



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 4, No. 2 Pendleton, Oregon February 2006

Birders “Go West”

THE FOLLOWING PENDLETON BIRDERS made the trip to the coast February 17 through 21: **Dave Herr, Judy Johnson, Priscilla Dauble, Allan and Marilyn Jio, Lorna Waltz, Ann Wyatt, Janet Ebaugh, Kathy Ramsey, Russ and Connie Betts, Aaron Skirvin, Betty Klepper, Fern Oliver, Peggy Chevelier, Jane Holmes, Brian Griffin, Jerry and Sharon Como, and Duane and June Whitten.**

Unfortunately, Jill Wyatt was ill and unable to make the trip at the last minute. We had 93 species on our list and hopefully, left out none! Following are some highlights from the trip:

Ann Wyatt: Overall, the trip was fantastic! I've birded all over the world but this trip was special — it was the people that made it so. My favorite bird was definitely the Black Oystercatcher! The accommodations were superb. My disappointment: my daughter, Jill Wyatt, was ill and unable to go. That nasty cold wind was a bummer, too. I do hope I might join your group again.

Dave Herr: I want to thank you for all your work getting the accommodations. Our house was just great and worth many times what we had to pay for it. One of the best parts of the trip! The other best part was the weather. I can put up with cold and wind when the weather is as clear as it was Saturday and Sunday.

Janet Ebaugh: Thanks for everything you did to make the trip happen. I can't say enough about how good it was! For me, there were many good things — the chance to visit and again re-visit places to look for our birds. (Some expressed concern about this, but I liked it — quick visit does not reveal

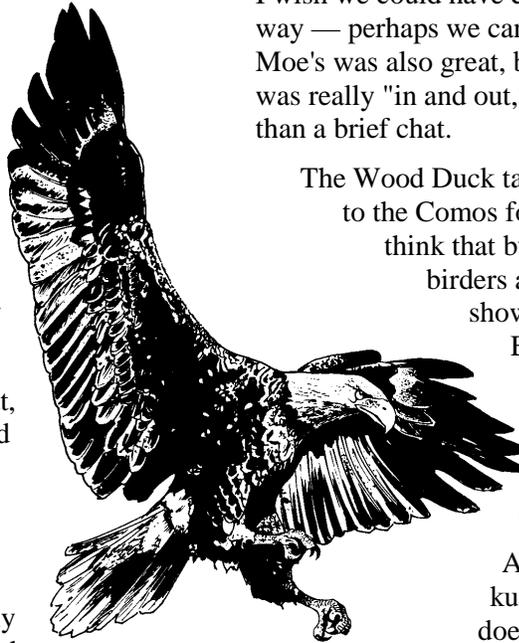
everything.) I really enjoyed the nice, economical housing you arranged, and really enjoyed the house-mates we had at the Palmer House. I enjoyed all the good advice on birding things, from everyone — but especially from Aaron and June — we are lucky to have such good teachers, which is an art!

I liked the pizza party, as an early get-to-know event. I wish we could have connected more on dinners, that way — perhaps we can in the future. The dinner at Moe's was also great, but we were all split up, and it was really "in and out," too quick to have much more than a brief chat.

The Wood Duck talk was just super, and thanks to the Comos for arranging and hosting it. I think that building connections with birders at the coast is really important, showing that we — way out here in Eastern Oregon — do care enough to make the long trip to show that commitment. I hope we can build on that connection in the years to come.

At the end, I must give great kudos to Aaron for everything he does for us. His strong involvement with this group is quite something and a blessing for everyone.

Betty Klepper: For me, the most memorable moments of the trip involved meeting everyone on Friday night at the pizza feed, seeing the Wood Duck program, and several memorable birds that were lifers for me. (How can any bird except a Jailbird be a lifer?) These included Eurasian Wigeon, Brant's Goose, White-tailed Kite, and the Mew Gull.



Fern Oliver: One of the best parts was eating clam chowder at Moe's! Seeing the "Green Flash" was memorable. (We did, indeed, see the green flash as the sun set over the water!)

Lorna Waltz: Favorite bird sightings that will long be remembered from our trip to the coast:

Winter Wren — who treated Betty K. and me to such a pleasant walk up the path at Cape Perpetua.

Wrentit — flitting through the shrubbery near the Yaquina Bay Jetty.

