



Kákya Táymut

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

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Birding, Beasts, and Beauty of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

A good crowd of members, new members, and guests of the Pendleton Bird Club gathered on October 11 to hear Terry Steele weave his story and to see his outstanding photography of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Oregon. They were not disappointed! The crowd lingered long over refreshments to re-hash the program and take advantage of the time to visit with Terry and his wife and business partner, Kay.

Terry worked on the refuge in the 1990's and took advantage of that time to learn all the area has to offer and also to pursue his photography career. Many of those who attended the program have visited the refuge at one time or another, and probably thought they had seen most of the wildlife Terry would present. But, probably no one had ever seen a Black-necked Stilt all fluffed up with many tiny legs dangling below her wings as she sheltered her babies. Nor, have many people seen a tiny, wet, hatchling Horned Grebe crawl out of the egg and onto its mother's back.

Then, there was the Pied-billed Grebe displaying its unusual foot before sinking into the pond like a submarine. The displaying Sage Grouse at the lek were stunning, and, as always, Terry added food for thought on their behavior. To our eyes, each male does a credible dance, tail fanned and feet stomping. Why, then, do the females observe all of this, and most, if not all, choose to mate with the dominant male? Is it his position in the lek, does he really do a better display, or does he actually produce stronger offspring? And, if all or some of this is fact, how do the females know it?

The photography was spell-binding: mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, pronghorn antelope, Sandhill Cranes, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans,

various ducks, right down to the *charming* snakes, possibly Terry's favorite. No trip to Malheur NWR would be complete without views of Steens Mountain, often snow-covered and looming at 10,000 ft. in the background.

As a boy and young man, Terry's personal life was a series of downswings. He told the audience that he suffered from severe attention deficit and was a most unsuccessful student. Dropping out of school at age 14 kept him on the downswing.

The wonder of his story, however, is that he was able to turn his life around, which was mostly due to an interest in birding. Terry discovered for the first time that he could learn and remember what he had learned. He realized that what to do with his life was his choice, not merely chance. By sharing with his audiences how he overcame his early personal struggles, he enriches many lives. Terry is certainly very successful in birding, photography, and presenting outstanding programs.

Contributed by June Whitten

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., November 8, 2007

“Birds of Iskuulpa Creek”

by Jenny Barnett

Pendleton First Christian Church on

N. Main Street in Pendleton



Bird Club Meeting and Annual Fund Raiser

7:00 p.m., December 13, 2007

“The Birds and the Bears”

Presented by June & Duane Whitten,
Betty Klepper, and Fern Oliver

The Club’s fund-raiser will
immediately follow the presentation

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Christmas Bird Count

December 29, 2007

For more information, contact

Aaron Skirvin umatbirder@yahoo.com

or 276-1948

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

6:30 p.m., January 10, 2008

Potluck starting at 6:30 p.m.

Program to be Determined

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 14, 2008

Jack Simons presents

**“The Artwork of John James
Audubon”**

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 13, 2008

**Book Reviews by Russ Betts,
Haval Norman,
Nancy Brown, and Jane Holmes**

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

6:30 p.m., April 10, 2008

Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m.

Program by Dave Herr

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Bird of the Month – Surf Scoter
(*Melanitta perspicillata*)

Surf Scoters are very uncommon in Umatilla County. Some years there are no scoters reported on the annual Umatilla County list, and then years like 2007, several are seen. They, no doubt, pass through here annually, especially in fall migration, but may not be seen or reported.

Several Surf Scoters have been reported this year from the Columbia River near Warehouse Beach and McNary Beach and from Indian Lake. There may have been some in other locations, such as McKay Creek NWR which closes to the public on September 30, which have gone unseen or unreported.

The Surf Scoter is a medium-sized sea duck, about 20 inches long and with a 30-inch wingspan. It is generally black all over, although the females are slightly brownish, with a large, cone-shaped bill, which is multicolored white, orange, and yellow on males and mostly gray with a small white patch at the base on the females. The males have distinctive white patches on the forehead and nape, and, in fact, their Spanish name is Negrita de Nuca Blanca (black with



white nape). The females and juveniles have two variable white spots on the cheek and bill base.

