



Pendleton Bird Club

NEWSLETTER Volume 1, No. 3 Pendleton, Oregon May 2003

Springtime Birding

This month's newsletter is filled with the sightings and experiences of various outings and field trips, with a special focus on birding the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Malheur with its great diversity of habitat, provides a much needed place of refuge for an amazing variety and number of birds, neotropical migrants and resident species alike. Set in the open country of southeastern Oregon, it is an oasis of fresh water marshes, ponds and meadows, surrounded by sage uplands and the basalt rimrock of the Great Basin Desert. Many Pendleton Bird Club members visited Malheur in the past two months: Carolyn Frasier writes of her annual trek there during the John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival; and Lorna Waltz, along with Betty Klepper and June Whitten write of the Bird Club's trip May 3-6.

Inside too is a guide to help us learn to differentiate the many Swallows and Swifts found in our area, most often observed near water, feeding on mosquitoes and other flying insects, and common along the Umatilla River.

Calendar of Events

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, June 12, 2003 7:30 p.m.

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

Mike Denny presents:
Birds of the Blue Mountains

Birds of the Blue Mountains

Mike Denny will present the program for the June 12th meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club. For those of you who are familiar with Mike and MerryLynn Denny, you know this is going to be an excellent presentation. Both Mike and MerryLynn are excellent birders and naturalists having lead fieldtrips throughout the Pacific Northwest. MerryLynn, as well as being an excellent birder, is also a noted wildlife photographer. For the past several years Mike has worked as a biologist for the Forest Service, surveying wildlife in the Blue Mountains. Using pictures taken by MerryLynn, Mike's presentation will include information about some of the common, and not so common birds, he has encountered during his work in the Blues.

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 on our own 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, songbirds 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!

Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Early May

"Neither rain, nor sleet, nor dark of night"---nor hail, nor wind, nor snow kept ten Pendleton Bird Club members from enjoying the birds of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. On a three and a half day trip to the refuge, May 3 to 6, 142 species were observed. Of these, 124 were inside the refuge and the remainder in Burns, Idlewild Forest Camp, Seneca, John Day and in route.

After twelve-hour birding days, the participants were tired, but happy and fairly warm under the multiple layers of clothing. The weather was greatly improved on Monday and Tuesday. We arrived at the Frenchglen Hotel Monday evening attired in our best birding garb--boots, jeans and jackets. The meal was wonderful and the gracious host is, no doubt, used to birders. Some of the rare encounters with interesting birds included:

Watching a Great Blue Heron carrying a large Belding's Ground Squirrel with its feet. While flying, the weight of the squirrel caused the heron's legs to seriously droop!

Viewing Short-eared Owls in graceful flight, which they rudely interrupted with a territorial battle of great ferocity.

A pair of Trumpeter Swans enjoying their breakfast near Benson Pond seemingly unaware of observers.

Tuesday morning we were treated to a warbler fall-out of sorts at the Headquarters. Sightings included Yellow, Yellow-rumps, Townsend's, Nashville, Orange-crowned and MacGillivray's. At least five Lewis' Woodpeckers also arrived. Sadly, Lewis' Woodpecker is included in a recent list of birds-of-concern, which is an early warning list of species in potential trouble.

A small flock of migrating male Lazuli Buntings added spectacular color and diversity at Headquarters.

Another treat was a large flock of Snow Geese and a few Ross' Geese near Burns. Early May proved an excellent time to view fifteen species of ducks in their breeding plumage and many performing courtship displays. One of the most colorful were the male Ruddy Ducks slapping their bright blue bills making bubbles in the water. Seeing no newly-hatched young of any kind seemed unusual. A pair of goslings near Burns were the only ones seen.

The icing on the cake: NO MOSQUITOES!!!!

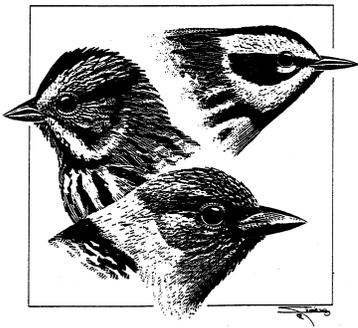
Article contributed by Lorna Waltz, Betty Klepper, & June Whitten

Umatilla County Migration Count

On May 10, 24 birders in nine teams searched throughout Umatilla County to find and count as many birds as possible in one day. The teams, all taking part in the annual North American Spring Migration Count, spent a total of 73 hours in the field, drove 865 miles and walked 16 miles searching for birds. The efforts of the 24 birders paid off as the teams tallied a total of

10,731 individual birds of 141 species. Highlights included 4 **Common Loons**, 52 **American White Pelicans**, 17 species of ducks, a **Northern Goshawk**, 95 **Black-necked Stilts**, 3 **Loggerhead Shrikes**, and 3 **Grasshopper Sparrows**. **Cliff Swallow** was the most numerous species, with 2141 counted. Mark your calendars for Umatilla County's fall migration count, which will be held on September 20, 2003.

