



# Kákya Táymut

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

---

Volume 4, No. 1 Pendleton, Oregon January 2006

## January 21<sup>st</sup> Bird Club Field Trip, Coombs Canyon to Pilot Rock

Seven bird club members met to go birding out to Ukiah on January 21, but due to the recent snowfall and slick road conditions at Battle Mountain, we decided to stay closer to Pendleton. Instead of birding in southern part of the county, we headed towards Coombs Canyon via Rieth. The weather was overcast, and we were fortunate to not have any wind. American Robins are migrating through the Pendleton area, and we saw a few in a pasture along lower Birch Creek. Then we spotted a record-setting number (800 or so) of Ring-necked Pheasants; of course, most were in pens at the pheasant farm, so we didn't count those. But, we saw at least 20 or 30 in a neighboring field; some were most likely escapees.

While looking for sparrows at one stop along Straughan Road, we were serenaded by at least four Western Meadowlarks, all hanging out in a tree with a bunch of Red-winged Blackbirds and a Downy Woodpecker. We saw the usual crowd of White-crowned Sparrows, a couple of American Goldfinches, a Dark-eyed Junco, and a tree chock full of House Finches. We were pleasantly surprised by our first sighting this year of a Yellow-rumped Warbler amongst the finches. We aimed the spotting scope at a distant hawk on a power pole, only to find that it was a not-too-uncommon insulator hawk.

Checking out the sparrow flock along Coombs Canyon Road just past Sparks Station Road, we could find only White-crowned and Song Sparrows. About four miles farther down Coombs Canyon Road, we had a good look at an adult Northern Shrike on a power line. It flew as we got out of the rigs for a better look, but then landed even closer, giving everyone a great view. A little further up the road we got a scope-view of a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk, and a good, but quick, look at a Golden Eagle soaring above a cliff.

Turning south on Mud Springs Canyon Road, there were two miles worth of Horned Larks chasing each other around. Aaron wished for some Snow Buntings or Lapland Longspurs, but we were not so lucky. A short distance down the road, a Great Horned Owl flushed from a road-side patch of trees. It briefly landed on a grassy slope before taking flight again and disappearing around a curve in the road ahead of us. As we rounded the curve, the owl flushed again from a dense willow. However, another Great Horned Owl remained perched in the willow, mostly hidden among a thicket of branches. Apparently, the owl felt safe in its hiding place, because it stayed put while Connie Betts took a photograph.

For the next 20 miles, all the way to Pilot Rock, birds were scarce, and we saw just a couple of ravens, kestrels, and red-tails. Birding picked up again along Wegner Gulch Road, southeast of Pilot Rock. By then the sun had poked through the overcast skies. The sparrow flocks we sorted through contained White-crowned and Song Sparrows, with a few House Finches and goldfinches. We found another field full of pheasants (100+) and an immature Red-tailed Hawk sitting in the tree right by the road. We weren't the only ones interested in the pheasants, as there were at least two Red-tails, a Harrier, and a Cooper's Hawk circling the area. And of course, like on all birding trips, we ate well and shared food. Although next time I think I'll bring something more to share besides dried squid and roasted green peas.

Participants were Nancy Brown, Connie & Russ Betts, Aaron Skirvin, June & Duane Whitten, and Tanya Harrison.

*Contributed by Tanya Harrison*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, February 9, 2006 7:30 p.m.

#### **Mike Denny's Presentation on Birds in Migration**

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

### Field Trip

#### Wanaket Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, February 11, 2006

Trip Leaders: Jenny Barnett and Tanya Harrison  
[JennyBarnett@ctuir.com](mailto:JennyBarnett@ctuir.com)

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot

February 17 – 21, 2006

#### **Birding the Oregon Coast**

We will look for coastal birds from Lincoln City to Yachats on the central Oregon coast

Contact: June Whitten 541-276-9019

### Pendleton Bird Club Meeting

Thursday, March 9, 2006 7:30 p.m.

