



Kákya Táymut

KUK-yuh TIE-moot, Umatilla Indian Translation: *Bird News*

Volume 3, No. 10 Pendleton, Oregon October 2005

Louie Dick Talks about Indian Birds

Our fall and winter series of Bird Club meetings started off on a high note with Tribal Leader, Louie Dick, once again honoring us with another wonderful presentation on traditional Tribal culture.

He and his wife, Marie, brought with them an elk hide which Marie had painted for Louie, depicting many important elements of his family history and religious beliefs. This elk hide, tanned until it was soft and white, showed the Columbia and Snake Rivers as its background. Within this setting, Marie had filled it with colorful paintings of certain birds, animals and plants that have traditional importance to this area – truly a beautiful work of art! They had stretched the hide on a wooden pole frame so that we could look at it while Louie spoke.

One of the prominent birds on the hide was a spectacular Bullock's Oriole, in its brilliant golden orange. Louie told us a story about how this bird comes at the time of year when the “sun turns around”, just after the winter solstice, and gives the message to the other birds that it's time to return to their nesting areas.

He also pointed out to us the deer, elk, salmon, chokecherries, huckleberries, couse, and bitterroot painted on the elk hide, and told us that this is what Indian people use to make children. As we looked around at one another, somewhat puzzled, he explained to us that in our culture we make our children out of "sugar and spice and all those things that are so nice....", but that these foods do not make for healthy Indian children. Sharing with us about his own diabetes, he also talked about how he has come to understand something that he heard his elders say when he was young – that Indian food and water are medicines.

He told us that birds traditionally were thought of as falling into three categories – the eagles and hawks; the song birds; and the birds such as ducks and grouse that the people would eat. He also described how the immense and powerful California Condors used to inhabit the skies of this region, especially around The Dalles on the Columbia River with its steep basalt cliffs, as well as along the deep gorges of the Snake River. As he talked about how these Condors are being restored elsewhere through captive breeding programs, such as in the Grand Canyon in Arizona, I think he made all of us wish that some day these magnificent birds will be able to make this place their home again as well.

In another reminder of some of the birds that once were prevalent here, but now are gone, he told us a story he had heard from a friend when he was young. This man had lived here in the days before the modern roads and highways, when it was a day's journey between Pendleton and Hermiston. To feed themselves on the way, he would go out a little ways into the sagebrush, where he would encounter grouse. These grouse would be so territorial and stubborn, that they would just stand there facing him down and not run away. So Louie's friend would take a whip and catch one for dinner. (Louie and Aaron have been discussing this description and think this must have either been Sage Grouse or Sharp-tailed Grouse. Unfortunately, we no longer have either type of grouse here in Umatilla County any more.)

He also told us a story about seeing Long-Billed Curlews for the first time when he was a young kid. He was on horseback, helping his father with the cattle, and had been sent up to one end of a pasture in the foothills of the Blue Mountains near Cayuse. There, he saw these amazing birds with their long,

curved bills. He thinks it must have been mating season, since they were chasing each other around and calling to each other with that distinctive call (which he imitated for us). He was so entranced that his father had to yell to him to get his attention back to minding the cattle.

I think it was a treat for all of us to hear Louie's stories. Some of them made us sad, most of them made us laugh, and all of them touched our hearts.

Contributed by Becky Hiers

Bluebirds of Happiness

What makes bluebirds happy? Living in the meadows and forests of eastern Oregon, having an abundant food supply, and nesting in sturdy, warm boxes most certainly contribute to bluebirds being happy.

The foothills of the Blue Mountains in Umatilla County provide great bluebird habitat. And, the Pendleton Bird Club is happy to provide the nest boxes. We have put up eight boxes in the vicinity of Poverty Flats, including one on a fence post on the east side of old Highway 30 just south of the former service station at "Boiling Point" near the top of Cabbage Hill. This past spring and summer, five of these boxes had successful Western Bluebird nests, with about ten babies fledging. Three boxes were used by House Wrens and one of these is now doing double-duty as a snug winter home for a pair of flying squirrels!

The other bluebird trail is in the Battle Mountain and Albee area, where we have twenty boxes. There were approximately 50 Western Bluebird babies in these nests, and while many fledged it is impossible to know the exact number. Three nest boxes were not used and at least two were occupied by Tree Swallows after the bluebirds fledged. Although we see Mountain Bluebirds at Albee (we know a pair nested in an old flicker nest cavity in a fence post near one of our nest boxes), no Mountains used our boxes this year.