Breeding Surf Scoters migrate in the spring from their Pacific Ocean environment to nest in fresh water lakes of the boreal forests of Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta. Surf Scoters also live on the Atlantic shores and nest as far north as Hudson Bay, and some may winter on The Great Lakes. Non-breeding scoters may remain on the wintering grounds until the following spring.

The nest is on or near the ground, often placed in a clump of small spruce, dwarf willow, or in a grass tussock. Occasionally the nest is far from water, but more often it is near a bog, pond, lake, or sluggish stream in brushy or forested locations. The nest, lined with feathers and down, holds 5-9 pinkish or buffy-white eggs, which are about 2.4 inches long. The males guard the area around the nesting females.

Not a great deal is known about the life of a baby scoter. The incubation period is about 28-30 days and the babies will fledge at about 55 days. Meanwhile, where there are large families of scoters on one lake, the babies may go home with different females from time to time. The mother provides no parental care other than guarding the ducklings, and do not seem to know their ducklings from their neighbor's. The young eat a variety of fresh-water invertebrates, and the adults dive for mollusks, crustaceans, small fish, and fish roe.

In the fall, Surf Scoters migrate back to the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts. They remain in rather shallow ocean bays, river mouths, and estuaries. They gather into large rafts that are tightly packed and they tend move about or take flight together. They may also be in mixed groups of White-winged and Black Scoters. They dive for shellfish and prepare themselves for the long flight north again in the spring.

In the surf, the scoters often "scote", or scoot, on the top of the waves, thus gaining the name of scoter. When you first see the name "scoter" in written form, the natural question is: How is it pronounced? Does it rhyme with "otter" or "motor", or is it "scooter?" In its most accepted English pronunciation, the word "scoter" rhymes with "motor."

This seems to be the "year of the scoter," so look for them in any body of water, especially the Columbia River. Report any of your scoter sightings to Dave Herr or Aaron Skirvin.

Contributed by June Whitten

Heads-Up for December Raffle/Auction

December's Bird Club meeting will feature a raffle and auction to raise money for renting the meeting rooms, funding the website, and off-setting costs for visiting guest speakers. 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 Lorna Waltz (clwaltz@eoni.com, 276-6353).

Shorebirding and Picnicking

Another Bird Club outing was blessed with great weather when 12 club members gathered for a field trip and the annual Bird Club Picnic on September 22. Eleven members from Pendleton met up with Neal Hinds from Hermiston to look for shorebirds at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge.

Several acres of mudflats were exposed in Cold Springs Reservoir, and fall-migrating shorebirds were present in sufficient numbers to keep us occupied for a couple of hours. To get close enough to identify the birds, the group walked onto the mudflats and setup scopes to scan through the birds. A nice array of birds gave us great views: Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Western Sandpipers, Baird's Sandpipers, Killdeers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Red-necked Phalaropes, American White Pelicans, Western Grebes, Northern Shovelers, a lot of "brown fall ducks", a single Great Egret, Double-crested Cormorants, a few American Pipits, some fly-over Sandhill Cranes, and others.

We witnessed a Peregrine Falcon, who was also "watching" the shorebirds, fly through the flocks twice, scattering the birds in all directions. The falcon, trying to "get up close and personal" with the shorebirds, failed in both attempts. As thrilled as we were to see the falcon, I'm sure the shorebirds were even more "thrilled" by the fast-flying hunter.

A little before noon, we adjourned the shorebirding and drove to West Park, a Corps of Engineers facility near McNary Wildlife Nature Area, and fired up the grills for the picnic. As always, the variety of the tasty salads, desserts, and grilled meats reminded us of the great cooks in the club. Participants in the fun trip and picnic were June and Duane Whitten, Lorna Waltz, Neal Hinds, Bruce and Katrina Mayfield, Ann



Wyatt, Jill Wyatt, Connie Betts, Neal Hinds, Jane Holmes and Aaron Skirvin.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

One Tough Duck

Responding to a report of an injured duck at Mission on October 19, Tribal wildlife officials, Randy Alexander and Jenny Barnett, arrived on the scene and immediately had their hands full. The plan was to capture the duck and transport it to Blue Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center for treatment, recovery, and hopefully, release. The duck had other ideas; it wasn't going to the "hospital" quietly.