Cormorants — Brandt's and Pelagic — enjoying a swim in the Jetty Channel near Newport.

Bald Eagle — swooping over the ocean and beach at Seal Rock looking for his lunch and scattering Sanderlings and Dunlins everywhere. (I think I can tell them apart now!)

Not to forget our special evening with Al Rice at Como's home learning about the habits of the Wood Duck, highlighted by the camera shots from inside the nest box.

Or the delicious fresh CRAB we shared together — picking away!

And, I never come home without once again appreciating the beauty of our Oregon Coast — no matter the season or the weather!!

June and Duane Whitten: We hope everyone had compatible roommates. Russ, Connie, Aaron, Duane and I have a very easy plan to live together for a few days. Actually, this is a "no plan" arrangement, but every time we do this, I am so impressed how everyone pitches in and does whatever needs doing!

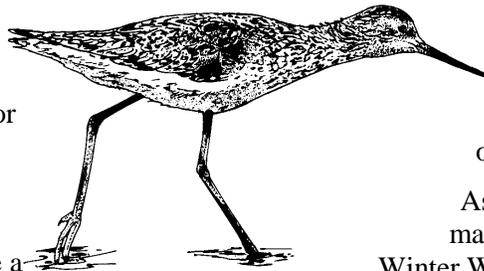
A lifer is a "big deal" to me. Thanks to Aaron's great eyes, we got to watch a Rock Sandpiper among 70 to 80 Surfbirds. Time was, the Surfbirds would have been enough to keep us totally interested. They were bathing and chattering; constant motion. The Rock Sandpiper is smaller (weighing only one-third as much as the Surfbird) and has a longer bill, but it managed to stay behind the rocks a good deal of the time. Laimons Osis told us, "Do NOT go down on the beach at Seal Rock or you will miss the good birds." We weren't seeing much from the top, so we did not follow directions and found the Rock Sandpiper and three gorgeous Harlequin Ducks from the beach!

Seeing all three Scoters, Eurasian Wigeon, Red-throated Loon, and Hutton's Vireo were more

highlights. And, we absolutely loved the Wood Duck program by Al Rice. Thanks to Jerry and Sharon Como for arranging it.

Russ and Connie Betts: Seal Rock was a great place to bird with such a variety. Fun to see the Surfbirds, Black Turnstones, Rock Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Harlequin Duck, Scoters, Loons, Gulls, Black Oystercatcher, Varied Thrush, Robins, Sea Anemones, Starfish, and seals. Different times of the day brought different birds. Russ enjoyed the Netarts area (Cape Meares) where we saw the White-tailed Kite and the Peregrine Falcon perched in the tree. Also, the thousands of Canada Geese and American Wigeon with at least two Eurasian Wigeon thrown in.

Aaron Skirvin: Thanks to all of you (all 21 in the group) for your cooperation in making it fairly easy to organize and carry out the daily birding activities, even though the cell phone operations/connections along the coast were frustrating. The weather was unusual to say the least. I've been to the coast many times over the years, and I can't remember any time when the sky was cloudless for two days in a row, except on this trip. I also can't remember it being as cold as it was on this particular trip, especially Saturday with the incessant wind. But even the wind didn't stop us, although it did wear us down over the course of the day.



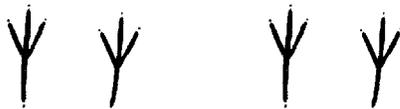
As far as birding highlights, I have many memories in my mind's eye:

Winter Wrens along the trail at Cape Perpetua, so close to us but remaining mostly hidden in the brush. A Brown Creeper, also at Cape Perpetua, working its way up the trunk of the Sitka Spruce. Hermit Thrushes, out in the open, at several locations, watching us as much as we were watching them. Two or three male Eurasian Wigeons, with red heads glowing in the sunlight, on Eckman Slough. Well-fed harbor seals sun-bathing at Alsea Bay, Yaquina Bay, and Seal Rock. An unexpected Hutton's Vireo singing high up in the tall conifers near Bayview. Acrobatic Chestnut-backed Chickadees hanging upside down on the alder cones.

