



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 4, No. 10 Pendleton, Oregon October 2006

Our Mountain Place: How I Got Started in Birding and Photography – Part 1

Editor's note: The following article is the first in a series of three articles prepared by Club Member Joy Jaeger. The articles focus on Joy and Steve Jaeger's property in the Blue Mountains, where they are restoring the property for wildlife and learning about the critters that live there.

We had been looking for a place in the mountains where we could camp on the weekends and holidays and avoid campgrounds with wall to wall trailers, children running amok and loud music, generators, motorcycles, etc. My husband (Steve) and I wanted to be able to see wildlife in a more natural state, and where we could actually hear and study them.

In 2001, we found a place that borders the Umatilla National Forest about 7 or 8 miles (as the Clark's Nutcracker flies) northeast of Ukiah, and then the work began. Our new property had been heavily logged and burned and somewhat replanted with trees about 10 years before. It seemed the only mature trees left were curved, broken topped or double topped.

There was a cattle-grazing lease ending that year, and we watched helplessly as the cattle spent most of their time down by the creek tromping and eating all the green vegetation. One of our first tasks was to build a perimeter fence to stop the cattle from grazing our property. We also joined a Federal program for wildlife habitat improvement. By the time the cattle were put on the national forest lands surrounding our place the next year, the perimeter fence was complete. And, the creek was safe.

Starting in the fall of that year (2002), we began planting grass and legume seed mixtures

recommended for wildlife. In the spring of 2003 with help from friends, we planted over 1000 native shrubs in one weekend, each surrounded by a tubular, plastic-mesh protector. We had selected native shrubs that should survive in our area and provide food and shelter for wildlife. The following weekend we came back and discovered that some elk had come through and it looked like a tornado had hit. They had removed and cast aside at least 100 of the protectors. They must have been having fun playing "toss the tubes." This was a disappointing and frustrating development: we were trying to help out the wildlife, and they seemed to be working against us. Curiously, the elk really weren't interested in eating the little leafless shrubs we had planted because they remained mostly untouched. Nonetheless, we had to try to find and protect the little seedlings all over again with the plant protectors.

Summer came, and there was no rain for 3 months. Steve hand-watered as many shrubs as he could every weekend, but even with all his efforts many of the plants did not survive. By our third summer on the property, we began to notice that since cattle were no longer grazing on the property, there were grasses and shrubs regrowing all over our place. We already had thousands of naturally produced snowberry plants, roses and other shrubs including serviceberry (which was one of the shrubs we had also bought and planted). As the years have passed and the shrubs have grown, it has become evident that we should have purchased and planted just a few plants of the species that had disappeared due to logging, burning and grazing and concentrated on restoring them.

In 2003, I decided I wanted to learn about the wildlife and plants living on our property. I began taking digital photographs of all the birds, animals and flowers I saw in hopes I would be able to find people who could identify them for me. I found that I could identify only a few birds, as most were different from those living in our neighborhood in Pendleton. At a Native Plant Society meeting one evening I met Aaron Skirvin and he agreed to try and identify my bird pictures.

Since the birds would not cooperate by sitting still long enough for me to take their pictures (with the exception of the grouse), many of my pictures were not the best. Aaron was able to identify most of them anyway. And, I got lucky with some pictures. There was a family of Mountain Bluebirds living near our trailer, and I got a good picture of them. I also managed to get a good photo of an amazingly colored bird (later identified as a Western Tanager).

I was now hooked on bird watching and nature photography. I continued taking pictures and getting better books to help identify the birds and flowers. As I found more different species, I needed some way to keep track of the birds using our property. Luckily, I found a pamphlet from the Forest Service on "Birds of the Umatilla National Forest" and have used its list as a guide to keep track. I did not check off a bird until I felt I could identify it again. I even found that I could identify some by their sounds (but not very many). The Pendleton Bird Club programs on bird identification really helped. I am still many years away from being anything more than a novice birder, but I am learning a few more birds every year. My plan now is to buy a better camera and take better pictures for identification.

Contributed by Joy Jaeger

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Field Trip

McNary Wildlife Area

November 4, 2006

**Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway
Parking Lot or**

**Meet at 9:00 a.m. at main parking area at
McNary Wildlife Area**

Trip Leader: Aaron Skirvin 276-1948

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., November 9, 2006

Nature Photographer Terry Steele

Presents

Birds and Beasts of the Chiricahua Mountains

Pendleton First Presbyterian Church

201 SW Dorion Ave. in Pendleton

Also, see article on Terry Steele in this newsletter.

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., December 14, 2006

Dave Herr presents

Tufa Tower and Golf Course Birds

Pendleton First Christian Church on

S. Main Street in Pendleton

Umatilla County

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 30, 2006

All are welcome and encouraged to join the count!

