



# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 6, No. 11 Pendleton, Oregon November 2008

## Mike Denny Presents, “Birds of the Inland Northwest and Northern Rockies”

At the November 13 Pendleton Bird Club meeting, Mike Denny captivated his audience of 34 club members with photos of scenes and birds common to Eastern Oregon. Emphasizing that habitat is the key to determining which birds will be attracted to an area, Mike talked about the more common bird species using the various habitats, which are scattered across the landscape of the inland Pacific Northwest. Mike pointed out that change in elevation and differences in annual rainfall and soil conditions all affect plant life and other habitat features, which in turn dictate the bird species nesting or otherwise using certain habitats.

If you want to find Varied Thrushes in the spring, for example, look for them in the higher elevation, moist, older forests in the Blue Mountains. In fall and winter, the thrushes move to lower elevations, and if you want to try to attract one to your yard, put out cut-up apple pieces. Want to find a Dusky Grouse (formerly called Blue Grouse)? Mike noted that Dusky Grouse love grasshoppers. Therefore, look for the grouse on the grass-covered ridges, near stands of conifers, where grasshoppers are common in late summer in the Blue Mountains.

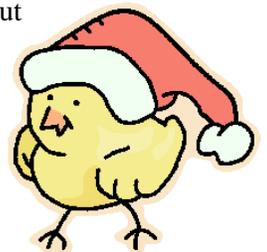
Ever wonder why Black-billed Magpies are seen in the Blue Mountains in fall? Mike gave us the reason: they are looking for “gut piles” where hunters have dressed out the deer and elk they’ve shot. Magpies eat carrion, and the hunters provide a ready-made food supply for the magpies. Need a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch for your bird list? In winter, these rosy-finches use old Cliff Swallow nests as night roosts. Mike advised stationing yourself in mid-afternoon near an old Cliff Swallow nesting cliff and watch for

rosy-finches as they come in to roost. These are just a few examples of Mike’s wealth of birding knowledge that he shared with club members.

Mike’s new book, *Birds of the Inland Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies*, which he co-authored with Harry Nehls and Dave Trochlell, was also a big hit with club members. Mike and his wife, MerryLynn, sold all of the copies they brought with them. The easy-to-carry field guide has many desirable features, including good photos and descriptions of the birds, distribution maps, and a place to record sightings on the same page. It is available at Armchair Books in Pendleton and two copies will be included in the Bird Club’s Christmas raffle on December 11.

## Planning for the Bird Club’s December Raffle/Auction

December’s Bird Club meeting will feature a raffle and auction to raise money for club activities like funding the website. 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!



If you have any questions, please contact Betty Klepper at [klepperb@ucinet.com](mailto:klepperb@ucinet.com) or 276-8416, who has agreed to chair the event again this year. Other



committee members, Lorna Waltz at [clwaltz@eoni.com](mailto:clwaltz@eoni.com) or 276-6353; and Jeanne Jensen at [ljensen@oregontrail.net](mailto:ljensen@oregontrail.net) or 276-7510, will also be happy to assist with questions.

Mark your calendar and plan on attending the December 11 Bird Club meeting. The fund-raiser is always fun event. Bring a friend, they'll have fun, too.

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **Bird Club Meeting**

7:00 p.m., December 11, 2008

## **NORTH TO ALASKA, PART 1:**

### **BIRDING AT AMBLER**

By Betty Klepper and Aaron Skirvin

&

## **Annual Bird Club Fundraiser**

Pendleton First Christian Church  
N. Main Street, Pendleton

### **Christmas Bird Count**

January 3, 2009

We need your help to count birds!  
See the article in this Newsletter on  
how to get involved in the 109<sup>th</sup>  
Christmas Bird Count.