A juvenile Glaucous-winged Gull with a large "starfish" in its mouth; I wonder if the gull ever swallowed it? A Bald Eagle strafing some Surf Scoters at Seal Rock, with the Surf Scoters deftly avoiding contact. The brilliant yellow and black of a gorgeous male Townsend's Warbler at Ona Beach State Park. An exuberant male Wrentit, 15 feet away, singing so vigorously (actually scolding us for being

in his territory) that his whole body shook with each note. Two stealthy Gray Jays, silently inspecting us from 60 feet away in the dark, dense fir forest. Sanderlings doing their job of escorting the waves in and out along the beach. Suddenly realizing that the flock of Sanderlings at Sallys Bend on Yaquina Bay wasn't composed entirely of Sanderlings, a few Dunlin were mixed in the flock. Soaking up the warm afternoon sunshine on the lee side of a hill at Yaquina Bay, with a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers foraging all around us. At Depoe Bay, watching a Black Oystercatcher pry open a mussel and extract the "food" from inside.

Marveling at the striking colors of two male Harlequin Ducks at Seal Rock; and someone remarking that they looked as if they had been painted. Watching a Rock Sandpiper amongst a flock of Surfbirds showering water in all directions as they bathed in a saltwater pool at Seal Rock. Confirming that the hawk in a tree near Pacific City was actually a White-tailed Kite and not a Northern Harrier. Looking through a spotting scope at Three Arch Rocks in the distance and slowly realizing there were about 100 Steller sea lions resting on the slopes above the surf. At Cape Meares, watching in awe at the aerobatics of an adult Peregrine Falcon and immature Bald Eagle, as the Peregrine repeatedly dive bombed the eagle and seeing the eagle turn upside-down in mid-flight, exposing its talons to ward off the falcon.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting
Thursday, April 13, 2006 7:30 p.m.
Program to be Announced
 First Christian Church Pendleton, Oregon
 North Main Street
 (Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

Field Trip
Great Gray Owls at Spring Creek
Saturday, May 6, 2006
 Trip Leader: Dave Herr
 Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Pendleton Safeway parking lot

Pendleton Bird Club Meeting
Thursday, May 11, 2006 7:30 p.m.
Warbler Identification
 by Aaron Skirvin and Dave Herr
 First Christian Church Pendleton, Oregon
 North Main Street
 (Across from the Pendleton Arts Center)

Field Trip
Cabbage Hill Birding
Saturday, May 20, 2006
 Trip Leader: Aaron Skirvin
askirvin@wtechlink.net
 Meet at 6:00 a.m. at Mission Market

Bird of The Month — Rough-legged Hawk, *Buteo lagopus*

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS MIGRATE south each fall from the most northern parts of North America, arriving in Umatilla County in late October or early November. In the spring, they will start their journey northward for the breeding season.

On the tundra, they will build a stick nest, perhaps including some weed stalks and grasses, near the top of a boreal evergreen tree. If no tree is available, the nest will be built on the slope of a steep bank, which will still give them some protection.

Two to seven greenish-white eggs, a little over two inches long, are laid. The babies hatch

asynchronously, so incubation begins when the first egg is laid. The first chick has the greatest chance of survival as it will be the largest and most aggressive in obtaining food. Each additional chick has a decreasing chance of survival. If the food supply, mainly lemmings, is abundant, more chicks survive to fledge.



The incubation period lasts from 28 to 31 days. The male does most, if not all, of the food foraging during incubation and until the babies fledge between six and seven weeks old. After the young fledge, the parents continue to feed and protect them until they are self sufficient.

Rough-legged Hawks are built to survive on the tundra. They have small feet and fully feathered-legs, the feathers going clear to their toes. They hunt small rodents from the air and can hover while hunting. They also eat some insects and carrion.

Rough-legs, like many other hawks, have both light and dark phases. The light phase is more common and the one typically seen in Umatilla County. The female has a light head and breast with light streaking and a more solid-dark belly. The male has a darker breast and barring on the flanks. Females are far more common in this area than the males. Both have a distinctive white band on the upper tail; dark circles near the wrists on the underside of the light wings;

and the wings reach the tip of the tail on perched birds. The wingspan of this large buteo is about 53 inches; they are 21 inches long, and weigh over two pounds.