#### **Presentation by Jack Simons Waterfowl Identification**

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

### Field Trip

#### Mission Ponds and Wildhorse Golf Course Ponds

Saturday, March 11, 2006

Trip Leader: Jack Simons  
[styletoil@eoni.com](mailto:styletoil@eoni.com)

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot

### **Bird of the Month -- Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiaca*)**

Not only is the Snowy Owl mostly white, it is a bird of the far north, that land of ice and snow. With nearly twenty-four hours of daylight, however, the summers are quite nice, albeit short. But, the farthest reaches of North America is where the Snowy Owl spends the breeding season, nesting on mounds, hillocks, or rocks on the tundra. The ground nest is minimally lined with moss, lichens, or grass.

Usually five to eight elongated, white eggs about 2.2 inches long are laid per nest. Clutch size varies, however, from three to 14 eggs and is dependent on the abundance of lemmings. The male brings the incubating female her food of choice, lemmings. The babies hatch asynchronously; that is, the first-laid egg hatches several days before the last egg. The female broods the young for about three weeks. The female is very territorial and defends the nest and young with both vocal and visual displays. Geese and eider ducks often nest near the owls and enjoy her protection. The young fledge around two months of age, and all will remain together as a family until autumn.

In addition to lemmings, Snowy Owls also prey on other rodents, snowshoe and arctic hares, birds and carrion. They often hunt from low perches and are regularly seen on the ground.

The Snowy Owl is 23 to 24 inches long, with a 52-inch wingspan. At a weight of four pounds, it outweighs a Horned Owl by nearly a pound. And, those lovely denizens of the forest, the Great Gray Owls, are huge but lightweights of feathers and fluff, weighing in at less than two and one-half pounds. A fully adult male Snowy Owl may be nearly all white,

while the female retains more of the black barring. A sub-adult Snowy has a white face and white feathers with extensive black barring.

As early winter sets in on the tundra, Snowy Owls begin to move southward, across Alaska, Canada, and the northern edge of the United States. Then, every few years there is an irruption of Snowy Owls, as they move farther south into Washington, Idaho, Oregon and other states at similar latitude. Exactly what causes these southward invasions is not known. It may be connected to their food source. Small, boreal mammals have dense populations that tend to crash about every four years. This could cause a southward movement of Snowy Owls. It is also surmised that a good survival rate of young Snowys may promote an irruption in the more southern latitudes. Most of the Snowy Owls seen as far south as Oregon are sub-adults.

So, lucky for us in Umatilla County, this is an irruption year for Snowy Owls! A sub-adult was first seen by John Merry on December 7, along Fruitvale Road, near Umapine, a few mile northwest of Milton-Freewater. This owl, being a little fickle, has decided to become a Walla Walla County bird and has been most recently seen by numerous observers on Frog Hollow Road near the intersection of Forest Road, southwest of Walla Walla, WA. This owl, originally called the "Stateline Owl," is now dubbed, "The Frog Hollow Owl." A Snowy was reported on Koebecke Road southwest of Helix near the Myrick Elevator. After the original sighting by John Cole on January 1, 2006, this Snowy has not been relocated. Another sub-adult Snowy was originally reported on the weekend of January 7-8 near the Pendleton Airport. On January 10, several local birders saw this cooperative bird as it stayed on the ground just off Stage Gulch Road for most of the day. The owl was not seen in the area after January 10.

There are numerous reports of Snowy Owls along the Oregon Coast, extending from Astoria to Coos Bay. At least two owls had chosen the Portland area for their wintering grounds. One of those was killed by a vehicle at the intersection of I-205 and I-5. The other one was successfully trapped and relocated to a safer environment at Netarts Bay.

Our records for Umatilla County indicate a Snowy Owl was reported by Craig and Judy Corder on February 14, 1992, near Rew Elevator. Neal Hinds, Craig and Judy Corder, and others recorded another Snowy from November 14, 1993 to March 12, 1994,

east of McNary. So far, 2005 – 2006 appears to have the most owls reported in Umatilla County. This may be only due to more observers and better communication, however.

If there is sufficient supply of mice and voles, a Snowy Owl tends to remain in a particular area. They usually have favorite hunting and resting perches, often repeatedly returning to the same perch. This tendency supposedly makes them easy to observe. There is, of course, a dash of skill and a little luck thrown in, so don't give up if you don't spot the owl on the first attempt. There may be more in the county than the ones mentioned in this article. Be sure to report any sightings of Snowy Owls.

