

Pendleton Bird Club

NEWSLETTER Volume 2, No. 1 Pendleton, Oregon January 2004

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count

If birds can be found more easily with several inches of snow on the ground, Umatilla County birders were in luck on Jan. 3 as they participated in the 104th Annual Christmas Bird Count – 2003-2004. Twenty-one adults and two children spent a total of 21¾ hours searching for birds by auto and 20¼ hours walking, much of the day under snow storm conditions, and traversed 207.8 miles by car and on foot combined. In addition, two stationary counts were taken at active bird feeders.

CBC is the largest and most comprehensive annual bird census taken in N. America. Tens of thousands of people participate to create a powerful database that measures avian population and distribution nationwide. With over 100 years of data to use for comparison, this is an invaluable tool to see the effects of the dramatic changes that are occurring in habitat and in our environment. The results of CBC can also help to measure the effects on populations of certain species of birds from more recent influences such as West Nile Virus.

Our CBC counters tallied 70 species and a total of 6,828 birds. 5 Ruffed Grouse and 8 Lincoln's Sparrows were observed: high numbers for Umatilla Co. in comparison to years past. A most interesting find was a female **Williamson's Sapsucker** observed by Connie Betts and her team along the North Fork of McKay Creek Road. Other interesting finds were 8 Gray Partridges, 4 Common Redpolls, 300 Horned Larks, 33 Rough-legged Hawks, 2 Common

Goldeneyes, and 9 Killdeer. Complete results of the Umatilla County Count will be listed at the Audubon website (www.audubon.org) and click on the link to Christmas Bird Count).

Calendar of Events

Pendleton Bird Club Field Trip

Saturday, January 31st, 2004

Bundle up in wool or fleece & bring your thermos filled with warm drink! Bird club members will **enjoy a second field trip this winter to McNary Wildlife Area.**

This area is rich in winter sparrows, waterfowl, & wildlife.

Meet at the NE corner of Pendleton's Safeway parking lot at **8:00 am, Jan. 31.**

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

Trip leader is Dave Herr (276-6413).

Blue Mountain Wildlife's Annual Membership Meeting

Blue Mountain Wildlife's annual membership meeting will be held at **2pm, January 31, 2004 at the First Christian Church in Pendleton** (across from the Arts Center). The program will include introduction of new board members, election of officers, a review of 2003 rehabilitation activities and educational programs as well as a look at 2004 volunteer opportunities. One of the center's education birds, an ambassador to the world of raptors,

will also be present. Refreshments will be served.

Blue Mountain Wildlife, a nonprofit, volunteer organization serving eastern Oregon and southeast Washington, is dedicated to the rehabilitation of orphaned, injured or sick wildlife, primarily birds of prey, and to public education. For information call Lynn Tompkins (541-278-0215).

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, February 12, 2004 6:30 pm

Please note: **This meeting will begin one hour earlier than normal as it will be a Potluck!**

Please bring a dish of your choice, plus plates & silver for your family members.

Program for the evening is Photo and Slide Show and Tell. Bring some bird slides and/or photos to share with the group.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb 13 – 16, 2004

During last February's Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), bird enthusiasts across North America submitted almost 50,000 checklists totaling more than four million birds. The event documented the whereabouts of 512 species. Everyone's contribution is important! For more information visit: www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

Klamath Basin Audubon Society's Bald Eagle Conference – Silver Anniversary

Feb 13, 14, & 15, 2004

Conference will be held at the Oregon Institute of Technology, Klamath Falls, OR. For more information visit www.eaglecon.org or write to Anne Wenner, 1608 Cove Point Rd., Klamath Falls, OR 97601

Coming Up!

Louie Dick will make a presentation on *Birds in Indian Culture* at the April 8 meeting of the Pendleton Bird Club.

Winter Bird Feeding: an Observation

While birding in Area 4 for the Christmas Bird Count, I drove mile after mile without seeing

any birds--just snowy field after snowy field. Until I came to a patch of plowed ground that had been swept clear of snow by winds--then birds would be gathered there, or--the gravelly patches of road exposed by the snowplow, where they need to get grit each day--they would usually be gathered there.

I also noticed empty feeder after empty feeder, which could have been rich with birds!! When I got home (I usually try to keep-up with the seed demand) my own feeders also needed refilling. After refilling, I got a shovel and scraped down to the grass in and around the feeders (always some spill out of seed). I also exposed a pile of gravel we have near the feeders. It wasn't long before Juncos by the crowds were hopping around the scraped areas!! I put out chicken scratch and corn for the quail and doves--next thing you know, here come the doves--!!!

