



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 5, No. 6 Pendleton, Oregon June 2007

## *Salem Audubon Rolls Out The Red Carpet*

**E**ight members of the Pendleton Bird Club left for Salem on May 3 for a fun-packed weekend of birding new areas and making new friends. Glen Lindeman, field trip leader for Salem Audubon, had done a fantastic job of planning and coordinating our entire weekend. We left early every morning and arrived home late every evening. Home was, of course, our motel and even a motel bed near the freeway was a welcome sight after our busy days.

Early Friday a.m. we visited Basket Slough, a National Wildlife Reserve near Dallas. Here we hiked the trail with several admonishes to stay out of the poison oak. Birding was lively with warblers, wrens, and finches entertaining us.

The Oregon Coast was spectacular on Friday — a rare sunny day with no wind! For us from Eastern Oregon, it was fun to see Surf Scoters, Black Oystercatchers, Pigeon Guillemots, Loons, and Whimbrels, to name a few. Thousands of Common Murres on the rocks at the Yaquina Lighthouse were a special treat.

Saturday morning found us sneaking up on a vocal, but not visible, American Bittern at Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge, with its lovely board walk through the wetland. We did see a Virginia Rail, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, a Hutton's Vireo, and dozens of warblers. The main attraction here was a Song Sparrow, — yes! — a Song Sparrow! This Song Sparrow is cinnamon in color, and they call it their Cinnamon Teal—Song Sparrow cross! With the breast a very cinnamon color, it is not easy to identify as a Song Sparrow, but its song gave it away as it was obviously protecting its territory.

Saturday afternoon we went to Finley National Wildlife Reserve south of

Corvallis where we were joined by several birders from Corvallis and Salem. A Yellow-breasted Chat put on a show, just to prove Chats don't always drop immediately into deep brush. On our trip back to Salem, we visited a park in Corvallis and saw several Acorn Woodpeckers, one using a nest hole.

Glen kept us moving with plenty of water and fruit plus great picnic lunches. Those of us who could still keep our eyes open attended a barbecue and enjoyed the birds and flowers of Glen's spacious (3 acres!) back yard. Then it was off to Silver Creek Falls for an Owl Prowl led by Oregon State Park's rangers. About 25 people followed through the dark trails listening for owls. We were finally rewarded with a calling Barred Owl, who persisted in calling long after we left his territory.

The trip home on Sunday, May 6, over Santiam Pass to Sisters was guided by several of the Salem birders. American Dipper, Harlequin Duck, nesting Barrow's Goldeneye, and a Calliope Hummingbird were among the bird treats. An especially good sighting of a White-headed Woodpecker made our day!

Those attending were Russ and Connie Betts, Tanya Harrison, Betty Klepper, Fern Oliver, Aaron Skirvin, and June and Duane Whitten.

*Contributed by June Whitten and Betty Klepper*



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Bird Club Picnic

**Summer Picnic — Date and Location  
To Be Determined**

#### Field Trip to Malheur NWR

**September 6 – 9, 2007**

**The Pendleton Bird Club will join with the  
Salem Audubon Society for a joint trip to  
Malheur and Steens Mountain in early  
September.**

**To participate, you must register by June 1.  
Limit of 12 club members.**

### Bird Club Meeting

**October 11, 2007**

**Terry Steele will present a  
slide program on**

**"Birds of Malheur NWR"**

**Pendleton First Christian Church on  
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

### 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)**

### "Thank You" Pendleton Bird Club!

**A big "thank you" to the Pendleton Bird Club** for providing such a great turnout on May 19 for the River Cleanup! You had the second biggest representation of any of the groups, and, perhaps appropriately, had one of the toughest areas to clean.

It seemed to me that everyone enjoyed themselves in spite of the hard work involved. We were certainly lucky on the weather. The good food and the wonderful camaraderie made the day special for me, and I think for most other Bird Club members.

We collected and disposed of **1,580 pounds of trash**. Most areas reported some improvement in the condition of the Parkway this year, so maybe we are making some progress.

Volunteerism seems to really be alive in Pendleton and having donations of time and effort from groups like yours really helps get things done.