Aaron Skirvin compiled count results for Umatilla Co.



Bird Sightings

This is a great time of the year, with new birds arriving daily. I really appreciate all the sightings folks have been sending us and I will report as many as possible. Please note that even if one of your sightings is not listed here, they are still entered into the County Database that Aaron maintains, so keep sending us your information.

On April 20 Craig Corder reported a **Nashville Warbler**, **Orange-crowned Warbler** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** all singing in his yard. The same day Aaron Skirvin and June and Duane Whitten tried to relocate the **American Bittern** Craig had reported earlier from the Power City Wildlife area. They were unsuccessful, but did find many birds along the Stanfield Meadows Road including **American Avocets**, **Black-necked Stilts**, and a **Lesser Yellowlegs**.

On April 21 Aaron found a **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** east of Pilot Rock on the road to Indian Lake. There have been only a few sightings of this species in Umatilla County.

Several other birders tried to relocate the bird, but were unsuccessful.

On April 23, Aaron had the year's first **Rufous Hummingbird** at his feeder. The same day Duane Whitten spotted the first **Western Kingbird**.

On April 24 I observed two **Gray Partridge** and winnowing **Wilson's Snipe** near Ukiah (in a snowstorm). The same day Terry Shepherd saw a **Bald Eagle** near Mission.

On April 26 Craig Corder found 7 **Virginia Rails** and one **SORA**, as well as a **Blue-winged Teal** near Hermiston. **Sora** are hard to find in Umatilla County. The same day a number of Pendleton Bird Club (PBC) members visited Mission Ponds. They found 12 duck species, more than 700 swallows, 4 **Solitary Sandpipers**, one **Least Sandpiper** and 2 **Black-necked Stilts**. Mixed in with all the swallows, Jane Holmes picked out the first reported **Vaux's Swift** of the year. Also on April 26, Neal Hinds observed a **Turkey Vulture** near Hermiston.

The evening of the same day, Craig and Judy Corder observed a really unusual sight in their yard. They watched a pair of **Western Screech-Owls** pulling worms (that's right, **NIGHT-CRAWLERS**) out of their back yard and feeding them to at least one "very cute" fledgling. The owls perched from 3 to 20 feet high, looked down a few minutes until spotting a worm and then flew down and pulled the worm out robin-like. About 10 worms were caught.

Speaking of unusual happenings, April 26, Mike and Merry Lynn Denny observed a **RED Northern Bobwhite Quail** south of College Place. Mike reports the quail has been around for two weeks and hangs out with a group of **California Quail**.

On April 27, Joe Corvino reported finding a **Solitary Sandpiper** behind the Walla Walla K-Mart store. The same day Craig found that the **Tricolored Blackbirds** were back at the pond between the Hermiston and Stanfield exits on I-84. Note that this is a very dangerous location to

stop, and if you do, pull completely off the hardtop. There is also a risk of getting a ticket if the State Police pass by. Craig also reported finding another **SORA**, 2 **Western Kingbirds**, 16 **Yellowlegs** (mostly Lesser), 10 **Least Sandpipers**, 2 **Blue-winged Teal**, 10+ **Swainson's Hawks** and more than 500 **White-crowned Sparrows**. The same morning, Aaron reported a number of different species of ducks on McKay Reservoir as well as 2 **Eared Grebes**, 1 **Common Loon** and 2 **Western Grebes**. Also on the same day I observed one **Sage Sparrow** near Nye Junction.

Birding near the Stanfield Meadows road June and Duane Whitten with some other friends found a number of **American Avocets** and **Black-necked Stilts**, **Dunlin**, and two **Wilson's Phalaropes**. However the best find of the day was a **BLACK SWIFT**. To my knowledge, this is only the third sighting of this species in Umatilla County. Great Bird.

On May 1 Aaron birded at McKay Reservoir in the evening and found 13 species of ducks, 1 **Common Loon**, 4 **Eared Grebes**, 7 **Western Grebes**, 4 **Bonaparte's Gulls** and 2 **FRANKLIN'S GULLS**. Franklin's Gull is another difficult species to find in the County.

On May 3, Colette Jakabosky reported 8 **Lazuli Buntings** at her feeder along upper McKay Creek. This is the first report of multiple sightings of **Lazuli Buntings** this year.

