



Newsletter of the Pendleton Bird Club

# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 5, No. 9 Pendleton, Oregon September 2007

## **RETURN OF THE BIG SIT! — SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2007**



**he Pendleton Bird Club** will participate again in the Big Sit!, a national and international bird-count event. It is a fun time for some pretty relaxed birding. While the rules allow anyone to participate from midnight on Saturday to midnight on Sunday, October 14, our planned event will begin about 9 a.m. (or earlier if anyone prefers) and last until we are ready to call it a day.

We will have three circles this year: one just below the spillway at McNary Dam; one in the usual location at the McNary Wildlife ponds, where there is a view of the Columbia River and a pond as well; and the third will be at Cold Springs NWR. At Cold Springs, park in Parking Lot D, and walk down the boat ramp. There is a gate there, which is easily walked around. Aaron Skirvin will set up at Cold Springs, and he should be visible, perched on the mudflats, from these directions.

One of the sponsors of the event, Bird Watcher's Digest, encourages locating circles in National Wildlife Refuges this year. This makes the Cold Springs location special.

The circles are 17 feet in diameter. Only birds seen or heard by the counters who are inside the circle may be counted. Also, one person may leave the circle to investigate birds seen or heard, but the bird may be counted only if it is detected by someone standing within the circle.

Bring a lawn chair, binoculars, scope if you have one, snacks or lunch, and possibly hot drinks. The weather could be chilly on Sunday, October 14, so dress appropriately.

**Questions?** If so, please e-mail or call June Whitten 276-9019 [jwhitten@oregontrail.net](mailto:jwhitten@oregontrail.net)

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **Bird Club Meeting**

**7:00 p.m., October 11, 2007**

### **“Birds of Malheur NWR”**

**by Terry Steele**

**Pendleton First Presbyterian Church  
201 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton**

### **The Big Sit! Bird Count**

**Sunday, October 14, 2007**

Enjoy a few hours or more of relaxed bird counting near McNary Dam at Umatilla or Cold Springs NWR, east of Hermiston. The Pendleton Bird Club will participate again this year in the Big Sit! Bird Count, so put October 14 on your calendar! Want to participate? We hope so!

**For further information, contact June Whitten: 276-9019**



## **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

## **Umatilla County**

### **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Saturday, December 29, 2007

All are welcome and encouraged to join the count!

Mark your calendar and reserve December 29<sup>th</sup> for  
counting birds.

Compiler: Aaron Skirvin 276-1948  
[umatbirder@yahoo.com](mailto:umatbirder@yahoo.com)

## **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)

## **BIRD OF THE MONTH: PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)**



Due to its name, the tiny Pygmy Nuthatch is only 4.25” long with less than an 8-inch wingspan. They are fairly common in the forests, especially old-growth ponderosa pine, in Oregon, Washington, California, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. Due to their small size, variable high calls, and tendency to feed near the treetops, they aren’t always easily seen.

Their cryptic coloring, gray backs, brownish caps, and muted white and beige underparts also help to make them inconspicuous. Their calls are shrill piping notes, “pip-pip—pip-pip-pip,” with high chipping and squeaky notes added.



*Pygmy Nuthatch nestling at nesting cavity. (Photo by Mike Danzenbaker)*

The eastern counterpart of the Pygmy Nuthatch is the Brown-headed Nuthatch, which is very similar in appearance. They both appear large-headed and chunky, though small. The Brown-headed has a distinctive brown cap, gray back, and whitish underparts. The Brown-headed Nuthatch lives exclusively in Texas east to Florida and The Carolinas, so the ranges of the two species do not overlap.

The Pygmy Nuthatch is a cavity nester, using natural cavities, old woodpecker holes, or even nest boxes. They can, and often do, excavate their own cavity in a snag or dead branch, preferring pine or aspen. Both the male and female excavate the nest and line it with available materials, such as bark, plant down, fur, and feathers. The female then incubates 5 to 9 eggs for 12 to 17 days. The male and the year-old helpers bring food to the incubating female. Pygmy Nuthatches are one of the few known bird species to have the year-old offspring assist in raising the young. The babies



fledge between 2-3 weeks of age, but the adult birds continue to feed them for an additional 3 or 4 weeks.