The nest boxes have been thoroughly cleaned by Aaron Skirvin and Duane Whitten and are ready for the 2006 nesting season. We can add a few more boxes to the Poverty Flat and Albee trails. If anyone has an approved location for a box, please contact me (June Whitten, 276-9019). Most of our nest boxes

are on public land, but a few are on private property with the permission of the landowners.

The nest box at "Boiling Point" is easily observed from the highway, and provides a good opportunity for club members to see nesting bluebirds. Assuming bluebirds use the box next year, May would be a good time to go for a drive to look at the bluebirds.

Contributed by June Whitten

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Field Trip

Saturday, November 5, 2005

Birding at McNary Dam and Columbia River

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot
(NE corner)

Trip Leaders: June & Duane Whitten (276-9019)

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, November 10, 2005 7:30 p.m.

Dave Herr shows slides of local birds & birds from his trip to Cabin Lake

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

Bird Club Field Trip

Sunday, November 20, 2005

Birding at Wanaket Refuge

The refuge is located between McNary Dam and
Hat Rock State Park.

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot
(NE corner)

Trip Leaders: Tanya Harrison and/or Jenny Barnett
(278-5298)

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, December 8, 2005 7:30 p.m.

Sage Grouse Life History and Research in the Oregon Great Basin

by
Jenny Barnett and Mike Gregg

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

Bird Club Field Trip

Sunday, December 18, 2005

Birding at McNary Wildlife Area

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot
(NE corner)
Trip Lead: Neal Hinds

Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 31, 2005

**Look for more information in
the November newsletter**

Contact Aaron Skirvin 276-1948
askirvin@wtechlink.net

Bird of the Month

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Who gave this elegant, twelve-inch tern the unimaginative name of Common? Just how the name came about we can only guess. David Allen Sibley states in The Sibley Guide to Birds (2000), "Common, Arctic, and Forster's Terns form a well-defined group with similar habits, plumage, and voice. Common Tern, the most widespread of the group, is found on lakes, rivers, and oceans." Since the Common Tern is the most widespread (they breed across the northern hemisphere), we assume that is how it acquired its name. Of course, it is not the only lovely bird with "Common" as part of its name. Among them are Common Yellowthroat, Common

Murre, Common Nighthawk, and Common Eider: birds that we could readily label with more descriptive names.

In North America, Common Terns breed from Alberta and Montana to the Atlantic Coast. Many Common Terns spend the winter along the Gulf Coast, but some winter from Southern California into Mexico.

Common Terns are not so common in Umatilla County, but they are regular, uncommon, fall transients, and are rarely seen in spring. Common Terns have been seen at McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs, but the most reliable location to view them is on the Columbia River below McNary Dam. September and October are the best times to find Common Terns passing through Umatilla County, though they are sometimes seen in August, too.

Forster's Terns are also in the area in summer and September, and the two species are easily confused. The best field mark in fall is a small, black patch on the wings, visible in flight on the Common Tern, which forms a dark carpal-bar when the bird is at rest. Also, Common Tern adults in summer show grayish shafts on two or three primary feathers on upper side of wing, while Forster's upper wing is completely white. In winter, Common Terns retain more of the black cap than an adult Forster's. Fresh juveniles of the two species are quite similar unless the carpal-bar can be spotted on the Common Tern. In breeding plumage, the Common Tern has a gray back and belly, black cap, red legs, and a red bill with a dark tip.

So, a small tern with a forked tail on the Columbia River during the fall may well be a Common Tern. Carefully check over these small terns and hopefully learn to distinguish Forster's from Common Terns.

Contributed by June Whitten

Birding Humor

Excerpted from "The Universal Laws of Birding"
http://www.speakingofbirds.com/resources/universal_laws_of_birding.htm

Western [U. S.] Rules of Hawk Identification:

Rule No. 1 - It's a Raven.
Rule No. 2 - It's a Red-tailed Hawk.
Rule No. 3 - It is NOT a Golden Eagle.
(Jim Frazier)

Sosensky's 3rd Law: Woodpeckers and creepers spend more time on the far side of the trunk.
(Steve Sosensky)

PENDLETON BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Member's Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.

www.pendletonbirders.org

A Successful "Sit"

Any birding day is a good day. However, there are conditions which make it a great day. The "Big Sit!" on October 9 had plenty of components to make it a great day!

First of all, the weather was nearly perfect: warm, sunny, and practically no wind on the Columbia River. The area is scenic with the river, McNary Ponds, and McNary Dam in view. The company was genuine, good friendly birders, who sat in lawn chairs, sipped hot tea or coffee, ate snacks, and saw plenty of birds to keep it interesting.