*Contributed by June Whitten*

## **2005 Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count**

Twenty-four birders, including three feeder counters, participated in the annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count on December 31, 2005. Umatilla County's count was part of the nationwide 106<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society. The goal of our count was to find and tally as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period within a count circle 15 miles in diameter. The center of Umatilla County's count circle is located near the base of Cabbage Hill about six miles southeast of Pendleton.

A typical Umatilla County CBC will tally 70 to 72 bird species. The highest species total for the Umatilla County CBC was 81 species on January 3, 1992. Last year, we found 78 species in the count circle. This year, we found 70 species and 11,186 individual birds. Total number of species was lower than expected, because the persistent rain in the afternoon s drove the birds into deep cover to try to keep dry. Rules for the Christmas Bird Count allow the addition of species found during "count week", three days immediately prior to and three days after count day. This year, three additional species were seen within the count circle during count week but not on count day: Hooded Merganser, Western Screech-Owl, and Cedar Waxwing.

Participants in this year's count were: Dolly Robison, Ginger Shoemake, Joe & Carolyn Corvino, Priscilla Dauble, Jack & Sharon Simons, Russ & Connie Betts, Craig Kvern, Bruce Mayfield, Jenny Barnett,

Dave Herr, Marilyn Cripe, Sandy Cripe, Jean Wood, June & Duane Whitten, Lorna Waltz, Aaron Skirvin, Becky Hiers, Jane Holmes, Janet Ebaugh, and Ellen Wardell.

Results of the count are as follows: Canada Goose 1361, Cackling Goose 1, Wood Duck 8, Green-winged Teal 90, Mallard 2273, Northern Pintail 75, Northern Shoveler 1, Gadwall 112, American Wigeon 322, Ring-necked Duck 25, Lesser Scaup 2, Common Goldeneye 83, Bufflehead 26, Common Merganser 1, Pied-billed Grebe 1, Great Blue Heron 15, Bald Eagle 6 (5 adults and 1 immature), Northern Harrier 23, Sharp-shinned Hawk 2, Cooper's Hawk 1, Northern Goshawk 1, Red-tailed Hawk 119, Rough-legged Hawk 13, *Buteo* sp. 4, American Kestrel 79, Prairie Falcon 1, Ruffed Grouse 3, Wild Turkey 82, Ring-necked Pheasant 372, California Quail 288, American Coot 18, Ring-billed Gull 2, Rock Pigeon 346, Mourning Dove 187, Barn Owl 2, Northern Saw-whet Owl 1, Great Horned Owl 3, Belted Kingfisher 9, Downy Woodpecker 2, Hairy Woodpecker 3, Northern Flicker 37, Pileated Woodpecker 2, Horned Lark 20, Black-billed Magpie 319, American Crow 13, Common Raven 40, Black-capped Chickadee 58, Mountain Chickadee 10, Red-breasted Nuthatch 24, Pygmy Nuthatch 7, Brown Creeper 2, Bewick's Wren 10, Winter Wren 1, Golden-crowned Kinglet 9, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2, American Robin 3, Northern Shrike 1, European Starling 2557, Spotted Towhee 2, American Tree Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 108, Lincoln's Sparrow 1, White-crowned Sparrow 299, Dark-eyed Junco 178, Red-winged Blackbird 262, Western Meadowlark 101, Brewer's Blackbird 422, House Finch 103, Red Crossbill 15, American Goldfinch 349, House Sparrow 267.

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*

## **November 2005 - January 2006 Bird Sightings**

Because I participated in several of the Harney County Christmas Bird Counts in mid-December, I did not have time to report bird sighting in the last newsletter. Thus, this report covers November 2005 thru mid January 2006. Besides a very successful Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is reviewed in another newsletter article, the most exciting news has been the sighting of several **SNOWY OWLS** in Umatilla County. The first was sighted on December 7, 2005, near the state line west of Milton-Freewater. This bird has been seen in both

Oregon and Washington, but appears now to have taken up temporary residence in Washington. According to Mike and MerryLynn Denny, the "Stateline" Snowy Owl was last reported on January 10, 2006. A second **SNOWY OWL** was reported by John Cole near Helix on January 1, 2006. Although several PBC members looked for the owl, it could not be relocated. A third **SNOWY OWL** was reported on the second weekend of January near the Pendleton Airport. On January 10, 2006, several Pendleton Bird Club members were able to locate and photograph this bird. Although birders continued to search for this owl, it was not seen after January 10.

