

Pendleton Bird Club



NEWSLETTER Volume 1, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon October 2003

October Meeting

South of the Border: Birding Down

Mexico Way was the program for the October 9th meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club, presented by Duane and June Whitten. As guides for "Adventure Caravans," Duane and June lead birders (traveling in a RV Caravan), for a 67 day birding adventure into Mexico, crossing the border at Nogales, AZ. At San Carlos, the first stop and 210 miles below the border, up to 150 species of birds can be identified. At Alamos, the second stop on the tour, and an old mining town, the **Crested Caracara** (Family Falconidae) may be found. In the higher elevations of the Sierra Madres, (6,500 ft.) the **Tufted Jay** is the target bird as it is *unique* to this area.



Many of the birds that June & Duane mentioned or showed slides of are birds that are familiar to us, as birders of the Blue Mountain and Great Basin regions; Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting, Evening Grosbeak; but many were excitingly new! June showed us the **Northern Jacana**, a bird with extremely long toes that appears to be walking on water (as it walks across lily pads.) A bird very similar to our Cormorants is the **Anhinga**, also known as the "Snake Bird" because of the appearance of its long neck when it swims. **Magnificent Frigatebirds** are very large birds commonly seen soaring over coastal waters, yet they are doomed if they land on the water June informs us. They pirate food from gulls, terns, and other birds, because if they were to dive or land on the

water, they would not be able to take off and fly again as their wings are for soaring and their legs cannot propel them to take off on water.

In Mexico, the hummingbird (pájaro mosca) can vary from the tiny, 2.8" long **Bumblebee Hummingbird**, to the **Mexican Hermit** hummer which has a long, decurved bill and long, white tail streamers, and is up to 7" in length. Keeping with the Mexican theme for the evening, Dannell Tapley created refreshments including "Hummingbird" Bundles, a Festive Mango Salsa and treats that contained other essential ingredients like chilies, lime, and tortillas. Ole!

Just as the Junco has begun to arrive in our neighborhood, a sure sign that winter is about to arrive here, June's and Duane's presentation made us long for birding in Mexico, a land of unique birds, and temperate waters and climate.

Calendar of Events

Pendleton Bird Club Field Trip

Saturday, November 8, 2003

Join the fun and enjoy early winter birding at McNary Wildlife Area. Lots of waterfowl and water birds as well as winter sparrows and other passerines may be seen.

Meet at the NE corner of Pendleton Safeway parking lot at **8:00 am, Nov. 8.**

We should arrive at the McNary Wildlife Area (just below McNary Dam) at 9 am.

Trip leader is Aaron Skirvin (276-1948)

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, December 11, 2003 7:30 p.m.

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

Lynn & Bob Tompkins will discuss the work
& many successes of
Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation &
Education Center

This should be a special meeting as Lynn & Bob
will *bring raptors with them!*

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, January 3, 2004

Kevin Blakely, count compiler

276-2344 (W); 276-5249 (H);

blakely4@ucinet.com

More details in the Nov and Dec newsletters.

Festival of Trees – Bird Tree

HELP is needed with decorating a CHRISTMAS TREE. June Morhland at St. Anthony Hospital has asked us to create a Christmas tree about birds for the Festival of Trees. It will be a joint S.U.R.E. and Pendleton Bird Club effort. This event is a major fundraiser for the hospital and allows them to do a lot in the community that they otherwise would not be able to do. June Whitten and Betty Klepper have agreed to co-chair the committee that puts a tree together if they get some positive response from club members. The idea would be to decorate the tree with attractively packaged bird food--like peanut butter in pine cones, seed in colorful socks, (other ideas?) and to place under the tree little bird things--like feed, bird houses, feeders, etc.-- **WAYS YOU CAN HELP:** help with expenses, help with ideas, or help with putting things together in mid November. Please email or call Betty (276-8416), klepperb@uci.net) or June (274-6492, jwhitten@oregontrail.net) to volunteer your help. We need it soon since the event will be in early December.