Again, thank you Bird Club members for your hard work this year. I hope that you found this effort worthwhile and will agree to continue to support this project in the future.

Betty Klepper, Coordinator,  
SURE (Stewards of the Umatilla River Environment)

### Little League Heronry



**he Great Blue Heronry** on the Umatilla River across from the Pendleton Little League Park has had another very successful year. There are now more than fifteen nests and, apparently, every nest had a successful hatch of herons (see the March 2005 bird club newsletter for some history on the heronry).

On May 30, Stewards of the Umatilla River Environment (SURE) sponsored a bird walk for Jerri Flynn's Washington School fifth grade students. SURE and Pendleton Bird Club members, Lorna Waltz, Betty Klepper, and June Whitten, and the students walked and birded the River Parkway from the school to the heronry. Duane Whitten met us there with two scopes set up for the students to view the herons.

Duane had the best show about 9 a.m. when the herons were actively feeding, flapping their wings, and nest-hopping. He counted thirty-eight herons at



one time, including several adults. Even after the students arrived, it was impossible to tell how many young herons were in each nest. Since many of the young herons were about to fledge, there were 6 to 8, usually of varying sizes, in some nests at the same time. The nests appear a little fragile for this much weight, but none fell out of the trees while we were there anyway. Do adult herons feed only their own babies, or will they feed any baby in their nest? The eager young herons apparently believe they may be fed in any nest.

It is a joy to watch the students' expressions when they first view the herons in the scope. Invariably, it is, "WOW! I didn't know they were over there." Their enthusiasm for the Parkway and the herons showed in their thank-you letters as well.

Betty Klepper and Bruce Barnes also did a plant class and walk on the Parkway on May 28, just two days prior to the bird walk. Many students were pointing out plants they had learned, especially the Poison Hemlock.

To aid the children in seeing birds on these field trips, SURE has about 9 pairs of used binoculars kept for check-out at the Education Service District (ESD). However, we do not have enough used binoculars to meet the need. If anyone has any used binoculars you would like to donate to this project, SURE and the students will be very appreciative of your donation. You can receive a tax deduction letter from the ESD, if desired. While some students are allowed to bring binoculars from home, most do not have binoculars. It would be nice to have 20 to 25 pairs to loan them for use on these bird walks. When they have to share binoculars, there is always a chance they will not see the bird, or the binoculars could be dropped when passed among the students. Please contact Betty Klepper at 276-8416 if you have binoculars you would like to donate to the SURE.

*Contributed by June Whitten*



## **Bird of The Month -** **Willow Flycatcher** (*Empidonax traillii*)

**Willow Flycatchers, along with so** many of the migrant breeding birds of Umatilla County, are actually here for a very short time. The Willow Flycatchers are rather late arrivals, usually the first ones are reported late in May. Their exact departure dates are less well documented, but most have left our area by September 1 for their wintering grounds in Panama, Mexico, and some southern states. June is the very best time of year to go birding and hear and see our summer resident birds. Fortunately, Willow Flycatchers have a very distinctive song, known as a buzzy *FITZ—beyew*. They prefer a brushy, damp area near a stream and true to their name, they like riparian areas of willows.

Willow Flycatchers are a rather plain flycatcher, as are most empidonax flycatchers, and without hearing their distinctive song, can be hard to identify. They are about 5.75 inches long with a brownish back and tail, and the head and wings are slightly darker. The throat is whitish with a buffy wash on the breast and a white belly and undertail coverts. There are

two rather pale wingbars and a faint or absent eye-ring. They have a moderate primary extension; that is, on a perched bird the primaries extend very noticeably beyond the secondary or tertial feathers.

Willow Flycatchers, along with their more northern counterpart, Alder Flycatchers, were once known as one species — Traill's Flycatcher. The two species are nearly identical, though the Alder may have a more distinct eye-ring, and they have different songs. Generally, the Alder Flycatchers breed across Canada and into Alaska. The breeding ranges of the two do overlap some in the more northern and eastern states. Then it is even more important to separate the *FITZ—beyew* of the Willow from the *ree—BEEa* song of the Alder.

