

# Pendleton Bird Club



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Pendleton, Oregon

June 2003

## June Bird Club Meeting

Mike Denny was guest speaker for the June meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club, held on the 12<sup>th</sup> at the Fellowship Hall of the First Christian Church. Mike's knowledge about the birds of our area is unsurpassed and we are fortunate that he and wife MerryLynn traveled from Walla Walla to present a program on The Birds of the Blue Mountains. MerryLynn is a talented wildlife photographer, whose slides we enjoyed with Mike's presentation.

Birders in the room expressed their envy when Mike was introduced as someone who makes a living as a biologist for the Forest Service, surveying birds in the forests of the Blue Mountains. Mike grew up in Zambia, Africa and began birding there at eight years of age, using his first pair of binoculars from Sears Roebuck. He has been birding in this region since 1978.

As birders we enjoy hearing and seeing birds familiar to us, but we excite when we experience the not-so-common bird sighting. Lucky for us, species diversity is very high in the Blue Mountains, so we live in an area rich with potential for birding. Mike explained it is the diversity of habitat that exists in the Blue Mountains that attracts the many species.

Our Blues hold a high population of Great Gray Owls, one of the greatest densities of Great Gray found in the world, according to a study by Evelyn Bull. Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls are common here too. The Northern Pygmy-Owl, also a local resident, is a small but

fierce owl (fierce to the owl world as the Chihuahua is in the world of dogs), known to eat snakes, fish, and has been documented taking on a long-tailed weasel as a meal. The Boreal Owl is a secretive owl, difficult to find, but has been discovered in the Blues by Dave Herr and few others. Mike taught us that the Black-billed Magpie makes a large nest that owls such as the Long-eared will reuse. The despised and much maligned Magpie is one of our corvid (crow family) species, which are known to be highly intelligent birds capable of cognitive thinking. Magpies have learned to follow hunters into our local forests. Like gulls that follow the fishermen's boats, Magpies know that the hunters will leave the gut piles from their kills.

The Ruffed Grouse is competing for habitat with introduced Wild Turkeys that are thriving in our area. When in the Blues, you can hear the Ruffed Grouse's drumming, a sound it makes by beating its wings against its body. They are hardy birds, eat buds, and can survive the winters of the Blue Mountain range. Their broods are out now.

The Lewis's Woodpecker is also a bird in competition with another introduced species and, sadly, is not competing well. The decrease in the number of Lewis's Woodpeckers in this area, as they compete for nesting sites with the European Starling (the Starling arrived in our area as recently as 1954), has been dramatic.

Mike told us when and where to go to observe the birds of the Blues. Pipits are a migratory bird

found September through early November, feeding on insects in flooded alfalfa fields or meadows. Wilson's Snipes can be found nesting and performing their winnowing displays in Bear Valley (near Seneca) and in the Ukiah area. Also in the Ukiah area, just west of the Forest Service Ranger Station, Bobolinks may be viewed. Gray-crowned Rosy-finches can be found roosting in Cliff Swallow nests during the winter.

To enjoy more of Mike's and MerryLynn's expertise, please join us on Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, to bird the Blue Mountains in their company. We will carpool from Pendleton to the Tollgate area. Meet at the Pendleton Safeway parking lot at 5:30 a.m.

### Calendar of Events

**Field Trip**  
Birding the Blue Mountains  
Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>  
Field Trip to the Tollgate Area

Meet at 5:30 a.m. at the northeast corner of the Safeway parking lot in Pendleton.

**Pendleton Bird Club Meeting**  
Thursday, August 14, 2003 7:30 p.m.

First Christian Church  
Pendleton, Oregon  
(Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

Program to be announced

### Birding Terminology

**Winnow:** According to Webster's New World Dictionary – **1** to blow (the chaff) from (grain) **2** to scatter **3** to sift out.

**Winnowing:** According to our local birding expert – The aerial flight display of the Wilson's Snipe during the breeding period. Their display

creates a low-pitched whistling sound as air rushes rapidly through the snipe's tail feathers.