Sunrise Over Mission Ponds

Orion shimmered overhead in the clear southern sky as I made my way along the horse path leading to the dike road. I paused to admire the Constellation, then asked myself, "How long has it been since I last saw Orion? Last winter? Surely not that long! How time slips away...." Not able to recall the elusive last encounter, I opened the back gate, found my walking stick propped against the back fence and headed up the dirt road to Mission Ponds.

It was 5:55 AM and the air was a cool 42 degrees — cold enough to chill my fingers but not too uncomfortable for October 8th. I had decided to visit Mission Ponds to see what sort of birds came in before the sun cleared the Blue Mountains a few miles to the east. I figured if the birds did not cooperate, at the least I might be greeted by a pretty sunrise or a moment of solitude.

Though it was still dark, a faint glow on the horizon lighted the way as I walked through the cool air. The only sound came from the Umatilla River 100 feet to my left as it made its way past the log jams and boulders strewn in its path. Before long I was inching my way beneath the barbed wire fence that separated the road from the Mission Ponds. Having "scoped out" the situation the previous day, I found the plastic chair I had hidden knowing it would be more comfortable to sit than to stand for the next hour. Cradling the chair beneath my arm I walked down a game trail to a large patch of willows adjacent to one of the ponds. At only six inches in depth after the summer's drought, I guessed there would be few birds interested.

However, as I slipped into my hiding spot a large silhouette appeared out of the darkness over the pond. I was not certain if it was a Black-crowned Night Heron or a Great Blue Heron but when it *squawked* and flared I knew it was one of the Great Blues that feed and loaf at the pond. As I settled into the willows I looked at my watch — 6:10 AM. It would be one hour before sunrise.

At 6:12 I heard the first train whistle of the morning — probably approaching the curve at Pendleton Ready Mix — almost two miles to the west. People and wildlife get used to the trains out here. Sometimes the shrill whistle sets off a

crescendo of coyote yelps and calls from the river bottom. Coyotes are permanent residents in the river bottom along with the white-tailed deer they sometimes encounter.

The last time I had seen a coyote was the previous week. He had been feeding on a deer carcass in the middle of the river (along with about 20 Magpies), perhaps the victim of a hunter's faulty aim or from an untimely encounter with a vehicle. I remember thinking, "What an odd place for a deer to die — in the rushing water on the basalt bed rock. But at least she died in plain view of hungry mouths." My thoughts of the deer faded as the Great Blue Heron reappeared over the pond heading for the river. It was 6:15. One minute later the first Killdeer called. A second Killdeer answered nearby — the birds of Mission Ponds were waking up. At 6:20 another Killdeer called as it sailed overhead; three or four of his buddies answered from the twilight. As I strained to see the little bird overhead I noticed the sky filling with clouds. Good.....might get a decent sunrise. Then a Greater Yellowlegs called from further out in the pond; a few minutes later a second Yellowlegs answered from the east pond 100 yards away.

It was 6:25 before the first ducks arrived, slipping and sliding through the cool air before alighting on the water's surface. In the dark I guessed they were American Wigeon but wasn't sure until I heard the distinctive *wi-WTW-weew* whistle of a drake Wigeon. At the same moment a Yellowlegs flying overhead called and a Wilson's Snipe answered.

At 6:28 four more Wigeon circled then dropped into the pond. Then twelve more cupped their wings and dropped in. Before the ripples on the water had faded away, the morning's first Black-crowned Night-Heron flew over, heading for the river bottom in search of an early morning snack or possibly a roosting site for the coming day. Things were picking up.

In the next 5 minutes five more Wigeon pitched into the pond, then six more. A moment later ten Wigeon landed, then four more followed by a flock of six which quietly glided to the water's surface. A couple of minutes later three mallards circled overhead intent on landing but not before the Great Blue Heron decided to join the feast on his six-foot wing span. The sight of this

behemoth landing in the middle of the flock of Wigeon intimidated about twenty of the ducks and caused them to scatter out of the way of the big bird. As I reached for my binoculars to get a better view, the heron's keen eyesight caught the movement and off he went — *squawking* all the way across the pond and out of sight.