On May 3, Pendleton Bird Club (PBC) members birded the Upper Umatilla River. A summary of this trip will be provided in the June newsletter. On May 3 to 6, members of the PBC visited the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. A summary of this trip is located elsewhere in this newsletter.

On May 10, 24 members of the PBC participated in the Umatilla County Spring Migratory Bird Count. Complete details are summarized in a separate article, but a total of 141 species were found during the count.

On May 11, I had over 25 **Cassin's Finches** at my feeders. On May 12, Jean Wood reported seeing a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at dusk, flying downstream from the Main Street Bridge.

On May 13, Jane Holmes reported the season's first **Western Tanager** behind her home.

On May 14, Mike Denny reported finding several **Grasshopper Sparrows**, 2.4 miles south of Nye Junction along highway 395 and also reported seeing a pair of **Sandhill Cranes** across the road from the Forest Service Office in Ukiah. Mike said he has seen the Cranes in this location for 5 years. On May 16, I had 14 **Lazuli Buntings** at my bird feeders. On May 17, along with many newly arrived migrants, was a noticeable movement of flycatchers along the Upper Umatilla River. Numerous "**Western type**" and **Hammond's Flycatchers** were heard calling.

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

SWALLOWS AND SWIFTS OF PENDLETON'S RIVER PARKWAY IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

During the spring and summer, swallows and swifts are very common and easily seen birds along Pendleton's Umatilla River Parkway. Six species of swallows and one swift species are found along the Parkway. They occur throughout the Parkway, but there seem to be higher numbers between Main Street and Highway 30 than between Main Street and the Little League Park at the upstream (east) end of the Parkway. At times in the spring, several hundred swallows and swifts may be seen hunting on the wing for flying insects. Because these species are superficially similar and are often seen as a flying silhouette, they can be difficult to identify. This guide is intended to assist in distinguishing among the various species. Due to factors such as poor lighting, distance to the bird, or short length of time the bird is seen, you will not be able to identify every swallow you see. However, nearly every swallow that an observer sees well is identifiable.

Barn Swallow – this is the only species with a long, forked tail, though juveniles may have

short tails. A few are present every day from May through July. They can occur anywhere along the Parkway, but you are most likely to see them near the Little League Park or the Round-Up Grounds. Usually, 5 or fewer are seen on a morning walk along the Parkway.

Violet-green Swallow – this is the only species with a white rump and our only swallow in which the white on its cheek extends above the eye. It occurs throughout the Parkway, and is the most common swallow at the Main Street Bridge. In May, June, and July over 100 birds occur daily along the Parkway.

Cliff Swallow – this is the only species with an orangish-buff rump. They also have a dark brown throat, and Cliff is our only swallow with a white forehead. In May, up to 300 or 400 may be seen near the Round-Up Grounds and the Bedford Footbridge. Fifty to 200 are often seen daily through July. They build their mud nests on the Happy Canyon grandstands and the concrete bridges in town. They seem to be more numerous along west half of Parkway.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – this is one of our two brown-backed swallow species and can easily be confused with the Bank Swallow. The Rough-winged has a dusky throat and breast. Prior to June and after mid-July, they are more numerous than the Bank Swallow. Their call is a flat, raspy, single, low note.

Bank Swallow – this brown-backed swallow is all white beneath except for a prominent grayish breast band. If you see only the back of this species, they are difficult to distinguish from the Rough-winged. The Bank's call note is more "buzzy" than the Rough-winged's. They can be seen throughout the Parkway, but seem to be

most common in June and early July near the Little League Park.

Tree Swallow – this species is all dark on the back, wings, tail and rump. Males are metallic blue on the back; females have a brownish-blue back. They are all white beneath; white cheek, but no white above the eye. Though more common elsewhere in Umatilla County, this species is rare along the Parkway and is seldom seen except in migration. You might see a few in March, April, and early May, rarely in June.

Vaux's Swift – this species is shorter than any of the swallows and has a stubby tail. The birds are all dark, though the breast is a little lighter than the belly and back. Their wings are noticeably narrower, but as long, or longer than a swallow's. They have a distinctive fluttering flight pattern, with more rapid wing-beats than the swallows. At times, hundreds may be seen along the Parkway, particularly in the evening, from mid-April to mid-May. Swift numbers decrease during late May and June, though a few stay to nest in chimneys in Pendleton. During fall migration (late August – mid-September), there may be hundreds along the Parkway, particularly in the evening.

Note: White-throated Swift could occasionally be found along the Parkway, since a few nest in cliffs near Rieth. White-throats are noticeably larger than swallows and Vaux's Swift, and they have a striking black and white color pattern. The Black Swift, another large swift, rarely occurs along the Parkway and was seen once in mid-June 2001.

Swallows & Swifts ID Guide - by Aaron Skirvin

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