You will find wintering Rough-Legs perched on posts and electric poles near wide-open spaces. They seem to be more common in higher elevations, such as Ukiah and Cabbage Hill. But, some can be found throughout lower elevations including, Highway 37 (Holdman Route), the Helix area, Alkali Canyon, and Coombs Canyon. Some Rough-Legs spend the winter locally, and most leave for their Arctic breeding grounds by the end of March. However, a few linger in Umatilla County until mid-April. Enjoy these winter visitors while you can as they will soon be heading to the northern arctic, not to return until next fall.

Submitted by June Whitten



Wanaket Refuge Awakens From Winter Slumber

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11TH DAWNED clear and cold here in Pendleton — perfect weather for a jaunt through the fields and wetlands of Wanaket Refuge east of McNary. The refuge lies on a bluff high above the Columbia River on property previously owned by the Conforth family who settled in Umatilla more than a hundred years ago to raise cattle. In the 1990s the land was sold to a conservation trust. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation now own and manage Wanaket Refuge which offers prime waterfowl, raptor and passerine habitat. The refuge is open to the public from mid-February to the end of March.

Is it worth your time to visit Wanaket Refuge? Perhaps a metaphor would answer that question: “Wanaket Refuge is like a Mallard in a flock of Coots.” **YES!!!** By all means take the time to visit this jewel in the high desert. Whether your interests are simply to enjoy the solitude or to challenge your birding skills, you won’t regret the experience.

Bundled up for the cold temperatures, Pendleton Bird Club members Jenny Barnett (Biologist at Wanaket), June Whitten, Joanne Britton, Aaron Skirvin and myself, Jack Simons, met at the Safeway parking lot at 8:30 before heading over to the refuge some 35 miles away. Also joining us were Chris Christie from Baker City and Stacia Peterson from Walla Walla. Naturally we took the back roads to catch a

glimpse of raptors perched on telephone poles and fence posts east of Stanfield and Hermiston.

Skirting the southwest corner of Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge we stopped alongside a frost laden field where 75 Canada Geese were snoozing in the warmth of the early morning sun. Most of the birds were the common Western Canada Goose but we did manage to pick out about a half-dozen smaller, darker breasted geese that appeared to be Cacklers. No one would hazard a guess as to which sub species of Cackler we might be looking at (too far away). [Hmmm...might be time to come listen to my "Waterfowl Identification" presentation at the next Pendleton Bird Club meeting at the Pendleton First Christian Church on Thursday evening, March 9th.]

We soon arrived at Wanaket's western-most parking lot on the south side of Highway 730 where we were met by fellow club members Dave Herr, Nancy and Lyle Brown and Joe Corvino. The suggestion was made to split into two groups — one group would make a cross country trek to Parking Lot #7 while the second group would drive there and survey the adjacent habitat.

Aaron, Joe and I opted for the cross country excursion knowing we would likely run into something of importance along the way. Sure enough, ten minutes into our walk we stopped to survey a brush pile where White-crowned Sparrows were flitting about when I happened to look down and their at my feet was a Wholly Mammoth tusk — **JUST JOKING!!** Actually, it was a beautiful, large deer antler with 5 sharp tines or points, recently shed by a buck. Knowing that deer shed their antlers each year — sometimes quite a distance apart — I was surprised to look ahead 20 feet and spot the other antler! Hey, my first set of antlers (and I didn't even have to fire a shot!). Lyle and Jenny later told the group that these antlers had belonged to a mule deer not a white-tailed deer. They now adorn my flower garden where visitors will be informed they are slightly deformed Wholly Mammoth tusks...

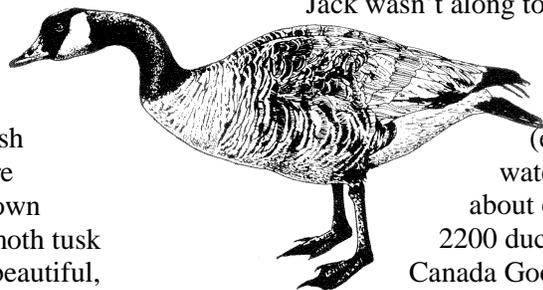
Wanaket Refuge is approximately 2 to 3 miles east of Umatilla and is roughly bisected into north and south areas by Highway 730 which travels east and west between Umatilla and Hat Rock. The southern portion of the refuge has excellent passerine habitat with a small number of ponds and wetlands. By contrast, the northern area is quite open with numerous pothole-type ponds, which make for prime waterfowl habitat. Club members birded the southern

area in the morning and the northern area in the afternoon.