For more information, contact

Aaron Skirvin

[umatbirder@yahoo.com](mailto:umatbirder@yahoo.com)

or 541-276-1948

### **Bird Club Meeting**

7:00 p.m., January 8, 2009

## **NORTH TO ALASKA, PART 2: BIRDING AT GAMBELL AND NOME**

By June Whitten & Duane Whitten

Pendleton First Christian Church  
N. Main Street, Pendleton

### **Bird Club Meeting**

7:00 p.m., February 12, 2009

## **Program TBD**

Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton

### **Bird Club Meeting**

7:00 p.m., March 12, 2009

## **QUEST FOR THE ROSEATE SPOONBILL**

By Bruce Mayfield

Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton



## **Bird Club Meeting**

**7:00 p.m., April 9, 2009**

### **BIRD TREKKING THROUGH PANAMA**

**By June & Duane Whitten and  
Betty Klepper**

**Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton**

## **Bird Club Meeting**

**7:00 p.m., May 14, 2009**

### **Program TBD**

**Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton**

## **Bird of the Month – American Crow** *(Corvus brachyrhynchos)*

**Why would anyone want to write** about the pesky American Crow? Does the Crow have any redeeming qualities to brag about? The Crow thinks so. Redeeming — maybe; interesting — definitely. Crows are so mysterious that whole books have been written about them. Perhaps we can reveal some facts that will make the crow more attractive.

As stated in, *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*, by John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell, “*There are more than forty distinct species of ‘crows,’ technically members of the genus Corvus, worldwide, which people interact with to various degrees. These include primarily meat-eating ‘ravens’ and omnivorous ‘crows, rooks, and jackdaws’ that favor fruit, seeds, and insects. Familiar jays and magpies, nutcrackers, and obscure choughs are close relatives to crows that round out the biological family*

*collectively known as corvids. Crows are clever and problem solvers. They have disproportionately large heads accommodating large brains that endow these birds with exceptional memory and intelligence. They are able to learn, remember, and use insight to solve natural and human challenges.”*

Crows are black, noisy, and thieves. Their black color helps them blend into shadows and absorb sun to maintain body heat and “turn their natural preen oil into a course of Vitamin D.”<sup>1</sup> Patterns of *caws* and *crocks*, which make up a complex language, “alert, warn, contact, and greet others.”<sup>2</sup> They have many types of calls and are great mimics. They invade our yards to eat the suet left for Northern Flickers and Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees. They eat small animals, birds’ eggs, nestlings, garbage, seeds, nuts and snails. They watch the squirrels take peanuts from the feeder and hide them. The crows follow and dig up the peanuts. Crows are not easily intimidated. Try chasing one away from your feeders. They’ll fly up a short distance with much squawking, wait for you to go inside and then return to the feeder. They do like being with humans.

Their beaks are shaped so they can carry eggs, tear open bags, pick up squashed bugs, dig insects from bark, and break open nuts and snails. Crows have been seen to place nuts in a crevice in a road where cars will run over them. They will drop nuts from a great height to crack them open. They have short, fanned tails (distinguishing them from the ravens which have wedged-shaped tails) and broad wings.

Crows have interesting habits, such as hiding, soaking, and washing their food. The following behavioral information was received from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology:

“Crows and all members of the family Corvidae will store excess food. Sometimes you can see crows bury things in the grass of the yard (usually covering it up with a leaf or plucked grass; sometimes looking at it several times and using a number of different coverings before being satisfied that it really is hidden). They also hide food in trees or rain gutters, or whatever is a handy spot. In April crows are nesting, and the female breeder sits all day on the eggs or young nestlings. She leaves the nest only infrequently and the male and the helpers bring her food. Food is easy to bring (all pecked into pieces and stashed in the throat under the tongue), but water



is harder. So, crows often will dunk dry foods in water and take the moistened food to the nest. In my experience with several captive crows, some individual crows also seem more inclined to put food in water and leave it there than others. Perhaps they want it to rot a little to improve the flavor a bit before they eat it (just like we do when we 'age' beef)."<sup>3</sup>

Habitat can be farmland, fields, open woods, parks, urban, and suburban areas. They gather in "communities" in spring and fall. Here in Pendleton, as many as 44 American Crows have been seen "in community" in Pendleton's Community Park.

Research has shown that American Crows can live between 14 – 24 years. They lay three to nine eggs per clutch, incubate them for 16 – 19 days, and fledge young after 4 – 6 weeks.

Nests are built in the crotch of trees, shrubs or utility poles 10 – 70 feet above ground. Outside nest dimensions are 22 x 26" across, 9" in height with an inside width of 6 – 7" across and 4 – ½" deep. The baskets are made of sticks, bark and vines glued together with mud. The linings are bark fibers, moss, grass, feathers, fur, hair, roots, and leaves.