### Field Trip Report - May 3, 2003

Quote from Dave Herr: *"The Umatilla County wheat farmers will surely give the Pendleton Bird Club a commission this year. Every time we plan a field trip, it rains!"*

A cool day with some sprinkles of rain did not deter the participating birders from seeing a good representation of spring birds and also having a good time. The first stop was the Mission Ponds with a great display of ducks, including Ring-necked, Redhead, Bufflehead, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, and Common Goldeneye. There were also all six species of swallows and the first Vaux's Swift of the year. Please note, the Mission Ponds are on private property and permission is required to enter.

The ponds at the Wildhorse Golf Course were filled with Yellow-headed Blackbirds and many water birds. At least one pair of Pied-billed Grebes had taken up residence there. Canada Geese with goslings, Mallards with ducklings and American Coots with babies entertained the birders. We had very close views of the grebes, swallows, ducks, and a male Yellow-headed Blackbird within arms reach as it paraded along the rail fence looking for a handout.

At the Wetlands Community Park an American Kestrel was busily devouring a mouse. Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warblers were singing from the trees and shrubbery. Several other species were observed, but we needed to move on to Minthorn Springs, adjacent to the Umatilla River. Again, the Yellow Warblers were singing and Bewick's and House Wrens were added to the list. Ospreys are nesting here, and a Pileated Woodpecker made an appearance.

The last birding stop of the day was Wenix Springs, also along the Umatilla River, but near Thorn Hollow. This area has great riparian habitat and a large assortment of birds.

About twenty members of the Pendleton Bird Club enjoyed this outing. Remember, the field

trips are open to everyone and all are welcome. We encourage beginners as well as experienced birders to join the field trips.

### **Birding Trip to Ukiah & Vicinity - June 7**

How many people went on this birding adventure? Six people left Pendleton about 5 a.m. One had to return from the Albee road due to an emergency. (Your spouse locking the keys in the car at the Wal-Mart parking lot is, indeed, an emergency!) Another person had to return from Battle Mountain State Park due to prior commitments. But another couple joined us at Battle Mountain and so the day progressed to Albee, Ukiah, Ukiah-Dale State Park and back to Pendleton around 4 p.m.

There were 92 species on our list for the day. One of the most remarkable was a MacGillivray's Warbler singing in the shrubbery at the K-Mart parking lot before we left Pendleton! He was, no doubt, a bit off his scheduled route to a nesting site.

Other highlights included a performing Willow Flycatcher who posed and sang while we studied him through the scope. A pair of Western Wood-Pewees worked on their nest at Battle Mountain summit. One Pewee, acting like a female, got in the nest, fussed and fluttered, and rearranged it to her liking.

A Dipper rock-hopped in Cable Creek near its unique nest under a bridge. Four or five male Bobolinks gave us good views in their wet-meadow habitat on the west edge of Ukiah. Blue-winged, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal were a nice find on the Ukiah sewage ponds. Colorful drakes of each teal species were seen swimming together within one binocular view. Also seen on the ponds were 68 adult Canada Geese with 59 goslings, and several Ruddy Ducks, with one female trying to keep her five tiny ducklings hidden in the reeds.

Ferruginous Hawks and Prairie Falcons were between Pilot Rock and Nye Junction. The nest of the Prairie Falcons was discovered in the rim rocks when the adults fed their young.

Some other special treats of the day were cupcakes from the Tapleys for June Whitten's birthday picnic in the Ukiah city park; learning bird songs and calls from Aaron, who has such a special talent and is so willing to share it; showy wildflowers that covered the hills with gold and purple carpets. Many deer, one coyote, one antelope, yellow-bellied marmots, golden-mantled and Belding's ground squirrels, chipmunks, and a spotted frog completed the day.

Participants were Aaron Skirvin, Betty Klepper, Bette Husted, Jack Simons, Jeanne Jensen, Bob and Dannell Tapley, and June Whitten.

### **Bird Sightings – Compiled by Dave Herr**

On May 17, Craig and Judy Corder found a NASHVILLE WARBLER and a WESTERN TANAGER in their Hermiston yard. Later in the day, they found an OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER and **WHIMBREL** at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. The **WHIMBREL** was an exciting find and a new County bird for Craig. They also found a HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER and HERMIT THRUSH at Hat Rock State Park.