Yes, it's a pain to have to get out there each day to expose the ground under or around the feeders (after each snowfall), **but so worth it**--then I can feel good about myself when I'm warm and cozy indoors.

Observer & Contributor: Dolly Robison

Bird Against Bird: A Lunchtime Story from McKay Creek

Last Wednesday (January 14), in spite of the continuing snow pack on local streets and sidewalks, I pursued one of my favorite lunch hour walks around McKay Park. It is a route well known to me, as I live only a few blocks away and use the paths frequently at this time of year to offset the sedentary blues of office work and fluorescent lighting. Last winter I enjoyed watching the Greater Yellowlegs that frequented the gravel bars of McKay Creek near the footbridge. This year my sightings of those shore birds have been less frequent, and lately of only one or two birds at a time, but I always take that walk with anticipation of what intriguing species I may see along the way.

On Wednesday, I was approaching the footbridge near the end of my walk, having seen no other people and no wildlife more exciting than a Downy Woodpecker. Of course, with the snow packed footpath, I had to spend most of

my time with my eyes on the trail to negotiate the sometimes slippery footing. So my mind was not on birds until suddenly a loud racket erupted from the creek close to the path. The screeching seemed to come from just around the corner, so I moved a few feet off the trail to get a better view of the creek. About 30 feet in front of me, standing in the shallows of the creek, was a Black-crowned Night-Heron holding a Northern Flicker in its bill. The flicker was frantically flapping and squawking as only flickers can. I waited to see what would happen, and after about a half a minute the flicker escaped, flapped drunkenly across the creek, and landed in a cottonwood. It shook itself, and then started moving up the tree trunk in a normal flicker-like manner, apparently unharmed by the episode. The heron stood looking confused for a moment, then dipped its bill in the creek a couple of times to rinse off a beak full of feathers. Then it took a drink and returned to its usual Zen state of a fishing heron, standing motionless in the water. It didn't appear to pay any attention to me, though I was thrilled to have such a close-up view of one of these usually shy birds. I turned back to my path, already gloating at the thought of astonishing Dave Herr with my story as soon as I got back to the office.



Contributed by Jean Wood

Winter's Potpourri

Weather prognosticators predicted a “winter of extremes” and, for once, they may have actually hit the target. For Pendleton, 21-inches of snow between December 28th and January 8th certainly defines “extreme” as does the bone-chilling minus 16 degree low temperature on January 5th.

As I write this on Saturday, January 10th, the sun has burned off the morning fog to reveal a scene of snow and ice across the winter landscape. Icicles are dripping from the roof line on the house while traffic on Mission Highway is still minimal but picking up — probably from house-bound folks attending to neglected errands from the inclement weather. This reminds me of the need to re-supply our inventory of cracked and whole kernel corn to feed the Mallards that roost on our front pond. The “inn was full” last night

with 18 hungry Mallards pecking away at the grain on the bottom of the pond or hidden in snow drifts.

Many of these birds normally roost on Mission Ponds or the nearby Umatilla River when the weather is less extreme. However, the ponds were frozen over for 5 days so local waterfowl have had to make adjustments. I see ducks now in places they rarely visit during the hunting season — beaver ponds or backwater stretches amongst the alder trees or open irrigation ponds adjacent to the dike road. They come to these hideaways for one reason — to feed on duck weed, which is one of the few food sources available now that the snow pack prevents their feeding in local wheat fields.

With Mission Ponds iced over, the Umatilla River and adjacent riparian habitat has become a magnet for all kinds of bird life — Great Blue Herons, Song Sparrows, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, Mourning Doves, Killdeer, American Pipits, Common Snipes and, of course, ducks and Canada Geese. This concentration of bird life has not gone unnoticed, however.

Raptors — like coastal sharks pursuing schools of migratory bait fish — have concentrated along the river bottom too. In a short period one morning during the first week of January, I counted 2 mature Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harriers (2 beautiful full-plumage males), 1 Red-tailed Hawk, 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 1 American Kestrel. All of these raptors were within a ½ mile stretch of river bottom. If that same density repeated itself to the river's mouth, there must have been hundreds of raptors patrolling the skies between Pendleton and Umatilla — pretty scary if you were on the menu!

Part of my daily routine is to try to take the dogs for a walk on the dike road. These “walkabouts” through the snow have made me keenly aware of one distinguishing characteristic of fresh snow — the ability to reveal the constant struggle (almost always fatal) between predator and prey. I've lost count of how many times I've walked upon feathers (and one hen pheasant wing stripped to the bone) lying on the snow beneath a tree.