Mark your calendar and reserve December 30 for
counting birds.

Compiler: Aaron Skirvin 276-1948

askirvin@wtechlink.net

Bird Club Meeting & Potluck

6:30 p.m., January 11, 2007

Aaron Skirvin presents

Winter Sparrows of Umatilla County

Pendleton First Christian Church on

S. Main Street in Pendleton

Heads-Up for December Raffle/Auction

December's Bird Club meeting will feature a raffle and auction to raise money for club activities like funding the website. Be thinking about what you want to contribute! Home-made items like bird houses, feeders, food-cakes, and trinkets were popular last year. How about store-bought sacks of bird feed? Calendars? Books? T-shirts? Put your thinking cap on and get started on any items that you would like to bring! For more information, please contact Dannell Tapley (dnail@my180.net, 969-7087) or Betty Klepper (klepperb@uci.net, 276-8416).

Bird of the Month – Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)

While Mike Schroeder's presentation had "almost" nothing to do with Belted Kingfisher, it did give us reason to stop and think about the year-round birds in Umatilla County. Mike stated when he was deciding which bird species would be his major focus, he considered Black-capped Chickadee and Grouse! What's the connection? The main idea behind his thinking was year-round birds that do not migrate. While we thoroughly enjoy our brief spring and summer visitors, it is really the birds that stick out eastern Oregon winters that we should, perhaps, admire a little more. See how many species you can come up with that we have the pleasure of watching all winter.

The Belted Kingfisher is definitely one we can depend on all winter. His rattling call may be heard on the Umatilla River, McNary Wildlife Ponds, Mission Ponds, Camas Creek, or anywhere there is open water. If there is a severe winter and the favorite fishing hole freezes over, the Belted Kingfisher will move downstream until he reaches open water.

And, a great fisherman he is, too. Belted Kingfishers plunge from ten to forty feet above the water, gaining momentum to enter the water headfirst. He often comes up with a small fish from his shallow dive. They also eat amphibians, insects, mice, and reptiles.

This is one species where the female is more colorful than the male. The female has rusty-red flanks and a second belt of the same red color. The male has a white breast with a blue-gray belt and both sexes have white collars. They are also both blue-gray on the back and head. The feathers on the head are

shaggy and the bill is long and stout. The legs are short and the wings are strong. They like to perch on a favorite branch or power line while watching for prey at the favorite fishing holes.

Belted Kingfishers are 13 inches long and have a wingspan of 20 inches. Their short, but strong, legs help them to excavate a burrow for nesting. The nesting burrow is usually 3 to 6 feet long and dug into a vertical bank near water. Both male and female dig in the burrow and remove the debris. It is then lined with grass and leaves and is ready for the white, 1.4-inch eggs to be laid. The usual clutch is 6 or 7 eggs.

After hatching, the parents feed the babies regurgitated food, mostly fish. When the young fledge, the parents teach them to hunt by dropping dead meals into the water for them to retrieve. Except during the breeding season, Belted Kingfishers are solitary.

Thanks to Mike Schroeder for reminding us about our year-round birds!

Contributed by June Whitten

Editor's note: The following is the announcement of the program the Bird Club has set up for our November 9th meeting. Terry Steele, our guest speaker, is an accomplished nature photographer and public speaker. Terry and his wife, Kay, live near the John Day River about 75 miles south of Pendleton.

"Birds and Beasts of the Chiricahua Mountains"

An entertaining photographic presentation by Terry R. Steele

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: First Presbyterian Church, 201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton

Sponsored by the Pendleton Bird Club

There is a very special place in southeastern Arizona called the Chiricahua (cheer-a-cow-waa) Mountains. Cave Creek emerges on the east side of this mountain island range and it is a biological wonder. It is a mixture of several ecological life zones that normally do not overlap; plants and animals typically not found co-existing are the norm. Through the lens of Northwest photonaturalist, Terry Steele, you will view the exotic Elegant Trogon, the Montezuma Quail and stop-action flight of a Blue-throated

Hummingbird. Although his program is primarily about birding, he will include images of a pollen-eating bat, colorful blooming cactuses, the coati, toads, lizards and snakes – all a part of this remarkable area. It is no small wonder that nature-loving people from all over the world come here to observe birds and wildlife. If you have been to Cave Creek, you will want to revisit it through this presentation. If you are looking for a future adventure, this program will acquaint you with the outstanding wildlife viewing opportunities of this exceptional place.