On the same day near the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds, Aaron Skirvin and Jane Holmes observed a large swift flying among a group of swallows and Vaux's Swifts that was probably a **BLACK SWIFT**. Aaron has seen a **BLACK SWIFT** before along the Parkway.

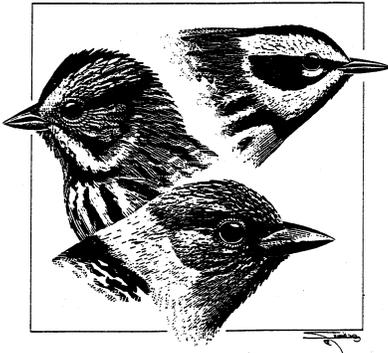
On May 18, Mike Denny saw three CASPIAN TERNS at the Walla Walla River Delta that were dyed bright pink. Apparently these birds are part of a research study to track tern populations in the Columbia Basin.

Also on May 18, Aaron birded Mud Springs Canyon (south of Yoakum) and reported a nice assortment of summering and migrant birds. Of special interest were a LARK SPARROW and a late WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW seen along the Coombs Canyon Road.

On May 19, Neal Hinds reported two TURKEY VULTURES near his Hermiston home being dive-bombed by crows. This was his first

sighting of **TURKEY VULTURES** in over 40 years of living there.

On May 19, Mike Denny found a **GREAT GRAY OWL**, a **LONG-EARED OWL**, and four **FLAMMULATED OWLS** at Divide Well Campground in southwestern Umatilla County. The next day, Mike discovered two **COMMON POORWILLS**, a **FLAMMULATED OWL**, and a **BLUE GROUSE** near Potamus Point in extreme southeast Morrow County.



On May 20, Aaron reported finding 10 **WESTERN GREBES**, 14 **EARED GREBES** and a **LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** at McKay Reservoir. At Rieth Ridge he saw four **GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS**.

On May 21, Craig Kvern and Aaron saw one adult and one immature **COMMON LOON** at Indian Lake.

Jack Simons and Aaron birded at Albee, Ukiah, and Battle Mountain on May 24. They tallied a total of 92 species for the day and some of the best finds were **BOBOLINKS** near Ukiah and 60 **WILSON'S PHALAROPES** and two **RED-NECKED PHALAROPES** at the Ukiah sewage ponds.

On Memorial Day, Aaron drove up Cabbage Hill on the old highway and found 29 different species. Of special note were **GRAY CATBIRDS**, **FOX SPARROWS**, **EASTERN KINGBIRDS**, a **DUSKY FLYCATCHER** and several **YELLOW-BREASTED CHATS**. In all, Aaron reported a fantastic weekend of birding.

Also on Memorial Day, Bob and Dannell Tapley photographed a pair of **BLACK-NECKED STILTS** nest-building next to a farm pond along Stanfield Meadows Road. About a week later, the Tapleys returned to the area, but couldn't find the nest, which may have been trampled by livestock.

Jack Simons saw two **GREAT EGRETS** perched in a tree near Mission on May 27. Evidently the egrets stopped for a short rest while passing through, since they could not be relocated.

On June 1, Duane and June Whitten and Aaron found 54 **WESTERN GREBES** and one **CLARK'S GREBE** upstream from the McNary Dam.

While recording bird songs at Thorn Hollow on June 2, I heard a singing **AMERICAN REDSTART** in riparian woodlands along the Umatilla River. Restarts have been seen in the Thorn Hollow area in past years, but they are not seen in Umatilla County every year.

On June 4, Duane and June Whitten and Aaron reported three **LARK SPARROWS** and one **GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** on Kanine Ridge.

On June 14, Duane and June Whitten and Aaron observed several fledgling **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS** and an adult **PIED-BILLED GREBE** with 6 young at Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds. The next day they observed a **BLACK TERN** at a pond about a mile north of Pilot Rock.

On June 17, Mike Denny observed a singing male **PINE GROSBEAK** near Arbuckle Mountain in southern Morrow County. This species is rare in the Umatilla National Forest anytime and very rare and infrequently seen during the breeding period.