Pygmy Nuthatches do not migrate, but may move to warmer areas for a better food supply. They are very social and are usually found in small flocks. They eat mainly insects, including weevils, leaf and bark beetles, but turn to seeds, mainly from pine or fir cones, in winter. While foraging, these nuthatches often work around the top of a tree and then proceed down the tree, always head first.

To save energy in winter, Pygmy Nuthatches roost together in cavities. As many as one hundred birds may crowd into one hole, roosting in stacks of squares, oblongs, or wedges. A bird at the bottom of the stack saves 6 times more energy than a bird at the top. While roosting, the Pygmy Nuthatches lower their body temperature (hypothermia), which also allows them to conserve energy.

Some of the best habitat in Umatilla County for Pygmy Nuthatches is the ponderosa pine forest along the Albee Road and Battle Mountain State Park along the scenic corridor. Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flat are also good places to find Pygmy Nuthatches.

*Contributed by June Whitten*

## **AUGUST - SEPTEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS**

Every year at this time most of the birding in the county focuses on shorebirds, and the two best spots are Cold Springs and McKay Reservoirs. Both of these areas have produced a nice variety of birds during this reporting period.

### **COLD SPRINGS RESERVOIR**

By the end of August the water level at Cold Springs had dropped enough that plenty of good habitat was showing. Birding the area August 19, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found 2 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 5 **Black-necked Stilts**, 200+ **Western Sandpipers**, several **Red-necked Phalaropes** and 1 **Orange-crowned Warbler**. Birding the area on September 2, my list (Dave Herr) included **Western**, **Least**, **Baird's** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**, **Red-necked Phalarope** and **Killdeer**. I also found the first for the year **Stilt** and **Pectoral Sandpipers**.

On September 4, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found an estimated 500 shorebirds at Cold Springs which included 40% **Killdeer**, 45% **Western Sandpiper**, 10% **Red Phalaropes**, 1 **Pectoral**

**Sandpiper**, 2 **Lesser** and one **Greater Yellowlegs** and a few **Baird's Sandpipers**. They also found 11 **STILT SANDPIPERS** (a high number for Umatilla County, although Mike Denny found 95+ **Stilt Sandpipers** at the Walla Walla River Delta the following day). A **Black-bellied Plover** was also added to the county year list.

Birding Cold Springs September 6, I found many of the species previously reported, but not the high numbers June and Aaron reported (they always find more birds than I do!). I did find one **Solitary Sandpiper** in the area; this is a species that has been difficult to locate in the County this year.

On September 16 June and Aaron, birding at Cold Springs, added **SANDERLING** to the county year list. This is a bird more commonly found along ocean shores and is not found in our County every year. They also reported 400+ **Killdeer** and well as **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Stilt**, **Western**, **Least**, **Baird's** and **Pectoral Sandpipers** as well as **Long-billed Dowitchers**, **Red-necked Phalarope** and **American Pipits**. The same day I birded the upper end of the Reservoir, but had much poorer luck, finding mostly **Killdeer**. I attributed the lack of shorebird to the fact that a **Prairie Falcon**, **Coopers Hawk** and **Red-tailed Hawk** were all patrolling the area.

### **McKAY RESERVOIR**

The water level at McKay Reservoir has been dropping rapidly and is much lower this year than it was last year at the same time. This area should remain good for shorebirding until the gate is locked at the end of September.

On September 2, I checked McKay, but found only one **Greater Yellowlegs** and a smattering of **Western** and **Least Sandpipers**.

Checking the same area the following day, Aaron and June found approximately 120 shorebirds including **Western** and **Baird's Sandpipers**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Red-necked Phalarope** and **Killdeer**. The best find was a **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER**, which was only the fifth sighting of this species in the County. **Long-billed Dowitchers** are a common in Eastern Oregon, but **Short-billed Dowitchers** are generally found along the coast. Identifying the two species is difficult, especially if the birds are not calling.



September 4, Russ and Connie Betts checked McKay and found a nice variety of birds that included **Red-necked Phalaropes, Western Sandpipers, Western Grebes, Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, Green-winged Teal, Double-crested Cormorants** one **Osprey** and 3 **Great Blue Herons**.

