



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 3, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August 2005

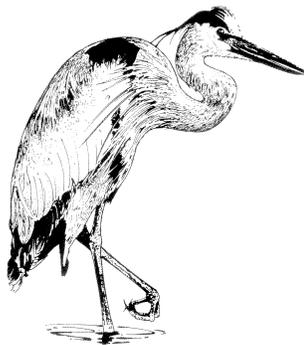
## Mission Ponds Field Trip Invigorating

**Twelve bird club members** luxuriated in the cool morning air at Mission Ponds last Saturday. In fact, some members donned long pants and sweat shirts in the Safeway parking lot where we assembled prior to departure. What a splendid way to end our latest heat wave! With excellent viewing conditions we spent the next 2 hours sharing in the excitement of finding 31 bird species — not bad for a Saturday morning wake-up call.

With its diverse bird population, Mission Ponds rarely fails to provide a fun experience — for novice as well as expert. As we pulled into the parking area on the south shore of the west pond, two Black-crowned Night-Herons flew from their perch to land out of sight in the willows at the east pond. Not to despair though — three juveniles conveniently remained on the shoreline where we had good looks through Duane Whitten's spotting scope.

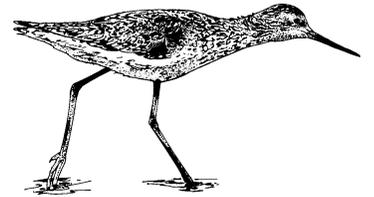
A moment later someone spotted a lone Greater Yellowlegs foraging for breakfast along the shoreline. Western Sandpipers scurried nearby across the mud flats. With all eyes focused on this activity someone shouted, "Hey, there's a snipe hidden in the rocks just beneath the yellowlegs." Sure enough.... camouflaged among the rocks and mud was a Common Snipe giving us a good view of the pale buff stripe that ran down the center of its head. A good start to the morning!

As the air warmed up, so did the birding with appearances made by a large adult Osprey, several



Great Blue Herons, (sorry, no Common Egret this trip but he did make an appearance the following evening), Northern Harrier, Killdeer, Red-tailed Hawk and Mourning Doves.

The plan for the morning was to walk all the way around both ponds with stops at the cottonwood thicket and the Umatilla River dike road. With the water level dropping this time of year, it looked like we could make the trip without getting our feet wet — which we accomplished I am pleased to say.



After 30 minutes of viewing at the parking area we headed over to the east pond where Aaron Skirvin spotted a solitary Ring-necked Duck (not typically found here this time of year) and pointed out several Vaux's Swifts flying overhead. Sometime between the duck and the swifts he called our attention to the Virginia Rail calling softly in the nearby reeds.

Meanwhile, Jane Holmes made two notable sightings at this spot — the first was a solitary Western Wood Pewee singing from a high perch in a nearby locust tree. Then, through a veritable maze of foliage and dead limbs she spotted a lone Cedar Waxwing staring down at 12 birders craning their necks to see *him!* Way to spot that decoy I put up there, Jane....JUST JOKING!!!! Probably the only Cedar Waxwing within a country mile....

After that stop we headed over to the thicket. Two days before I had seen two juvenile Great Horned Owls only 20 feet from the road we would be walking on so I confidently told everyone that

Great Horned Owls were likely nearby. Alas, the baby owls had chosen to spend this lazy summer day at a different secluded spot. Maybe next trip.

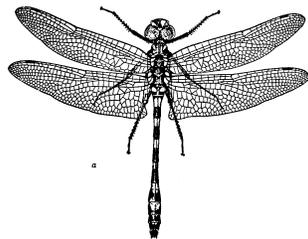
Our next stop was on the dike road over-looking the Umatilla River. I had been watching a family of Eastern Kingbirds for several days at this location and advised club members the family was in the area. After 10 minutes though, the best we could do was spot a lone adult atop a tall mullein plant. No babies here, either.

I did take the occasion to tell club members of a recent encounter I had with the Eastern Kingbird family. I had walked up the dike road to the ponds and spotted 3 Eastern Kingbirds — 2 juveniles and 1 adult — in a dead Elderberry bush. Suddenly, a second adult flew in with a juicy morsel — a large Green or Blue Darner dragonfly. The adult wasted no time in stuffing the creature down the nearest open mouth but the baby had trouble swallowing such a large meal.

