers

Paul Daniello Daytime phone: 278-4623 ggreyhnd@eoni.com

Aaron Skirvin Evening phone: 276-1948 skirvins@uci.net

Dave Herr Evening phone: 276-6413 dsherr@oregontrail.net

Jane Holmes Daytime phone: 276-3469 holmesj@eoni.com

If you have comments about, suggestions for changes, or articles for the newsletter, please contact Jane Holmes.

Remember: "When you are too busy to go birding you are indeed too busy!!" *June Whitten, April 2003.*