I quickly checked McKay on September 5, and along with the expected species found a **Long-billed Curlew** feeding along the shore near the breast of the dam. I had not expected to find this species so late in the year.

September 14, Aaron and June found a number of interesting species at McKay including a hunting **Peregrine Falcon, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs,** one **Baird's Sandpiper,** one **Long-billed Dowitcher** and several **Killdeer**. There were also at least 20 **Eared Grebes** as well as nearly a hundred **Ruddy Ducks** on the reservoir.

During a survey of McKay on September 16, I found **Baird's, Western and Pectoral Sandpipers,** a **Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs,** one **Dowitcher sp.** and **Killdeer**.

Checking the Reservoir September 19, Aaron found a number of species including **Black-bellied Plovers** (the first time he had seen this species at McKay), a **Peregrine Falcon, Great Egret, Pectoral, Baird's and Western Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitchers,** both **Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintails, American Wigeon** and a **Clark's Grebe**.

### BACK YARDS

A number of folks have been keeping track of the birds seen in their yards and around their feeders. Here is a summary of what has been reported.

Connie Betts' yard in southwest Pendleton has been a busy place. **Black-capped Chickadees** and **White-crowned Sparrows** have returned to her yard and a few **American Goldfinches** are using her feeders. Connie had a real surprise on September 4, when she saw a **TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** using her birdbath.

Bette Husted reported that a pair of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** has been coming to her ground feeders in southwest Pendleton since July.

Mayanna Porter reported that she has had been feeding up to **400-500 California Quail** at her Pilot Rock home this past winter, but the number has dropped off a bit during the summer months. She also is feeding about 30 to 40 **Mourning Doves** and reported that the **White-crowned Sparrows** have returned to her yard.

Although not strictly a "yard bird", **22 Turkey Vultures** circled Jack Simons' home near Mission on September 12. It seems to me that there are more Turkey Vultures around this fall than in past years. Has anyone else noticed this?

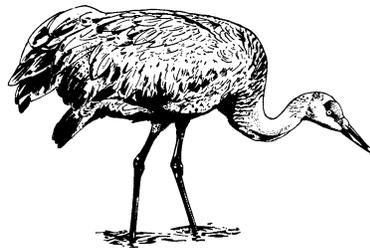
### OTHER SIGHTINGS

Birding in the Juniper Canyon, Holdman, and Kosmos Road area of the county on August 19, Aaron and June found a number of interesting species including **Lark Sparrows, Chukars,** and **Loggerhead Shrikes**.

Driving on School House Road the next day, Aaron encountered a bird in the middle to the gravel road he could not immediately identify. After careful study, Aaron determined it was an immature **SAGE SPARROW**. It would be interesting to know if this bird was hatched in the County or was just migrating through. Birding below McNary Dam on August 24, Mike and MerryLynn Denny found a great addition to our County Year list. Mike, checking the locust trees in the park directly below the dam, found a male **BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER**. This species is seldom found in our county, as this is only the 3<sup>rd</sup> reported sighting of this warbler.

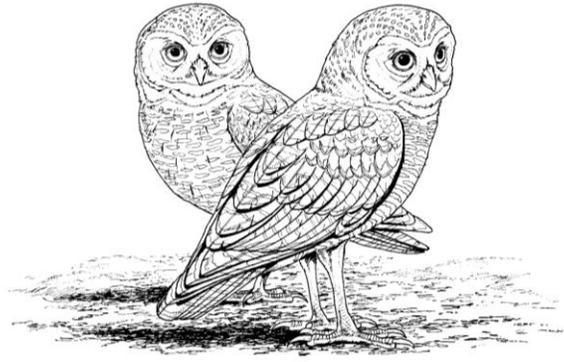
I am compiling this listing while sitting at the Malheur Field Station and through the open window can hear hundreds of calling **Sandhill Cranes**. I'm sure some of these birds are from the same flocks that folks reported hearing as they flew over Pendleton the last few days. What a wonderful sound. Well, migrating cranes and returning White-crowned Sparrows remind us that fall is here.

This means many of our fall friends will soon be returning to Umatilla County. Please keep your eyes open and send your sightings to me, Dave Herr at [dsherr1@mac.com](mailto:dsherr1@mac.com) or (541) 276-6413.



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