**Bald Eagles** are now being seen throughout the report area. However, the most exciting find was made by Aaron Skirvin and June and Duane Whitten. On January 7, 2006, they reported spotting numerous raptors along Highway 395 between Ukiah Junction and Albee Road, including **9 Bald Eagles**.

Connie Betts reports that a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** has taken up residence near the bird feeders in her yard in southwest Pendleton. Birding in the Coombs Canyon area, Bob and Dannel Tapley found a **FERRUGINOUS HAWK** on Thanksgiving Day. This is a very common winter bird in Umatilla County. The following day, Neal Hinds reported a **Great Egret** west of Umatilla. Birding at McNary Wildlife Area on November 27, Aaron and June and Duane Whitten found 7 species of gulls below the dam including a **WESTERN GULL**. Later that day they watched a **Peregrine Falcon** capture a **Rock Pigeon** at the Umatilla Bridge.

Mike and MerryLynn Denny accompanied Ginger and Rodger Shoemake on a new raptor survey route in northeastern Umatilla County on November 29, 2005. They counted a total of **206** birds of prey including **124 Red-tailed Hawks**, **3 FERRUGINOUS HAWKS** (a high number to find this time of year), and a **Northern Goshawk**.

On December 1, along with the more common species, Connie Betts reports finding a **Greater Yellowlegs** and **Wilson's Snipe** along McKay Creek near her home in Pendleton. Rose Scott reported finding **3 Tundra Swans** at McNary Wildlife Area on December 4, and spotted a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** at her feeders near Mission on December 9. Aaron reported counting 179 raptors on the Pendleton Raptor Survey December 11. On December 17, Bob Tapley got a great picture of a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** at his bird feeders in the Riverside area of Pendleton.

Neal Hinds got a good start on his 2006 Umatilla County list by finding 47 species at the McNary Wildlife Area on January 1. His best find was a **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW**, a species we missed in the county last year. While looking for the Helix Snowy Owl on January 4, Connie Betts reported finding no owls, but **40 Red-tailed Hawks** as well as a **Rough-legged Hawk**, a **Prairie Falcon**, **3 Northern Harriers**, **3 American Kestrels**, and numerous **Horned Larks**. On January 12, Connie reported finding **2 Downy Woodpeckers** at the Pendleton Community Park. And, on the same day, Jack Simons saw a **Pileated Woodpecker** behind his home near Mission. On January 13, Connie Betts reported finding **39 Mallards** on McKay Creek near the Pendleton Community Park (a high count for the area). On January 14, Jack Simons reported finding the year's first reported **Western Screech-Owl** in a nesting box located on his property.

Birding in the Ukiah area on January 16, Aaron and Russ and Connie Betts made a number of good sightings. Probably the best was a flock of **8 MOUNTAIN QUAIL** along the North Fork John Day River near Highway 395. This is another species not reported in the county last year. They also reported finding 39 Gray Partridges, a Northern Shrike, 4 Bald Eagles as well as a "few" Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks near Ukiah. On January 18, Dee Croteau, who lives near Ukiah, was able to photograph several **Gray Partridges** in a field at the edge of town.

On January 18, I heard a **Western Screech-Owl** calling in my yard. This is only the second time I've heard this species calling in my neighborhood. Running their northern Umatilla County raptor survey route January 19, the Shoemaker's and Denny's reported finding a large number of raptors including **210 Red-tail Hawks**. They also added **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Savannah Sparrow** to the Umatilla 2006 year list.

Well, we still a couple of months of winter left, so who know what new winter birds may visit Umatilla County. Keep your eyes open and please continue to send your bird reports to me, Dave Herr at [dsherr@oregontrail.net](mailto:dsherr@oregontrail.net) or phone (276-6413).

#### 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)

*Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant*

*Editor for January: Aaron Skirvin*

*Phone: 541-276-1948 Email: [askirvin@wtechlink.net](mailto:askirvin@wtechlink.net)*