Randy approached the duck and immediately it bit his hand and then pulled at his pantleg. Finally, subduing the quacker, Randy put it in a box. But, when Jenny peaked in to take a look, the duck lunged and tried to take a bite. The feisty bird did get its bite in when Jenny reached in with her gloved hand to pick it up for examination. Determining that the duck was not injured, Randy and Jenny transported it to Mission Ponds for release. Apparently, the duck had inadvertently landed on dry land and couldn't get airborne again.

Jenny stated that, "We took it down to the water's edge at Mission Ponds and let it go." But the duck wasn't ready to give in, yet. Instead of going into the water, the duck decided it would rather fight than swim and turned on its captors, lunging at them with beak wide open. Jenny further reported that she "put the box down and it hopped in, still trying to bite. I took it back to the water's edge and flipped the duck into the water. At that point it turned and swam off. We watched it preen, bathe, and stretch its wings for a while. It looked healthy, strong and fine."

What was this ferocious duck, one worthy of being the mascot for the University of Oregon's football team? Why, the mighty Ruddy Duck.

Summing up the ordeal, Jenny observed, "I had never handled a Ruddy Duck before and had

no idea they were so feisty. It's such a tiny, little duck, but it was ready to fight to the last. Hopefully, it can refuel at Mission Ponds then continue on its journey."

Tough-guy attitudes occasionally come in small packages!

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

September – October Bird Sightings

I am always disappointed by late September and October birding. I expect great things, but am never able to find any unexpected species. It's good to know that other Umatilla Birders have not had that problem and a number of "good" birds have been reported this period.

Back Yard Birding

Fall is a fun time for those of us who have back yard bird feeders. Birds we have not seen all summer start showing up again. At my (Dave Herr's) feeders I still have well over 100 **American Goldfinches** eating very expensive thistle seed, and just recently **Pine Siskins** have arrived. **Dark-eyed Juncos** and immature **White-crowned Sparrows** are also present in good numbers. Perhaps the most exciting bird at my feeders has been a **Steller's Jay**. Common in the Blue Mountains, I have only seen this species two or three other times on Mount Hebron in northeast Pendleton.

Connie Betts reported in September she also had **American Goldfinches**, **White-crowned Sparrows** and **House Sparrows** in her SW Pendleton yard. She also reported a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** has started harassing the birds at her feeders. A **Mountain Chickadee** was an unexpected visitor in late September. On October 6, Connie reported that **Cedar Waxwings** had moved into her McKay Park neighborhood, and the following day she found a **Townsend's Solitaire** at her bird bath. Birding McKay Community Park in mid-October, Connie reported, along with the expected species, she found **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Spotted Towhees** and several **Dusky Flycatchers**. She also spotted a late **Swainson's Hawk** flying over the burned hillside adjacent to the park.

Although Joy Jaeger's summer home is in the Blue Mountains and not Pendleton, she always has a great



“summer home” yard list. In September, Joy reported **Steller’s Jays, White-crowned Sparrows, White-breasted Nuthatches, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Cassin’s Finches** and a **Williamson’s Sapsucker** at her feeding area. She also reported that an immature **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was trying (unsuccessfully) to catch a **Steller’s Jay**.

Cold Springs NWR and the Columbia River Area

Again this month, a lot birding was done in the areas near and along the Columbia River. On September 22, Pendleton Bird Club members birded at Cold Springs MWR before the annual Club Picnic near McNary Wildlife Area. Results of the field trip and picnic are reported in a separate newsletter article. The following day (September 23) Aaron Skirvin returned to Cold Springs and had an exciting day. Along with the shorebirds spotted the previous day, he found a **MARBLED GODWIT**. This is only the 6th record of this species in Umatilla County. On his hike back to his car he noticed an unusual number of songbirds. Aaron, imitating a Pygmy Owl call, was able to attract 11 different species to his location. By far the most exciting bird was a **BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER**. This was the 4th record of this species in Umatilla County and the 2nd this year. Mike and MerryLynn Denny found one in August near McNary Dam.

Birding at Warehouse Beach Recreation Area along the Columbia River on September 29, Aaron found numerous species and was able to add **Common Yellowthroat** to the County Year List. At Cold Springs he found 2 **Bonaparte’s Gulls** and checking McKay Reservoir one last time before the winter closure found one **AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER**. Both the **Bonaparte’s Gulls** and **AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER** were new birds for the year.