Sensing this dilemma, the adult hopped over, snatched the dragonfly back, rotated it slightly in its beak then stuffed the poor insect head first into the juvenile's open mouth where the meal vanished in seconds. Now that's what I call 'fast food'!

Actually, I was amazed a bird could even catch a dragonfly. Darner dragonflies have been clocked at speeds over 30 miles per hour (some dragonfly species have been

clocked at an incredible 60 mph!). Dragonflies possess excellent eyesight and typically fly in an erratic flight pattern, thus it would seem



almost impossible that a bird could track then capture one of these insects. Apparently kingbirds have figured out a way to catch dragonflies. Or, maybe this dragonfly was sound asleep on a branch...either way, I was impressed.

Our little group exited the dike road and continued along the pond's west shoreline. Here we spotted (among hundreds of chirping, hopping frogs) a number of waterfowl species, including Mallards, a lone Northern Shoveler, a flock of six Green-winged Teal, one American Wigeon and several juvenile Wood Ducks — both male and female. Topping out this list were four Double-crested Cormorants sunning themselves on a tiny rock island in the middle of the pond. Slinking away as we made

our way around the pond was a shy Pied-billed Grebe.

All in all, what a way to start the day! Great weather, great companionship, great birding! Hope to see you on our next field trip to the Gurdane / Vinson area on Saturday, August 27<sup>th</sup>. Rumor has it that this year's huge grasshopper population has resulted in a large gamebird population. And where there are young gamebirds...there are usually predators lurking about. Trip leaders are Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten.

*Submitted by Jack Simons*

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **Oregon Field Ornithologists**

#### **26<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

August 19 - 21, 2005

Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, Oregon

For more information and registration see:

<http://www.oregonbirds.org/annualMeeting.html>

### **Field Trip**

**Saturday, August 27, 2005**

#### **Birding at Vinson and Gurdane**

Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the NE corner of Pendleton Safeway parking lot.

Trip Leaders: Aaron Skirvin (276-1948) and June Whitten (276-9019)

### **Fall Field Trip to Malheur NWR**

**September 2 – 5, 2005**

Twelve Pendleton Bird Club members have reservations at the Field Station on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. If anyone else finds they can go, contact June Whitten as soon as possible.

More housing might still be available.

Contact June Whitten - 276-9019

### Field Trip

**Saturday, September 10, 2005**

#### **Birding at McNary Wildlife Area**

Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the NE corner of Pendleton Safeway parking lot.

Trip Leaders: Aaron Skirvin (276-1948) and June Whitten (276-9019)

### **VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE**

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

[www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)

### North American Fall Migration Count

**Saturday, September 17, 2005**

Everyone, from beginner to expert, is welcome to join in the fun! Contact Aaron Skirvin, Umatilla County Coordinator, 276-1948 or [askirvin@wtechlink.net](mailto:askirvin@wtechlink.net).

**Cape Arago Audubon Society** is sponsoring the 19th annual Shorebird Festival, September 9, 10, and 11. The headquarters are in Charleston, OR. Mike Denny is the keynote speaker Saturday evening. His topic is "Shorebirds: Light Weights in a No Wait Game." For further information call or e-mail June Whitten (276-9019).

**Malheur Trip:** Twelve people from the Pendleton Bird Club have reservations at the Field Station at Malheur on September 2 to 5. If anyone else finds they can go, let June Whitten know as soon as possible. More housing may or may not still be available.

*Submitted by June Whitten*

### **The Big Sit! Bird Count**

**Sunday, October 9, 2005**

Enjoy an hour or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam at Umatilla. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! bird count, so put October 9 on your calendar! Remember this event allows participants to count the species of birds seen from a circle 17 feet in diameter. Our two circles are in the same location as last year on the Columbia River just below McNary Dam. Watch the September newsletter for more detailed information.

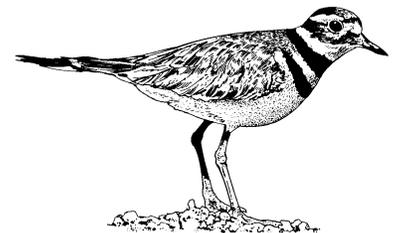
Contact June Whitten at 541-276-9019

### **McKay Reservoir Field Trip – July 23**

**Ten early risers including trip leader** Aaron Skirvin enjoyed a beautiful morning and a rewarding collection of shorebirds at McKay Reservoir on Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Attending this trip were Kathy Ramsey, Lorna Waltz, Connie Betts, Bette Husted, Carole Guenther, Betty Klepper, Fern Oliver, Becky Hiers, and Jack Simons.