Early one snowy January afternoon I saw a Red-tailed Hawk sitting motionless in a tree 200 yards from our living room window. In the time it took to position my binocular-mounted tripod, the hawk swooped down to another tree to make a kill on some unfortunate critter. Focusing through the falling snow only revealed an object in the hawk's talons. Soon, though, feathers could be seen falling amongst the snowflakes — reddish-orange feathers. After the hawk had finished his meal and departed I walked back to the scene and discovered a twenty foot wide circle of feathers from what had been a Northern Flicker. That day the insects the flicker had been hunting would survive...and, thanks to the flicker, so too would the hawk.



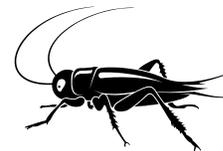
The increased activity at bird feeders also attracts life and death struggles. The day before the hawk incident, a Black-capped Chickadee flew around and around our leafless hawthorn tree to escape pursuit of a sharp-billed Northern Shrike. After 3 minutes of cat and mouse, the shrike moved on to easier prey while the chickadee quickly escaped to an evergreen tree. A number of Bird Club members reported similar sightings at their feeders, too. Aaron Skirvin emailed to report seeing a Sharp-shinned Hawk take down a Mourning Dove at one of his feeders then proceed to eat it within 5 or 6 feet of other doves feeding on the ground. No time for emotional farewells here...eat while the eatin's good!

Though both of the Mission Ponds froze completely over during the cold spell, the smaller, deeper east pond partially opened today. As I walked up to the water's edge at sunset, hundreds of Mallards, wigeon and teal were standing on the edge of the ice in the middle of the pond. With ducks departing and landing in the cold evening air I became aware that many of our resident song birds were not around. No trouble calling up the usual Song Sparrows and juncos hiding in the blackberry vines at the waters edge but gone were the White-crowned Sparrows, American Goldfinch and the occasional Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

A patch of tules frozen in ice at the pond's edge caught my eye and brought back memories of Red-winged Blackbirds staking out their territory at that spot each spring. Their familiar *kon-ka-reeeee* song rang through my head as I crunched my way back through the iced-over snow to the dike road. As the fog settled into the river bottom for a second night, I knew that spring was not far ahead but, given the current weather, wondered how many of today's birds would be here to greet it.

As twilight fell over the ponds it occurred to me that one bird species was conspicuously absent despite having made its appearance the previous three winters. Where were the Robins? With three mild winters preceding this one, it was not unusual to have seen robins in January and February. Yet the last robin I saw this year was back in November! How did the robins know to migrate further south this particular year? Speaking of forecasting and weather prognosticators, maybe we just need to pay closer attention to the birds!

Author: Jack Simons



Recipe: Jell-O Jigglers for the Birds

Jell-O isn't just for kids anymore! It's a fun and inexpensive way to add variety to the menu at your bird feeder. Plain gelatin can be used to "glue" a variety of ingredients together such as fruits or dried fish foods (freeze-dried blood worms for example) to form a nutritious aspic.



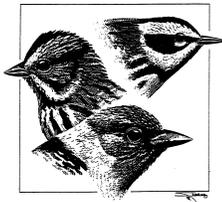
Line a cookie sheet with waxed paper. Sprinkle one packet of plain gelatin (7g) in three ounces of cool water. To dissolve gelatin, heat in a warm water bath or for 10-15 seconds in a microwave on low power. Stir ¼ to ½ cup additional ingredients into the liquid gelatin. Pour onto waxed paper and chill until firm. Roll the gel into a tube and slice thinly. Cut or tear the resulting strips into the desired length. The gel can be stored in the refrigerator for several days or frozen.

Remember to thaw before placing in your bird feeder.

Examples of ingredients to add to the gelatin are: chopped or grated fresh fruits, dried fish foods, powdered house fly larva (Soya Musca from Oregon Feeder Insects, www.skipio.com), various flavors of baby food, or dry dog or cat food soaked in water until spongy and then mashed. Do not use papaya or pineapple as they contain enzymes that will prevent jelling.

It may take the birds a few days to determine that the new item on their menu is edible. Using an ingredient in the gel that the birds are already eating at your feeder could speed up the process. The current weather conditions will also be an incentive for hungry birds to try new foods. Be patient and happy birding.