About Terry Steele – photonaturalist

Terry Steele's focus on nature began in the wild beauty of his eastern Oregon surroundings - the Strawberry Mountains, the rivers, rim rock and remote fingers of forest reaching into the expanse of great valleys and high desert habitats. He is especially lucky; he is a well seasoned naturalist who is still driven by his contagious enthusiasm and a passion to intimately know the creatures of nature. Most of us worked hard to reach adulthood with skills and education that would secure our lives in work and at home. Rarely, someone like Terry rides the waves of his life equipped with an abandonment for adventure. Luckily, he travels with a well focused eye, a camera in hand and a gift for telling the story. Terry and his wife, Kay, make their home in a remote canyon near the North Fork of the John Day River in northeastern Oregon.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

Big Sit! Update – October 8, 2006

The Big Sit! is a relaxed, fun birding time. You bring a lawn chair, sit inside a circle 17 feet in diameter, and count birds for as long as you wish.

Our circles this year were below McNary Dam and at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. It wasn't a particularly "birdy" day on the Columbia River with only 16 species recorded by Dave Herr, Duane and June Whitten. Aaron Skirvin, Neal and Sandy Hinds found Cold Springs a bit more productive with 41

species recorded.

Apparently, October 8 was a particularly busy day with a lot of birders out of town. Plan to join next year. This is a great time for anyone, but especially beginning birders. Most of the birds (gulls, terns, pelicans, cormorants, ducks, and shorebirds) are big and easy to watch. Some of these birds may not be so easy to identify sometimes, but there is usually someone around who can help with the identification.

Contributed by June Whitten

Umatilla County Fall Migration Count – September 16, 2006

Many, many thanks to Nancy and Lyle Brown and Jack Simons for conducting the annual fall migration bird count in Umatilla County. Count day, September 16, 2006, coincided with the first full day of the Bird Club's field trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which is located in Harney County. Many of the birders who usually help with the Umatilla migration count were on the Malheur/Steens Mountain trip.

Nancy and Lyle searched for birds in the west county area in the morning and added a few more birds to their tally when they attended the Pendleton Round-Up in the afternoon. Evidently, they weren't entirely focused on the rodeo, because they took time to count Rock Pigeons and Ring-billed Gulls that were circling the Round-Up Grounds. Jack counted birds in the morning in the Mission, McKay Reservoir, and Coombs Canyon areas. Thanks to their efforts, Jack, Lyle, and Nancy found 52 species of birds and counted 2452 individual birds. Highlights included 11 Great Egrets, 8 Turkey Vultures, 134 Black-billed Magpies, 161 Brown-headed Cowbirds, 3 Caspian Terns, and 1 Sage Thrasher.

The next formal count for Bird Club members is the annual Christmas Bird Count, which will be held on December 30 this year. I hope you will help count birds on December 30.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

The Case of the Missing Bluebird Box

The Pendleton Bird Club has 22 nest boxes on the Albee Bluebird Trail, and 9 on the Poverty Flat Trail. The boxes are monitored for nesting success rate and well-cleaned each fall in preparation for the following nesting season.

In early October, when Aaron Skirvin, Duane and I were checking the boxes and doing the fall cleaning on the Albee Trail, we were sorry to discover that nest box number 14 (all nest boxes have a number on the bottom) was missing. There was no sign of the box having been destroyed. The screws that once afixed the box to the tree were still in the tree, but the box was gone!

Well, imagine our surprise when we found box number 14 securely nailed to a ponderosa pine tree between boxes number 17 and 18. How or, more aptly, why did it get here? We did bring the mystery box home as the back board was badly split, and Jack Simon has agreed to cut-out a new back for it. And, too, it was too close to box number 17 for a successful nest. We haven't decided, yet, where to put it up for next spring. Mystery partially solved, but the "perp" remains at large!

On the Albee Trail there were 14 nests that were apparently successful. There are often at least 4 eggs in a nest, and later four babies. Of course, in some nests there are 3, 5, or 2 babies, or only 2 survive. We could estimate approximately 50 baby bluebirds hatched and probably fledged from the successful nests. Their survival rate after fledging is unknown. But, if you drive along the Albee Road from late March though mid-October, you will see bluebirds. And, we believe we see more now than before the Bird Club started the trail in the spring of 2004.

The Poverty Flat nests were decidedly less successful than Albee. Poverty Flat is somewhat less protected from inclement weather than Albee and probably receives more severe weather. The cool, wet spring took its toll on nestling bluebirds on both trails, but especially at Poverty Flat.

Out of 9 boxes at Poverty Flat, we had 3 successful nests by Western Bluebirds. One box was well-used by a House Wren, and two were well-used by squirrels. On the Albee Trail, we have mostly Western Bluebirds, but one or two pairs of Mountain Bluebirds use the nest boxes, too.

This is a fun and interesting project. It is especially rewarding to find baby bluebirds in a box, feathered out, and ready to fledge. We could use more help from Bird Club members to help monitor and maintain the boxes. Any volunteers? Please contact June Whitten at 276-9019.