Highlights of the morning survey included 1 Bald eagle, 750 Canada Geese, 1 American White Pelican, 1 Killdeer, 2 Wilson's Snipe, 1 Hermit Thrush, 3 Northern Pintail, 8 Red-tailed Hawks, 14 Northern Flicker, 1 Spotted Towhee, 96 White-crowned Sparrow, and 3 Marsh Wren. Over-all, 46 species were recorded that day — 36 in the morning and 22 (10 new species) in the afternoon.

Aaron compiled both a morning and afternoon list of birds seen on the field trip. When the two lists are compared side-by-side it is clear how the passerine species (as well as the raptors which feed on them) tend to favor the south side's thicker cover, whereas waterfowl much prefer the open country strewn with brushy-rimmed ponds. This is important for birders to know because it allows them to pre-select an area based on their interests at the time.

I had to leave the group shortly after lunch but everyone else headed over to "waterfowl country" for the afternoon survey. Here are Aaron's comments on that portion of the field trip: We didn't find any shed antlers on the afternoon bird survey, perhaps because



Jack wasn't along to find them, but more likely because we spent most of our time looking upward and trying to count (estimate) the number of waterfowl flying overhead. In about one hour we counted nearly 2200 ducks and geese of 11 species! Canada Goose was by far the most numerous species (estimated at 1500 birds), followed by about 600 Mallards. In contrast, the group tallied about 910 ducks and geese of 4 species in two hours of counting on the southern portion of the refuge earlier in the day. Highlights of the afternoon survey included a flock of 10 Cackling Geese, 1 Double-crested Cormorant, a pair of Hooded Mergansers, 5 Northern Shovelers, 6 Gadwalls, and 1 calling Horned Lark.

After completing the bird survey at Wanaket, several of us drove to the Port of Umatilla, located just upstream from McNary Dam, to look for the flock of diving ducks that often hangs out at the grain elevators. Sometimes the flock contains a few thousand birds, mostly Common Goldeneyes and Greater Scaups. One of our target birds was a female Long-tailed Duck that is sometimes found in the group and had been seen here a few weeks prior. We were fortunate to find a large flock, though it

contained about a third as many birds as usual. Among the Common Goldeneyes and Lesser Scaups were Buffleheads, Mallards, American Wigeons, and some Greater Scaups. American Coots were very plentiful, too. It took some searching through the flock, but everyone finally got good looks at a lone male Redhead and 5 or 6 Barrow's Goldeneyes that were swimming among the hundreds of waterfowl and coots. We carefully searched through the horde of ducks (the 8 birders must have looked at every duck at least twice) without finding the Long-tailed and concluded it wasn't in the flock, as it was unlikely that we simply overlooked the bird.

If you want to look for waterfowl and winter songbirds in Umatilla County, Wanaket Refuge is the place to visit, when it's open to the public between mid-February and the end of March. From Wanaket, be sure to make the short trip to the Port of Umatilla and McNary Wildlife Area to round out a great day of birding in the west county.



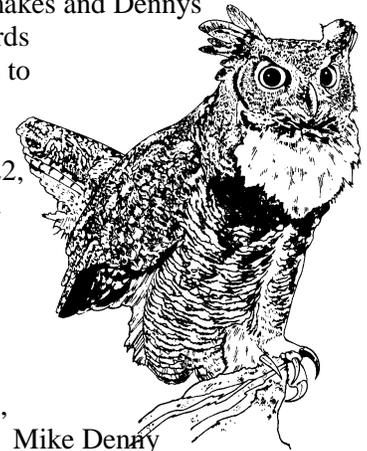
Bird Sightings January – February 2006

BALD EAGLES CONTINUE to be seen throughout the Umatilla Basin. On January 21, Marilyn Cripes reported **6 Bald Eagles** along upper McKay Creek. On his February Raptor count, Aaron Skirvin reported finding 4 immature **Bald Eagles** and on February 19, Bob and Dannell Tapley found **5 Bald Eagles** east of Ukiah. In an article published in the February issue of the *Confederated Umatilla Journal*, Aaron reported he thought there might be as many as 25 individual eagles in Umatilla County this winter. I've seen a number of eagles on the road between Mission and Cayuse and others have reported seeing them there as well, probably feeding on road killed deer.