Contributed by Lynn Tompkins



December - January Bird Sightings

Although much of this report period has been cold and snowy, many interesting birds were reported. Much of the activity has been at bird feeders, but participants in the Umatilla Christmas Bird Count also found a lot of great birds. Check the results of the Christmas Count in a separate newsletter article.

On December 10, Russ Betts found 4 **Greater Yellowlegs** at McKay Park. These birds have been seen periodically throughout the report period. On December 16, an injured **BURROWING OWL** was admitted to the Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center. The owl, found near Irrigon, is expected to recover and will be released in the spring. On December 20, Craig and Judy Corder found a **HARRIS'S SPARROW** as well as 9 **Savannah**, 12 **Golden-crowned**, 110 **Song** and over **1,000 White-crowned Sparrows** along the Umatilla River between Echo and Pendleton. They also found 3 **Rock Wrens** along this route.

On December 21, Scott Downes reported **16 SNOW BUNTINGS** and a **GRAY-CROWNED ROSY FINCH** at the Stateline Wind Farm (northwest Umatilla County). On December 22, Mike and MerryLynn Denny reported a **Swamp Sparrow** and 2 **Golden-crown Sparrows** at the McNary Wildlife Area. On December 23, Aaron Skirvin reported a **Spotted Sandpiper** as well as a **Lincoln's Sparrow** and 4 **Horned Grebes** from the same area. On December 25, Mayanna Porter reported a single **COMMON REDPOLL** coming to her feeder near Pilot Rock. The bird was seen again on January 1. In addition to the **COMMON REDPOLL**, Mayanna reports that **California Quail**, **American Goldfinches**, **Ring-necked Pheasants** and numerous sparrows are using her feeder. In addition to the birds, she reported **14** deer drinking from her heated birdbath. On the same day, Craig and Judy found **SAY'S PHOEBE** near Helix and 5 **Northern Shrikes** during a four-hour drive through the area. On December 27, Rebecca Hiers reported finding a male **Varied Thrush** along the Pendleton Umatilla River Parkway, near the new pavilion.

On the morning of December 29, Pendleton woke up to find 7 to 10 inches of snow and activity around bird feeders really started to increase. Aaron reported up to **12 Brewer's Blackbirds** at his feeders as well as **200 Red-winged Blackbirds** and **150 House Finches**. The same day Craig Corder watched a **Merlin** catch a **House Finch** at his feeders and reported seeing a **PEREGRINE FALCON** north of Hermiston Butte. On December 31, Jack Simons reported seeing a **Wilson's Snipe** along the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission. Jack said this was the first time he had seen a snipe land in the snow. On the same day Aaron reported more than **500** birds at his feeders including a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. On January 1, Jack reported 2 mature **Bald Eagles**, 3 **Northern Harriers**, a **Red-tailed Hawk**, 2 **Sharp-shinned Hawks** and an **American Kestrel** along the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission. On January 4, Craig and Judy found 3 **SWAMP SPARROWS** as well as 2 **White-throated Sparrows**, a **Fox Sparrow** and 4 **Golden-crowned Sparrows** at

McNary Wildlife Area. At the grain elevator above McNary Dam, they found a single **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE**. This is a difficult species to find in Umatilla County. On January 6, I (Dave Herr) counted over **200 Mourning Doves** at my feeders. As well as attracting a large number of feeding birds, I am also attracting a large number of avian predators. So far I've had **Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Northern Harriers, an American Kestrel, a Merlin** and a **Prairie Falcon** chasing birds at my feeders. On January 8, Jane Holmes had a **COMMON REDPOLL** visit her feeder in Pendleton. The following day I had two **LESSER GOLDFINCHES** at my feeders. Both of these species are unusual in Umatilla County. On January 9, Verna Johnson reported a large number of species using her feeders including **White-crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Black-capped Chickadees, Red-winged Blackbirds** and a **Varied Thrush**. On January 11, Aaron and I birded around the

local area. The best bird of the day was a **Merlin** we found in the small residential area south of the Arrowhead Truck Stop. On January 14, Nancy Brown had a **TREE SPARROW** at her Hermiston bird feeder. The following day Jane Holmes found a **LESSER GOLDFINCH** at her feeder. On January 17, Jane observed a **Western Screech-Owl** that is sometimes heard along the Umatilla River and in the Pioneer Park on NW 5th in Pendleton.

Well, the snow is finally melting, but there are still lots of birds around local bird feeders, so keep your eyes open and please continue to send your bird sightings to Dave Herr at 276-6413 or by e-mail at dsherr@oregontrail.net.

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