As we began birding along the shoreline at the upper end of the reservoir, we observed California and Ring-billed Gulls, compared Western and Least Sandpipers, and watched Ospreys and a Caspian Tern diving for fish. Working our way through the increasingly dense tangle of water smartweed

(*Polygonum amphibium*) on the mud flats at the south end of the reservoir, we were excited to get very close views of a Solitary



Sandpiper, Least Sandpipers, two Long-billed Dowitchers, and a juvenile Baird's Sandpiper, and were amazed when a juvenile Greater Yellowlegs walked practically in front of us. These birds seemed undisturbed by our presence, but departed rapidly when a Prairie Falcon cruised low over the area. As we were heading back to the cars, a graceful White

### **Pendleton Bird Club Meeting** **Thursday, October 13, 2005 7:30 p.m.**

Presentation by Louie Dick, Umatilla Tribal Member

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

Pelican circled and landed on the water. However, this was not the final bird sighting for this trip; an American Kestrel was noted along the road out to the highway.

In all, we identified 44 species. As always, Aaron was an invaluable source of identification tips. He encouraged us to return to the reservoir during the summer and fall to search for Sanderlings, Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, Stilt Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits, and other species that can sometimes be found there. When you visit the reservoir this summer, send in a report of what you discover.

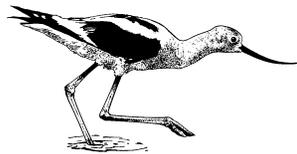
*Contributed by Carole Guenther*

**Editor's Note** — Joe and Carolyn Corvino, enthusiastic birders from the Walla Walla, WA area, birded through the Blue Mountains in the month of July and reported their sightings to Aaron. They were kind enough to share their adventures with the following report.

### **Ukiah-LaGrande-Tollgate Birding Trip**

**On Monday, August 1, Carolyn Corvino** and I (Joe Corvino) joined Rodger and Ginger Shoemake for a trip through the Blues. We were on a quest for Black-backed Woodpeckers and Mountain Quail. We birded from Walla Walla to Ukiah and then made our way to LaGrande, where we spent the night. We birded Ladd Marsh on Tuesday and made our way home over Summit Road and Tollgate. Thanks to Aaron Skirvin, Pendleton's master birder, for his great suggestions of where to look. Unfortunately, even Aaron could not direct us to Black-backs—and we continue to be skunked on this bird in 2005.

We also were shut out on Mountain Quail. The trip was not a bust, however. In a section of the Blues between Ukiah and LaGrande we saw at least 30 Lewis's Woodpeckers. These birds were active and some were feeding young.



At Ladd Marsh we saw 4 Nashville Warblers and a male and female Common Yellowthroat. We also saw one Nashville and one male Wilson's on Hwy 204 near Tollgate. This latter area was a serendipitous discovery. We were almost run off the road by a fully loaded logging truck. Because we were slowed down, Ginger spotted a woodpecker with white in its wings flying by. We stopped at an unlikely spot and found a pair of Williamson's

Sapsuckers, a Hairy, the Nashville and Wilson's warbler, Red Crossbills, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Red-tail Hawk, and Common Raven. We are heading to Rhinehart Canyon, along the Grande Ronde River, on Monday (August 8) to see if the American Redstart is still there, and on the way home we are going to spend several hours in this area which seems to be loaded with birds.

Other interesting birds seen:

- Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets at Ladd Marsh
- Swainson's Hawks in both Umatilla and Union counties
- One adult and one immature Ferruginous Hawk south of Pilot Rock. I think the other Ferruginous Hawks in this area have dispersed.
- A Golden Eagle near Ukiah
- American Kestrel were remarkably common, often vocal, and many were feeding young.
- Blue Grouse near Ukiah
- Gray Partridge—15 birds on the edge of the Bobolink field in Ukiah—no Bobolinks
- 2 Sandhill Cranes flying over Ladd Marsh
- Rock and Bewick's Wrens
- American Dipper
- Bluebirds—both Western and Mountain in several locations.
- Yellow Warbler—only 2
- Chipping Sparrows—several hundred on the move through an area of the Tower Burn—only 2 adults seen. I was sitting on a dead tree scanning burnt trees for woodpeckers and this huge flock flew past, with many birds landing almost at my feet. There was also a large flock of 25+ Mountain Bluebirds moving through the same area. I felt like St. Francis—not a feeling I often get.
- Vesper and Savannah Sparrows
- Song Sparrows were not common
- Lark Sparrow—a beautifully marked, almost tame bird, at Ladd marsh natural area
- Red Crossbills were everywhere in the mountains. More often heard than seen, but they did offer some great views.