The nest is a compact cup, 2 to 10 feet off the ground, in a slanted fork of a willow or other appropriate tree. The female chooses the nest location but both parents prepare the nest and feed the babies. Three or four buffy-white eggs, about 0.7 inches long and with brownish flecks near the large end, are laid. The adults feed mostly on insects, flying out to catch insects, and often returning to the same branch. The adults may eat a few seeds, but the babies are fed exclusively on insects.



The song of both the Willow and Alder is innate. That is, the song is not learned from parents or neighboring birds; instead, the birds are born with the ability to give their particular song. If a young flycatcher is raised away from any other flycatcher, as an adult it will still sing the same song as its parent. Some birds definitely do learn their songs from parents and others of the same species. These birds often have a more complex song with several variations.

Some very good places to see Willow Flycatchers include Owens Creek crossing on the Albee-Ukiah road not too far from Ukiah, several locations up the Umatilla River, and many brushy, riparian areas. Listen carefully for the very brief, but distinctive, *FITZ-beyew* song, then look for its "author" who will most often be singing from an exposed perch in its brushy habitat.

*Contributed by June Whitten*

**Editor's Note:** The following article was submitted by club member Robert Tapley. Thought you might enjoy reading it...a photo of the robin will be on the club's website shortly or you may go to <http://www.adn.com/news/alaska/wildlife/story/8976364p-8891955c.html> to see it immediately.

## **Robin White-Breast Catches Eye on The Kenai**

RARE: "Melanistically challenged" bird foils attempts to find its nest.

By JOSEPH ROBERTIA  
Peninsula Clarion  
Published: June 14, 2007

**KENAI** -- With a conspicuous red breast, frequent habit of foraging on the front lawn, and distribution range from Barrow to the Florida Keys, the American robin is a familiar sight, but a rare specimen spotted around town recently is worth taking notice of.

"When you see the bird fly, you just see a flash of white," said Marianne Clark of Soldotna. The bird -- unusually colored with large splotches of white plumage -- was spotted about a week ago near Kobuk Street in Soldotna. "It was really obvious on the green lawn. The white caught my eye, but I knew it wasn't a seagull," Clark said.

Todd Eskelin, a biological technician at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, agreed the robin was a rare sighting.

"It's definitely an aberrant bird," he said. "It's not a true albino, but more of a melanistically challenged bird."

Melanin refers to pigment cells that in humans and animals are responsible for coloring skin, hair, feathers, eyes and other body parts. True albinos have a total lack of melanin due to inheritance of recessive genes, but animals that have irregular patches of white instead of the normal color pattern due to genetic defects -- not naturally, or seasonally as with ptarmigan -- are known as "pied" or "piebald."

Eskelin said specific health problems also are occasionally linked to these genetic conditions, and while he couldn't say for certain if the robin would have any ailments, he did speak to the ecological aspects of the bird's blotched pattern.

"If I had to guess, I'd say the white's going to be detrimental because it'll draw attention to itself," he said. "On the nest in dark bushes or the crook of a tree, that white breast could stand out, allowing gray jays, magpies, squirrels and other nest predators to see it."

Eskelin said that is one theory why albinos are so rare in nature. In prey species, the inability to hide from natural predators makes it more difficult to survive, so the albino genes don't show up as often because albino animals do not make it to reproductive age. The same could hold true for predator species because stealth and camouflage while hunting prey could be compromised by white patches.

Still, Eskelin said, he has observed several birds with unnatural white coloring around the Kenai Peninsula.

"I've seen half a dozen other species in the past 10 years, such as redpolls with white heads, fox sparrows and white-crowned sparrows with white tails. Some just had a spot of white, while others were almost all white. I've never seen it in robins, though," he said.

Clark has been a bird rehabilitator for 30 years.

"You don't see many like this, but I have seen crows with some white in them, and in the south I saw a red-tailed hawk with some white, but nothing like this," she said. "This took my breath away the first time I saw it."

In observing the robin, Clark said, she has seen it gathering insects and flying them off to another



location, so she believes the bird may have a nest somewhere.

"I'd like to locate the nest to see if any of the babies have odd colors as well," she said.

So far, though, Clark said the bird has been leery of observers and tracking down its nest has been difficult.