*Please report your bird sightings to Dave Herr at 541-276-6413 or by email, [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net)*

### **Fall Field Trip to Malheur Refuge**

The Pendleton Bird Club is making arrangements for an early fall trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and Steens Mountain. Details, such as where we will stay, meals, etc., are still being worked out. The tentative timing for this trip is from September 10 to 14. Yes, that is during the Pendleton Round-up and probably poor timing for some. On the other hand, many people are off work all or part of that week, so it is a good time for others.

The road to the summit of Steens Mountain (9800 feet elevation) will be open, and we will have lovely vistas of the Alvord Desert and deep glacial-carved gorges. Better yet, the BLACK-CROWNED ROSY FINCHES should make an appearance! In addition, there should be migrant birds in the area plus a good assortment of the usual species. Mosquitoes will hopefully be pretty well wrapped up for winter.

If you are interested in participating and for more information, please contact June Whitten, 276-6492.

### **New Book on Oregon Birds Flies High**

"Birds of Oregon: A General Reference" is a new (published in 2003) comprehensive reference book, exceptionally well-done by experienced Oregon ornithologists David B. Marshall, Matthew G. Hunter, Alan L. Contreras, and senior contributor Harry B. Nehls. It incorporates contributions from over one hundred authors and from the Oregon Breeding Bird Atlas Project.

The last reference book on Oregon birds was written by two government wildlife biologists, Ira Gabrielson and Stanley Jewett, and printed in 1940. This reference, which was excellent for that era, also included writings and research of other ornithologists.

In the 1940 version, Gabrielson and Jewett listed 338 species occurring in Oregon. All but four of these are in the new "Birds of Oregon." The California Condor was omitted, as it has not been seen in Oregon for over a hundred years. The other three are listed as possible species, but

evidence is lacking to list them as Oregon species. The new edition lists 486 recognized species in the state. This great addition in numbers is due to the huge increase in bird watchers, some species moving into the state, and more vagrants that are reliably identified by birders.

Keep in mind, "Birds of Oregon" is not a field guide but a reference book. There are no color plates, but some species are highlighted with illustrations by Elva Hamerstrom Paulson.

If you want to know more about Oregon birds, their habitat, diet, breeding status, and numbers, this may be a book of great interest to you. There is a wealth of information in the "Birds of Oregon: A General Reference." The book is \$65.00 from the Portland Audubon Society, 503-292-9452 (Nature Store).

### **Bluebirds Need a Home**

Bluebirds delight us with their brilliant blue hues, beautiful songs, and insect-catching ability. Would you be willing to volunteer some of your time to help the Bluebirds if you could? Members of the Pendleton Bird Club can do just that! We can put up nest boxes along a pre-determined route(s) called a Bluebird Trail.

Both Mountain and Western Bluebirds in Oregon require nesting cavities that are made by other birds. There are fewer natural cavities available, and competition is intense from the introduced European Starlings and House Sparrows for these limited nesting sites. But, the good news is that Bluebirds readily adapt to and use nest boxes.

Here is what we need to do go get started. First, decide on an area where we know Bluebirds nest or will nest, such as Albee or Cabbage Hill. Next, we must obtain permission from landowners to install the nest boxes if we want to place the nest boxes on private land. If a public right-of-way is used, we need permission from the utility company if we use power poles, for example.

Third, we must acquire the lumber and find people who are willing to build the nest boxes.

We may want to start with twenty to fifty boxes, depending on how many people volunteer to help. The design specifications for the boxes are readily available. Cedar or exterior plywood is the preferred building material. Pressure-treated wood contains copper arsenate and should NOT be used.

The goal will be to put up the nest boxes in time for the 2004 breeding season. Installation of the boxes this fall (September and October) would be preferred. Once the boxes are in place, volunteers will monitor them during the nesting season and clean the boxes in the fall.

There are numerous successful Bluebird Trails throughout the U.S., including Oregon. In addition to bluebirds, other birds such as chickadees, nuthatches, wrens and swallows will use the boxes for nesting sites in our area.

If you want to participate in this worthwhile project, please let June Whitten (276-6492) or Aaron Skirvin (276-1948) know your interest. We need a group effort to succeed at this project.

*If you have comments about, suggestions for changes, or articles for the newsletter, please contact Jane Holmes at [holmesj@eoni.com](mailto:holmesj@eoni.com) or daytime phone: 541-276-3469.*