We also saw a pronghorn as we drove to Thief Valley Reservoir. The reservoir itself was under siege by gale force winds. Rodger, Carolyn, and I

hid in the car and ate while Ginger—either braver or more foolish—battled a wildly blowing scope trying to find an indispensable bird. This is my second visit to the reservoir, and I continue to be appalled at cattle grazing right into the reservoir itself and turning sections of the shore into muck. I don't understand why this is allowed. We also saw a very large herd of sheep grazing along Summit Road. This cannot bode well for our mountains. Too bad the sheep won't eat the frequent piles of slash left by the loggers. There are still wonderfully beautiful areas in these mountains, but I worry about the future.

All in all a great two day trip with two great friends.

*Contributed by Joe Corvino*

### **July-August Bird Sightings**

**Most birding in the county** this report period focused on shorebirds, primarily seen at McKay Reservoir. Anyone who has visited this area in the last month can attest to the fact that the water is very low. This means there are a lot of mud flats and that means good habitat for shorebirds migrating south. So far this summer at least 15 different species of shorebirds have been sighted at the area including: **Black-necked Stilt, Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper** and **Wilson's** and **Red-necked Phalarope**.

Large numbers of **Stilt Sandpipers** are being reported throughout Eastern Washington and on August 14, Aaron Skirvin located **8 Stilt Sandpipers** at McKay. Probably drawn by the unusually large number of shorebirds, both **Prairie** and **Peregrine Falcons** have also been sighted at McKay this report period.

Because water from the Columbia River is still being pumped into Cold Springs Reservoir, the water level there is high and few mud flats are exposed. However on August 12, Neal Hinds was able to find **Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, Western Sandpipers, Dowitchers, Killdeer,** and **Red-necked Phalarope** in the area. On August 19, Craig and Judy Corder, taking a break from work on their new ranch in Cheney, Washington, birded Cold Springs finding 4 species of warblers and 6 species

of shorebirds including an amazing **11 Solitary Sandpipers** all found within 50 yards.

On a trip to Indian Lake on July 30, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found a number of interesting species including **Canyon Wren, Blue Grouse,** and **Clark's Grebe, Clark's Nutcrackers** and **Gray Jays** at Indian Lake. Aaron also reported that the campground host has seen **Great Gray Owls** in the area several times this spring and summer.

The area along the Coombs Canyon, Mud Springs Canyon and Alkali Canyon roads continues to be productive. Today I found (August 20) there are still at least **5 Burrowing Owls** at the nest site along Alkali Canyon Road. On July 31, Aaron, Duane and June Whitten reported finding **3 Sage Thrashers** in this area as well as many other species including **Long-billed Curlews, 12 Short-eared Owls** in one flock, **Swainson's Hawks, Gray Partridge** and **Grasshopper Sparrows**. Although I found no Short-eared Owls on my trip through the area August 20, I did find 4 flocks of **Gray Partridge** totaling over 40 birds.

Jack Simons continues to monitor the Mission Ponds area. The results from the Pendleton Bird Club Field trip to the area on August 13 are reported in a separate newsletter article. However on August 11, Jack reported finding a **Great Egret, Wilson's Snipe,** a **Black-crowned Night-Heron,** 2 young **Great Horned Owls** and 2 **Pileated Woodpeckers** at the "Ponds".

Aaron Skirvin noted that a white dove was first reported from the Adams area on July 15. The identity of the dove was a mystery until Craig Kvern was able to take a photograph of the bird on July 29. Aaron identified the bird as a Ringed Turtle-Dove. Aaron noted that there are no known self-sustaining wild populations of this species in the United States, but that they are often kept as caged birds. This is undoubtedly an escaped bird, but still an interesting find.

Please continue to send your bird sightings to me, Dave Herr at [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net) or 276-6413.

*Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant*

*Editor for August : Jack Simons 541-276-8566  
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