Of interest, crows born in urban settings return to breed and raise young in the urban areas. Rural crows breed and raise young in rural settings. Crows participate in what is known as allopreening, where one partner grooms the other on the head and face. Young males may not breed for three years, but will hang around with their parents, and help feed nestlings. However, the yearling females leave and start their own families.

Other characteristics of Crows include playing, mobbing, communal roosting, gathering around their dead, and, on occasion, executing one of their own: *"Killing does not appear to be motivated by hunger, because the dead are not eaten. It is not done in the course of usual territorial defense, because too many bystanders are involved. Perhaps it is done for status enhancement. A subordinate that kills or partakes in the killing of a dominant may rise in status among its peers and is therefore climbing the avian social ladder. A sort of 'gang mentality' may actually drive this extreme behavior. As many gather, several move*

*in to kill an injured or newly vulnerable dominant bird. The competitive crowd increases motivation to kill. As one crow gets close, another follows or moves closer, causing the first attacker to get still closer or peck still harder. This grows like a rolling snowball until one bird kills another."* (from *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*).



*The American Crow. Photo by Connie Betts.*

American Crows are closely related to European Carrion Crows. They "share about 95% of their genetic material, which suggests that they diverged from a common

ancestor more than 2 million years ago."<sup>4</sup> They probably reached North America via the Bering Land Bridge, which would have provided the necessary habitat.

Watch and learn from the crow. Does he mimic us or do we mimic him? You can learn more about crows at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org).

<sup>1</sup> Marzluff and Angel, pg. 171

<sup>2</sup> Marzluff and Angell, pg. 203

<sup>3</sup> See [www.birds.cornell.edu/crows](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows) - in the FAQ section.

<sup>4</sup> Marzluff and Angell, pg. 84

*Submitted by Connie & Russ Betts*

## Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count Saturday, January 3, 2009

Here are the details for the 22nd official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which is scheduled for SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2009. This local count is part of the national 109th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. If you are interested in the history of the Christmas Bird Count and count data accumulated for the hundreds of counts across the country, please visit Audubon's website (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>).

During our count last year (December 29, 2007), 18 bird counters saw 69 species of birds, and tallied a total of 8,266 individual birds in our circle. Our count circle is 15 miles in diameter, with the center located about 7 miles southeast of Pendleton. We welcome everyone (from beginning birder to expert) to help count birds on January 3, 2009. There are no major changes in Audubon's rules



from last year as to how we conduct our count. The participant fee remains at \$5 per birder for those participants older than 18 years of age, and each participant will receive a CBC issue of American Birds.

### **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)

Our count circle is divided into four areas, and each area has a Coordinator (see below). Each Coordinator is responsible for organizing and managing the bird counters in his/her area. To get involved, each interested participant must contact directly one of the Area Coordinators to join that group for count day. The coordinator will set a place and time for his/her team members to meet on count morning. If you want to help count birds on January 3, please contact one of the coordinators listed below.

- ◆ **Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek, Patawa Creek and Riverside) *Jack Simons* — home: 276-8566
- ◆ **Area 2** (Umatilla River and Cayuse) *Jenny Barnett* — home: 276-0639; cell: 310-0374
- ◆ **Area 3** (McKay Reservoir, Upper McKay Creek, and Birch Creek) *June and Duane Whitten* — home: 276-9019
- ◆ **Area 4** (Mission, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats) *Aaron Skirvin* — home: 276-1948; cell: 541-215-0761

Bird enthusiasts can also choose to do feeder counts if you have an active feeder in the count circle. If you want to do a feeder count, contact Aaron Skirvin (see contact information below). All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the count results. Abby's Pizza on Southgate in Pendleton has reserved the banquet room for us from 4:00 – 7:30 pm that evening. Please contact Aaron Skirvin (276-1948, home or email at [umatbirder@yahoo.com](mailto:umatbirder@yahoo.com)) if you have any questions about the areas or feeder counts or how to participate.