On January 16, Connie Betts reported finding **American Robins, Cedar Waxwings** and **European Starlings** along the east bank of McKay Creek at Pendleton Community Park. Birding in the Ukiah area January 22, Russ Betts, June Whitten and Aaron reported finding 7 **Bohemian Waxwings** at Aaron's home and numerous species in the Ukiah area including **16 Rough-legged Hawks**, an **AMERICAN TREE SPARROW**, **Gray Partridges, Evening Grosbeaks, a Varied Thrush, Red Crossbills** and **70 Red-winged Blackbirds**. Birding on January 28, Aaron and the Whittens found **3 Bald Eagles** at Hat Rock and **Lesser Scaup, Greater Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye,**

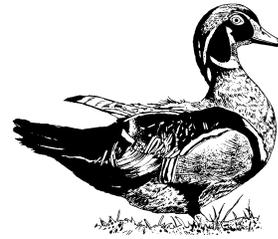
Canvasbacks, Coots, Mallards, Wigeon, and Buffleheads at the Port of Umatilla. They also found the years first **Cackling Geese** at Mann-Hopper Pond. On January 29, Aaron, the Whittens and Betty Klepper reporter finding **10 Northern Pintails** at Mann/Hopper pond and **3 Greater Yellowlegs** in the pond along Emert Road. In addition, there were at least **4 Savannah Sparrows** along Echo Meadows Road.

On February 4, Aaron was able to find a female **LONG-TAILED DUCK** mixed in with the hundreds of goldeneye and scaup at the Port of Umatilla grain elevators along the Columbia River. This is the third consecutive winter a female **Long-tailed Duck** has been seen in this location and Aaron thinks it is likely the same bird. On February 8, June and Duane Whitten made an exciting find. They located **4 EURASIAN COLLARED DOVES** in Pilot Rock near the area where 2 were found last winter. Running their Raptor Route on February 12, Aaron and the Whittens reported finding **Say's Phoebes, American Pipits, 4 Prairie Falcons** and 2 nesting **Great Horned Owls**. On February 15, Jane Holmes reported a pair of **Pine Siskins** at her thistle feeder. This has been a hard species to find this winter. Running the Milton-Freewater raptor count on February 21, the Shoemakes and Dennys reported finding **301** birds of prey. This continues to be a great area to find raptors in Umatilla County. On February 22, Connie Betts watched a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** capture an **American Goldfinch** outside her dining room window. I've seen plenty of accipiters at my feeders, but never an actual kill. Mike Denay reports that thousands of **American Robins** are flooding into the northwest. He believes these are birds traveling north but because of the extreme cold weather ahead of them, they are staging here until the weather moderates.



Although temperatures are still cool, spring is approaching. Today (February 25) on my Hermiston-Echo raptor survey I found **Great Horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks** and **Black-billed Magpies** nesting and **Great Blue Herons** at two rookeries along the Umatilla River. I also found two early **Tree Swallows** at the McNary Wildlife Area. Please let me know about all the new spring arrivals

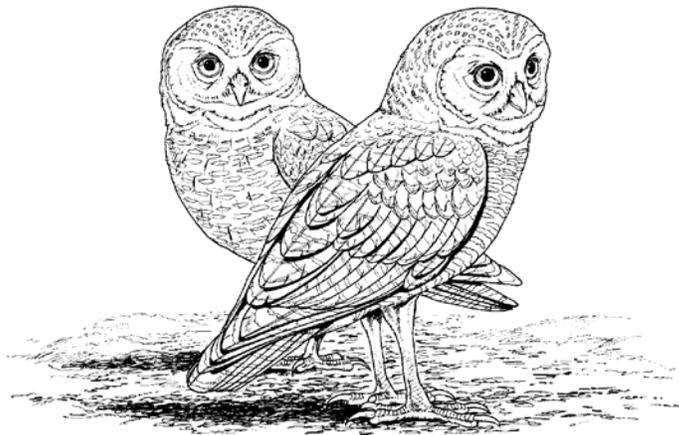
you find in your upcoming birding endeavors.
Reports can be sent to me (Dave Herr) at
dsherr@oregontrail.net or phone at 276-6413.
THINK SPRING!



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