Barely a minute had passed before another wading bird appeared — the graceful Great Egret. It landed among the feeding Wigeon although this time they did not scatter. Over the previous weeks I had seen one Great Blue Heron and one Great Egret wading together at this pond. Was this the same pair? It seemed late in the year to see an Egret at Pendleton but my records showed not one but *three* Great Egrets at the pond as late as October 4th of this year. And this is a warm climate bird?

At 6:46 I heard the familiar honking of Canada Geese coming from the east pond. Likely a flock had roosted at the pond the night before. If they followed their usual morning pattern they would be heading for the wheat fields before long.

At 6:55 I noticed the cloud bottoms starting to turn a crimson color. Shortly afterwards a Song Sparrow almost landed on top of me. I'm not sure who was more surprised — me or him! And, at 6:59 a flock of more than twenty Canada Geese lifted off the east pond heading for the wheat fields to the south.

It is no longer dark and a spectacular sunrise of gold and orange and yellow and pink reflects off the clouds hanging over the mountains. In the coming months, when the water level rises to fill the ponds, those reflections will come off the water as well as the clouds to make the effect twice as memorable. Knowing it was time to return home, I stood to watch more than fifty ducks and shorebirds take to the air as they became silhouetted against nature's light show. The only birds to remain were a pair of Green-winged Teal and six Snipe. I haven't a clue as to their arrival....

By 7:06 it is a great start to the day ahead. As I feast my eyes on the sunrise one last time, I remind myself not to take the next sunrise (or Constellation) for granted.....time is too precious to let slip away.

What to Look For In November? The Mission Ponds bird survey lists at least fourteen species of birds sighted during November 2002. This is

the time of the year when waterfowl start to show up in numbers — both puddle ducks, diving ducks, geese and Tundra Swans. Species you might encounter include: Black-crowned Night-Heron, Canada Goose, Mallard, Wigeon, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Pheasant, California Quail and Mourning Dove.



Happy Birding! *Contributed by Jack Simons*

The Big Sit

Sitting and letting the birds come to you isn't a bad idea! In fact, there are times and places where this can be a very effective way to view birds. It can also be a lesson in patience, as you tend to want to walk to where you are sure other birds may be found.

Pendleton Bird Club sponsored two Big Sits, one at McKay Reservoir and the other below McNary Dam. Observers were Aaron Skirvin, Dave Herr, Craig and Judy Corder, Bob and Dannell Tapley, and Duane and June Whitten.

The McKay circle, manned by the Fowl Watchers, viewed thirty-four species. A cold wind, ten to twenty m.p.h. kept viewers chilly and birds a bit scarce. Some of the birds seen from this area included Common Loon, Western Grebe, Canvasback and many other ducks, Long-billed Dowitcher, Least Sandpiper, Northern Harrier, Meadowlark and Horned Lark.

The McNary site was almost in the road, thus the name Road Hogs. The total species count from this circle was thirty-nine, including Pied-billed Grebe, Virginia Rail, Wilson's (Common) Snipe, Redhead, Common Merganser, Wood and several other ducks, both Yellowlegs, Glaucous-winged Gull, and Spotted Towhee.

Both groups saw Ring-billed and California Gull, Great Blue Heron, Prairie Falcon, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Song Sparrow, Belted Kingfisher and American Goldfinch.

The data has been e-mailed to Bird Watcher's Digest, one of the sponsors of the Big Sit. One

bird species will be drawn from the combined Big Sits from North America. Each group that saw the particular species chosen will be entered in a drawing for the Golden Bird Award. So, if the bird drawn is a Cardinal or a Broad-winged Hawk, we are not in the drawing. However, if it is a Prairie Falcon or a Spotted Towhee, for example, we are in the drawing. The winning group receives \$500 from Swarovski for the sponsoring bird club or organization.