"It seems very spooky compared to common robins," she said. "You can walk near them and they'll keep feeding, but this white one sees you on the other side of the street and takes off."

## May - June Bird Sightings

As we move from May into June, birds that breed in this region and settling into their courtship and nesting routines, and the number of new birds sightings has dropped significantly from last month. Even so, we had some notable sightings.

On May 22, Aaron found a **Clark's Grebe** hanging out the Western Grebes at McKay Reservoir. Aaron's sharp eyes also spotted 21 male **Lesser Scaups** and 1 male **Ring-necked Duck**. Aaron continued his waterfowl streak on May 23, spotting a pair of **Canvasbacks** at Mission Pond.

A **Northern Mockingbird** was discovered by Karen Kronner and Bob Gritzki near their North Hill home in Pendleton. June and Duane Whitten and Aaron Skirvin saw the same bird in the same area the next day. This is a rare bird in Umatilla County, with this sighting being the 5<sup>th</sup> on record.

Ron Lee saw 3 **Gray Jays** at Indian Lake on May 25. On the same day, Aaron found the first **Bobolinks** of the year, in their usual spot near Ukiah. Neal Hinds located the first **American Bittern** of the year on May 26, at the meadows near Stanfield and Echo. On May 27, Aaron found several new birds for this year, including **Western Flycatcher** and **Willow Flycatcher** along Linton Mountain Road, **Wilson's Warbler** near Langdon Lake, and **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Burnt Cabin Overlook.

June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin enticed a **Sora** to answer a play back recording, thereby documenting the first Sora in Umatilla County this year. The bird

was in a marsh along Soap Hill Road when it was tricked. June also found a **Green-tailed Towhee** in the Tower Burn area, along USFS Road #55.

Memorial Day Weekend found Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten adding a lot of birds to the county year list. They found 37 species at McKay Reservoir on May 30, included several county year birds: **Forster's Tern, Common Loon, Eared Grebe, Franklin's Gull and California Gull**. On June 1 they found **Common Poorwills**, and a **Burrowing Owl** who acted like it had a nest nearby. along Gurdane Road. On June 2, they located the first **Swainson's Thrush** of the year, at Emigrant Springs.

On June 3 Alison Havens joined Aaron and June. They located 2 singing **Veery**, along Cayuse Road, a **Northern Goshawk** at Langdon Lake, and **Brewer's Sparrows** at the summit of Bald Mountain, east of Tollgate.

Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten located a **Ferruginous Hawk** nest at Windmill Canyon on June 9.



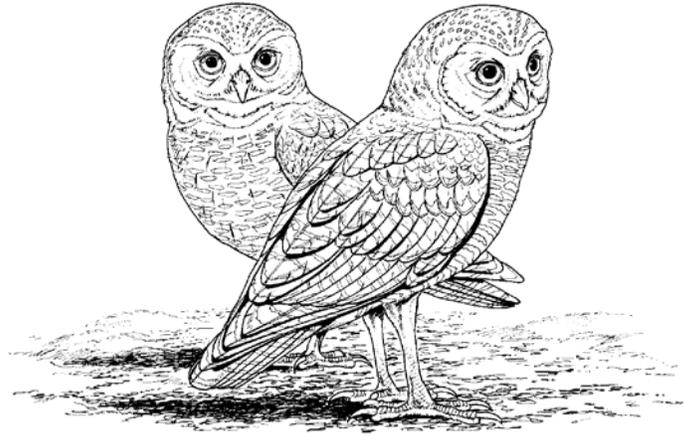
June 11 was a momentous day in Umatilla County birding history, when Barbara Clark reported a **White-winged Dove** at her feeder near Pendleton. Barbara, her husband Andrew, June and Duane Whitten and Aaron Skirvin confirmed the bird, which was the first record EVER of White-winged Dove in Umatilla County.

Apparently not wanting to be forgotten in the June newsletter, the **Great-tailed Grackle** showed itself to Jack Simons in Jack's pasture on June 13. The grackle was irritating a Brewer's blackbird, who chased it off.

Shorebirds should soon start their early migration through Umatilla County. Keep a sharp eye open at wetlands and mudflats, birders, and we'll see what interesting birds we can find next month.

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