### **LET'S GO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTING ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2009!!!**

*Submitted by Aaron Skirvin*

## **Bird Club Donates Wood Duck Nest Boxes**

**Next spring, when Wood Ducks** begin searching for nesting sites at Cold Springs NWR, they will find several new nest boxes ready for their use. Ken Thompson, a citizen volunteer at Cold Springs NWR, asked if the Pendleton Bird Club would be able to furnish six new Wood Duck nest boxes for installation at Memorial Marsh at the refuge.

The club agreed to build the new nest boxes, and Ken provided the plans for constructing them. Jack Simons gathered up the materials and cut out the pieces; Duane Whitten and Aaron Skirvin assembled the boxes this past week (see additional photos on the website). Cost of materials was \$84 (paid for out of



*Duane Whitten puts finishing touches on one of six Wood Duck nest boxes.*

club funds), and time and tools for the project were donated by club members. Ken and other refuge personnel will install the boxes this winter.

This project helps the Bird Club fulfill its mission, which includes "... promoting the conservation of birds and their habitat." If you visit Memorial Marsh next spring (Memorial Marsh is located in the southeast corner of Cold Springs NWR), perhaps you will spot one or more of the nest boxes and possibly some Wood Ducks as well. Even if you don't see the nest boxes, there will be plenty of waterfowl and other marsh birds to see, making your trip well worth the effort.

*Submitted by Aaron Skirvin*



## Carefully Check the Waxwings

If you have waxwings in your neighborhood this winter, give them a second look to be sure of their identity. Cedar Waxwings are year-round birds in Umatilla County; although they are less common in winter than in summer. In the past week or so, however, there have been reports of Bohemian Waxwings (the Cedar's larger, northern cousin) in the Walla Walla area. And, on November 20, I saw a flock of 13 Bohemian Waxwings at Mission, which is located about 5 miles east of Pendleton.

Bohemian Waxwings are not reported every year in Umatilla County, and when they are reported it's always between November and late February. During some winters, as many as several hundred are seen in Pendleton, but most winters none, or only a few flocks, are reported. This winter might be an irruption year for Bohemian Waxwings, locally. The winter diet of both waxwing species is composed almost entirely of fruits; mountain ash berries and crabapples seem to be favorites. Check the mountain ash and crabapple trees in your neighborhood for Bohemian Waxwings and be sure to report any sightings to Dave Herr at [dsherr1@mac.com](mailto:dsherr1@mac.com) and me (Aaron Skirvin) at [umatbirder@yahoo.com](mailto:umatbirder@yahoo.com).

*Submitted by Aaron Skirvin*

## October – November Bird Sightings

Winter is fast approaching and most of the summer migrants have left the area. However, new birds, especially raptors are arriving daily. Now is a great time to take a drive and see how many hawks and eagles you can spot.

October 22, Barbara and Andrew Clark visited the Ukiah area and reported finding a **bluebird** just above Ukiah and further along the road a **Ruffed Grouse**. There was a **Northern Shrike** at Ukiah Meadows, and at the sewer ponds, a flock of **Canada Geese** and one **Redhead**. The same day Aaron Skirvin, birding at Cold Springs NWR, found 1 **Semipalmated Plover**, one **Black-bellied Plover**, a **Tundra Swan**, one **Snow Goose**, 12 **Canvasbacks**, 30 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, 24 **Dunlin** and 15 **Killdeer**.

Birding at Pendleton Community Park in SW Pendleton on October 23, Russ and Connie Betts found a **Slate-colored Junco**, the first one reported this fall/winter. The next day, Connie Betts reported

several flocks of **Canada Geese** flying over McKay Reservoir, and Mayanna Kopp noted two large flocks of **Canada Geese** flying south between Pilot Rock and Pendleton. Mayanna also reports she has as many as **300 California Quail** feeding in her Pilot Rock yard.

This must be the season for **Hooded Mergansers**. October 24, Aaron reported seeing one male **Hooded Merganser** and a river otter at Mission Ponds. On October 27, Aaron reported 3 female **Hooded Mergansers** and 2 river otters at the ponds. On October 29, Jack Simons reported finding **18 Hooded Mergansers**, and on November 6, Jack counted **35 Hooded Mergansers** on Mission Ponds. A group of **35 Hooded Mergansers** on the same pond must be a record high number for Umatilla County.