The Bluebird Trail

The Pendleton Bird Club's Bluebird Trail is a reality with nineteen nest boxes in place at Battle Mountain State Park and along the Albee road. The boxes were put up October 5 by Aaron Skirvin, Jack Simons, Dianna LaSarge, and Duane and June Whitten. We have at least five more boxes which will be installed soon near Poverty Flats (Deadman Pass area).

Not only was October 5 a gorgeous fall day, but many bluebirds brightened our binocular views as we installed the nest boxes. We received permission from several land owners to use their trees or fenceposts for nest boxes.

Unfortunately, not everyone we talked to on October 5 shared our point of view on Bluebirds, assisting birds in general, or improving habitat. This is bound to occur in almost any endeavor, so we are thankful for the many people who do support our bird club and its many projects. There is no way to change a person's mind when they are adamant on an environmental subject. So, we just smiled politely, and went ahead with installing the nest boxes. A few of our boxes may already be history, but that is something else we have to accept. We believe the majority of the nest boxes are in fairly safe locations and we are confident they will house Bluebird families next spring.

Fifth-Grade Bluebird Project

Fifth-grade students from Washington School also have a Bluebird Trail in place in the Tollgate area. Bob Bloch cut out the boxes and numbered each piece. Jack Simons and June Whitten assisted in assembling the boxes. Jack was chief carpenter and each group of kids

followed his explicit directions. The students did all of the nailing, amazingly well, and were very proud of their nest boxes.

This is an after-school enrichment class that is funded outside of School District 16R. Twenty-two, very well-behaved students participated. Teachers are Jerri Flynn and Nancy Morgan-Bloch. Follow-up activities will include checking the boxes in the spring and recording data.

The Big Sit & Bluebird Trail articles were submitted by June Whitten.

Umatilla County North American Fall Migration Count

The North American Fall Migration Count was held on September 20, and 21 local birders counted birds throughout much of Umatilla County. Between 6:30 a.m. and 9:30 p.m., seven teams spent 66 hours in the field covering most corners of the county from the Columbia River to Indian Lake, North Fork John Day River to Harris County Park, Mission to Stanfield Meadows, Juniper Canyon to Ruckle Junction, Upper McKay Creek to Coombs Canyon, and Emigrant Hill to Cold Springs Reservoir.

Sandy DeBano, David Wooster, Florence Collins, and Bob & Dannell Tapley counted birds at three Pendleton and Hermiston feeders. Bob & Dannell Tapley also conducted a 3-hour stationary count near their home along the Umatilla River in Pendleton.

The weather was very cooperative, with light winds, sunny skies, and 70 degree temperatures. At the end of a great day of birding, the counters had tallied a total of 118 species and 9271 individual birds.

Count highlights: Neal Hinds found 77 Am. White Pelicans, 60 Sandhill Cranes, 50 Wood Ducks, 2 Solitary Sandpipers, 2 Sanderlings, 40 Pectoral Sandpipers, 1 Red-necked Phalarope, 6 Franklin's Gulls, and a Cassin's Vireo in the Hermiston-McNary Wildlife Area-Cold Springs Reservoir areas. Dolly & Terry Robison counted 30 Western Grebes, 29 Wilson's Snipes,