Contributed by June Whitten

September - October Bird Sightings

There was fog on Cabbage Hill last week; a sure sign that fall is here. Most of the summer birds have migrated out of the area and now is the time to start looking for winter visitors at our bird feeders. It's also a good time to start looking for wintering hawks and other winter birds; maybe the Blue Jays will return this year?

On September 30 (the last day before the access road closed for the season), Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found an immature **Bonaparte's Gull** at McKay Reservoir along with 3 **Western Sandpipers**, 16 **Long-billed Dowitchers** and several **Killdeer**.

On October 1, Aaron, Duane and June Whitten found a **Lincoln's Sparrow** along Wegner Gulch Road (located a couple of miles SE of Pilot Rock) and 2 **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and a **Prairie Falcon** near Albee. They also found one **EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** in Pilot Rock. This species appears to be increasing in many areas, and it will be interesting to see if the numbers increase in Pilot Rock next year.

Connie and Russ Betts continue to census birds at the Pendleton Community Park. On October 2, Connie found over 2 dozen **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and on October 7, she was lucky enough to find **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** in the park.

While deer hunting in the Bridge Creek area south of Ukiah in early October, Greg Whitten and his sons saw a number of **Mountain Quail** as well as **Chukars, Gray Partridge** and **Dusky Grouse**.

On October 1, I (Dave Herr) drove the Gurdane-Alkali/Mud Springs road route looking for Chukars and Gray Partridge. I did not find either of these species, but did find large flocks of **American Pipits, Savannah Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows** and **Horned Larks**.

During the first week of October a number of people reported **Sandhill Cranes** flying over the Pendleton area.

Jack Simons saw his first **Great Egret** of the fall along the Umatilla River near his home on October 1. He has seen the egret several times since then. On October 5, Jack found a **Greater White-fronted Goose** along the river. He noted that so far this fall

the number of ducks using the Mission Ponds has been lower than normal.

June Whitten reported that Don and Norma Staebler have seen a **Great-gray Owl** on their property near Meacham several time in October. They sent June a picture that verifies their sighting. The Staebler's also report a **Western Screech Owl** has been in their yard near McKay Park in Pendleton for several years.

Birding October 11, in the Blue Mountains, Aaron and June Whitten found a juvenile **Northern Shrike** near the 244 and Hwy 395 junction and a **Golden Eagle** about 10 miles east of Ukiah.

Saturday, October 14, was such a nice day that I decided to hike up Iskuulpa Creek. I parked at the end of the road and walked about three miles up the canyon. My objective was to find **Northern Pygmy-Owls** which are calling this time of year. I found four different Pygmy-Owls and was lucky enough to photograph one. I also found a **Golden Eagle**, heard a **Ruffed Grouse** drumming and had great looks at a black bear and coyote. Iskuulpa Creek is one of the areas Jenny Barnett manages for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Working on a restoration project along the creek on October 18, Jenny reported hearing **Northern Pygmy-Owls**, a **Steller's Jay** giving a fake hawk call, a **Varied Thrush** and numerous **Chickadees**.

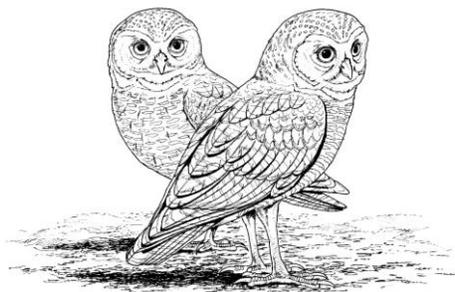
Monday, October 16, Aaron and June Whitten found an immature **Mew Gull** (first County report for the year) at McNary Dam. There were also **Ring-billed**

Gulls and about a dozen **Bonaparte's Gulls** in the area. At Cold Springs they found 7 **Black-bellied Plovers** and a large number of **Long-billed Dowitchers**. Umatilla Marina yielded an immature **Common Loon** (first report this fall) and a **Horned Grebe**.

October 18, Jenny Barnett reported a flock of 35 **Snow Geese** flying over Pendleton. Although this is a common bird in some parts of Oregon during migration, it is a difficult bird to find in Umatilla County.

After Aaron Skirvin found the **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** at his feeder last month, there have been several other sightings of unusual hummingbird recently. Our local hummingbirds have migrated out of the area, so any hummingbird found this time of year should be checked closely. Please continue to send your bird sightings (including any fall hummingbirds!) to Dave Herr at 276-6413 or dsherr@oregontrail.net.

Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant
Editor for October : Aaron Skirvin
Phone: 276-1948
Email: askirvin@wtechlink.net



Pendleton Bird Club
70371 Prairie Road
Pendleton, OR 97801