I made a trip to Cold Springs on October 5, but only had binoculars and not my spotting scope. Birds I could identify included a large flock of **American White Pelicans** (I estimated 500), a **Peregrine Falcon** and a flock of **Sandhill Cranes** flying overhead. The following day Aaron and June Whitten checked Cold Springs and found 14 **Black-bellied Plovers**, several sandpiper species including **Pectoral, Western** and **Least** and lots of **Killdeer**. Several **Greater White-fronted Geese** were mingling with **Cackling** and **Canada Geese**. They also found a juvenile/female **Surf Scoter** at Warehouse Beach Recreation Area.

Birding McNary Wildlife Area on October 8, Connie and Russ Betts found many species. Perhaps their most exciting observation was a group of over **150 Western Grebes**. On the trip home, Connie reported seeing large flocks of **Mourning Doves** gathered at nearly every farm yard.

Paul Sullivan led a group from Portland Audubon Chapter through our area the weekend of October 13. At Cold Springs, they reported finding, among other species, **Greater White-fronted Geese, 20 Black-bellied Plovers** and over **200 Long-billed Dowitchers**. Later, birding at McNary Beach Recreation Area, just above McNary Dam, the group found 5 grebe species that included, **Horned, Eared, Red-necked, Western** and **Clark’s Grebes**. They also found **2 Surf Scoters**. On October 14, June Whitten received a report that Brian Johnson and his family, while fishing at Indian Lake, saw **2 Surf Scoters**.

Aaron and June again checked the Columbia River area on October 20. At Warehouse Beach Recreation Area, they found 4 **Bonaparte’s** and a hybrid adult **Western/Glaucous-winged Gull**. They were also able to pick out 5 species of grebes at McNary Beach Recreation Area, including **Western, Clark’s, Pied-billed, Horned** and **Eared**. Later at Cold Springs, they found 17 **Snow Geese, 16 Black-bellied Plovers** and 2 **American Golden-Plovers**. The following day I counted 51 **white geese** (probably all Snow Geese) at Cold Springs.

Other Sightings

On September 21, Jerry Baker found two **BLUE JAYS** near the Post Office in Athena. It will be fun to see if any **BLUE JAYS** decide to winter in Pendleton this year.

On September 30, Aaron found a juvenile **Chipping Sparrow** at McKay Reservoir. Young **Chipping Sparrows** have a streaked breast and are difficult to identify until they molt into their adult plumage.

Birding along Stateline Road in Oregon October 6, Mike and MerryLynn Denny reported finding **400 American Pipits, 2000+ Brewers Blackbirds, 12 Savannah Sparrows** and **15 Brown-headed Cowbirds**.

October 7, Aaron walked along Pendleton’s River Parkway to see what species were around. He reported finding quite a few species, including



Yellow-rumped Warbler (the most common species), **Orange-crowned Warblers**, **Townsend's Warblers**, **Evening Grosbeaks**, **Hermit Thrushes**, **Ruby** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Bewick's Wrens** and **Black-capped Chickadees**. He noted he saw no **House Sparrows** on his walk, which pleased him.

October 13, Aaron reported finding a **Burrowing Owl** standing near a burrow north of Pendleton along Campbell Road. He also reported seeing more **Red-tailed Hawks** than he had seen in several years. He suggested an increase in the mouse/vole numbers might be responsible.

On October 21, Aaron and June and Duane Whitten decided to check the Tollgate area. They were unable to find their target species, which included Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and Pine Grosbeak. However, birding picked up when they checked Langdon Lake (with about an inch of snow on the ground!). On the lake, they found one **Surf Scoter**, **Buffleheads**, one **Common Goldeneye**, **American**

Wigeons and **Ring-necked Ducks**. Checking the area north of Pendleton on their way home, Aaron again noted an increase in the number of hawks in the area. He suggested that a drive up Wildhorse Creek (Adams Road) would be a good place for viewing hawks.

The unsettled weather we have been having is a sure sign that fall is here. Keep your eyes open for new winter visitors. Checking past records Aaron noticed that the birding below McNary Dam usually picks up considerably in November, so this might be another good area to check out. Please continue to send your sightings to Dave Herr, 276-6413 or dsherr1@mac.com

Newsletter Editor: Position Vacant
Editor for April: Aaron Skirvin
Phone Number: 276-1948
Email Address: umatbirder@yahoo.com



Original art work by John Green
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