6 Tree Swallows, 10 Chipping Sparrows, and 2 Fox Sparrows in the Columbia River-Hermiston-Stanfield Meadows areas. Bob & Dannell Tapley saw 16 Western Kingbirds, 1 Sage Thrasher, and 1 Lark Sparrow in the Coombs Canyon area. June & Duane Whitten, Jean Woods, and Matt Gerbrandt found 1 Golden Eagle, 2 Baird's Sandpipers, 1 Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and 1 Swainson's Thrush in the McKay Reservoir-Emigrant Hill-Thorn Hollow-Ruckle Junction areas. Connie & Russ Betts and Jack Simons reported 1 Great Egret, 11 Greater Yellowlegs, 3 Great Horned Owls, 1 Lewis's Woodpecker, and 7 Western Wood-Pewees along the Umatilla River from Mission to Echo and in the Juniper Canyon-Athena-South Fork Walla Walla River areas. Betty Klepper, Diana LaSarge, Don Rudy, Jim Sawyer, and Aaron Skirvin recorded 1 Greater White-fronted Goose, 1 Prairie Falcon, 6 Mountain Quail, 13 Vaux's Swifts, 1 Black-backed Woodpecker, 1 House Wren, 2 Dippers, and 1 Orange-crowned Warbler in the Indian Lake-Ukiah-North Fork John Day River areas. Dave Herr birded in the Tollgate area in the late afternoon and spent a short time owling just after dark and found a Northern Pygmy-Owl and a Northern Saw-whet Owl.

European Starling was the most numerous species, with 1249 individuals reported. Mallard came in a close second with 1039 counted. All in all we had great participation, superb coverage of the county's birding hotspots, and another fun day of birding. Our next organized bird count in the local area is the Christmas Count on January 3, 2004.

Aaron Skirvin compiled the results of the North American Fall Migration Count for Umatilla Co.

September-October Bird Sightings

Shorebirds continue to make up many of the sightings for this report period, but numerous species were found on both the Fall Migration Count and the two "Big Sits" conducted by the Pendleton Bird Club. Results from these counts are reported elsewhere in the newsletter.

On Sept 16, Aaron Skirvin reported 1 **Great Egret** at Mission Ponds. The same day, June

and Duane Whitten found 2 **Great Egrets** and an **Eared Grebe** at McKay Reservoir. Along with the expected species, on Sept 17, Craig and Judy Corder found 2 **STILT SANDPIPERS**, 2 **SANDERLINGS**, and 1 **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** at Cold Springs Reservoir. On Sept 25, Craig and Judy reported 500 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** and an estimated 2000 **KILLDEER** at Cold Springs. The next day Craig and Judy found 30 **COMMON TERNS** below McNary Dam. The same day I had an immature **Coopers Hawk** “buzzing” the **House Finches** at my feeder; a sure sign that fall is near. On Sept 27, Aaron found 5 **Horned Grebes** and 250 **Ruddy Ducks** at McKay Reservoir. The same day, Mike and MerryLynn Denny found a **SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER** west of Walla Walla in a flooded field. On Sept 27 I visited Cold Springs to check out the Pelicans Craig and Judy had reported. 500 **American White Pelicans** is quite a sight. I also found about 150 **Long-billed Dowitchers** and numerous **American Pipits**. On Sept 29, Jack Simons reported 2 **Great Egrets** at Mission Ponds. On Sept 30, Russ and Connie Betts reported finding 7 **Killdeer** and 17 **Ring-billed Gulls** at the McKay Community Park. There was also a

mixed flock of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and **American Goldfinches** at the west side of the Park.

On October 2, Aaron reported finding 6 **Canvasbacks**, 4 **Lesser Scaup**, 1 hen **Wood Duck** and 5 **Horned Grebes** at Indian Lake. On Oct 13, Mike Denny reported finding a **Ferruginous Hawk** along Highway 395 near Ukiah. On Oct 18, Margaret LaFaive reported that the wildlife park below McNary dam was “swarming” with **White-crowned Sparrows** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers**. She also noted 3 **Common Terns** and several **Bonaparte’s Gulls** near the Dam spillway. On Oct 19, I had a **Steller’s Jay** visit my bird feeders. Common at higher elevations, this is the first time I’ve seen this species in my yard.

As we move into fall, more birds will start using local bird feeders. Please report any unusual birds you see at your feeders as well as any other bird sightings to Dave Herr at 276-6413 or by e-mail, dsherr@oregontrail.net.

Newsletter Editor: Jane Holmes
holmesj@eoni.com or Daytime: 541-276-3469.



Pendleton Bird Club

Jane Holmes, Newsletter Editor
424 N.W. Bailey Ave.
Pendleton, OR 97801