The Pendleton Bird Club had two 17-foot circles, "Gulls Galore" just below McNary Dam and "Loons Aplenty", downstream a short distance with a view of a pond, brush and trees, and the Columbia River. No loons were observed, so some may question the naming of this circle. Well, they should have been there, but no loons showed themselves.

The "Gulls" circle found 21 species, including Ring-billed, Glaucous-winged and California Gulls, Common Tern, Common Merganser, and American Pipit. The "Loons" circle observed 39 species, some of which were the same as the "Gulls" circle. A juvenile Common Tern visited this circle also, as did a Herring Gull. A Virginia Rail called in the cattails, along with Marsh Wren and Bewick's Wren. Horned, Pied-billed, and Western Grebes were visible. Ruddy Duck, American Wigeon, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Bonaparte's Gull were some of the other species observed.

The species we recorded have been sent to [Birder Watcher's Digest](#), and their editors will compile the results of all of the counts. The "Big Sit!" is open to

birders all over North America and other countries as well.

Contributed by June Whitten

September - October Bird Sightings

Similar to what I noted in last month's report, this reporting period birding focused on several local areas including McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs. I'll list the sightings at each of these locations as well as the other local sightings.

McKay Reservoir: One September 22, Aaron Skirvin found a juvenile **SURF SCOTER** at McKay, which is the only report of this species from the county so far this year. On September 24 Aaron reported 10 **Eared Grebes**, 1 **Prairie Falcon** and 1 juvenile **SABINE'S GULL** at the Reservoir. Aaron notes that this is the 4th **SABINE'S GULL** reported in the county this fall. In addition to the bird at McKay, two were seen at McNary Dam and another at Cold Springs Reservoir. Connie Betts birded at McKay on September 26 while Russ fished. Connie reported 100 **Ring-billed Gulls**, 2000 **Canada Geese**, 11 **Killdeer**, and 8 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, but was unable to locate the Sabine's Gull Aaron found earlier. On September 30, Aaron reported finding 13 **Western Grebes** and 7 **Baird's Sandpipers** at McKay. Also, on September 30, June Whitten reported a **Western Sandpiper** and "lots" of **American Pipits** on the mudflats at the Reservoir. Remember the gate into the Reservoir is now closed (closes on October 1).

Cold Springs Reservoir: Birding at Cold Springs on September 23, Aaron and Connie Betts found **550 American White Pelicans**, 4 **Black-bellied Plovers** and **265 Barn Swallows**. On October 1, Aaron and June Whitten found **450 American White Pelicans**, 75 **Greater White-fronted Geese**, 9 **Cackling Geese**, 4 **Black-bellied Plovers**, **400 Killdeer**, **200 Long-billed Dowitchers** and 100 **Barn Swallows**. On October 20, Neal Hinds reported one **Peregrine Falcon** and more than **300 Sandhill Cranes** at Cold Springs.

Other Sightings: On September 22, Connie Betts found 3 **Dark-eyed Juncos** at the Pendleton Community Park, her first sighting of this species this fall. Lorna Waltz visited friends at Albee over the weekend of September 24-25 and reported seeing a flock of bluebirds, probably Mountain Bluebirds, several times during the weekend. On September 24,

Connie Betts found a **Swainson's Hawk** at the Pendleton Community Park. Connie reported that this was the last sighting of Swainson's Hawk in the park this year. Birding at the McNary Wildlife Area, Dolly Robison reported finding a **Varied Thrush** as well as several **Black-crowned Night-Herons**. On September 26, Connie Betts observed a **Mountain Chickadee** at her home near the Pendleton Community Park. Although common at higher elevations, this chickadee species is seldom found in Pendleton. Joy and Steve Jaeger had a great sighting October 3. They found a **GREAT GRAY OWL** along Yellow Jacket Road near Forest Road 5415 about 14 miles south of Pilot Rock. The same day I observed a flock of over **200 American Pipits** sitting on power lines along Highway 37 a few miles from the Highway 730 junction. On October 11, Ginger and Rodger Shoemake reported finding 2 **Common Loons** and 3 **Common Mergansers** below McNary Dam and one **Golden-crowned Sparrow** in the

McNary Wildlife Area. While birding in the same area, the Shoemakes also saw 23 Sandhill Cranes fly over the park. At Hat Rock State Park the Shoemakes reported finding 3 **Horned Grebes** along with several **Western** and **Pied-billed Grebes**.

As I noted above, don't forget to check out the detailed reports in this newsletter for results of PBC field trips held during this report period.

Please continue to send your sightings to me, Dave Herr at dsherr@oregontrail.net or call 276-6413.

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