October 25, Aaron and June Whitten birded between Pilot Rock and the Columbia River. They found 3 **Pacific Loons** below McNary Dam. Also at the dam were **Glaucous-winged, Herring, California and Ring-billed Gulls**. They reported seeing a **Merlin** in the Corps of Engineers park opposite the main entrance to McNary Wildlife Area. At McNary Beach Recreation Area they found a **Clark's Grebe**, several **Western Grebes**, one **Horned Grebe** and one **Herring Gull**. Checking Cold Springs for shorebirds they found 2 **Black-bellied Plovers**, 2 late **Western Sandpipers**, 20 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, 35 **Dunlin** and 40 **Long-billed Dowitchers**. However without question, their most unusual sighting of the day was an amazing **25 Eurasian Collared-Doves** counted in Pilot Rock.

On October 26, Aaron drove to the Tollgate area via Thorn Hollow Grade. On the Grade he found several raptor species including, one **Golden Eagle**, one **Bald Eagle**, one **Rough-legged Hawk**, one **Northern Harrier** and a **Northern Pygmy Owl**. Although he had hoped to find a Surf Scoter on Langdon Lake, all he was able to find on the lake were 8 **Mallards** and 5 **American Wigeons**.

Russ and Connie Betts checked the McNary Dam area on October 27. They reported lots of **Double-crested Cormorants** and **Ring-billed Gulls** below the dam and two pairs of **Hooded Mergansers** and a **Pied-billed Grebe** along with many other ducks on the ponds at the Wildlife Area. The Betts also reported seeing numerous **Red-tailed Hawks** and **American Kestrels** along the highways between Pendleton and McNary Dam. On October 28, Jenny



Barnett reported finding a **Merlin** and a **Short-eared Owl** on Telephone Ridge, which is located in the foothills of the Blue Mountains south of Thornhollow. On October 30, Connie Betts reported that the crabapple tree in Betty Klepper's yard in SW Pendleton "was decorated with **Cedar Waxwings**."

Aaron reported there were 2 **Common Loons** and 3 **Western Grebes** on Indian Lake on October 31. November 1, Aaron birded the area around the Columbia River. Some of his most notable sightings included 2 **Mew Gulls** roosting on the roof of the Umatilla High School, 3 **Common Loons** below McNary Dam and at the dam, 7 **Bonaparte's Gulls**, a **Western Gull**, 2 **Herring Gulls** and a **Glaucous-winged Gull**. He also found 2 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, 2 **Black-bellied Plovers**, 3 **Dunlin**, 50 **Long-billed Dowitchers** and 9 **Tundra Swans** at Cold Springs NWR. Birding the same area on November 5, Aaron reported 3 **Common Loons** above and 3 below McNary Dam. Below the dam he also found one **Red-necked Grebe**, several **Bonaparte's Gulls** and 2 **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. There was one **Eared Grebe** at McNary Beach Recreation Area.

November 6, Aaron reported seeing 13 **Swans** (probably **Tundra**) as well as 2 **Common Loons** at Indian Lake. The same day, Jack Simons was able to relocate 3 of the **Chickens** he found behind his home along the Umatilla River last month. Jack said he would continue to monitor the **Chicken** population to see if any will make it through the winter.

Khanh Tran, a birder from Portland, found a **Great Gray Owl** near Deadman Pass Rest Area along I-84 on the evening of November 7. This is the first report of a **Great Gray Owl** in that area of the county this year. Other reports have come from Milton-Freewater, Highway 204 (road killed bird), and Indian Lake.

The most exciting species found this period was reported by Mike and MerryLynn Denny and John Gatchet. Birding below McNary Dam on November 9, they found one mature and one immature **BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE**. This gull species, normally found along the Oregon Coast during certain times of the year, has never been reported in the county before. The **Kittiwakes** stayed in the area for several days after the initial report. Along with the **Kittiwakes**, Mike reported finding a **Red-breasted Merganser** and the previously reported **Red-necked Grebe** below the dam.

Aaron and June Whitten, birding in the McNary Wildlife Area the same day, met the Dennys and John Gatchet and soon after were able to find the **Kittiwakes**. Russ and Connie Betts also reported seeing both **Kittiwakes** at the dam the same day. Aaron and June also noted that the male **Eurasian Wigeon** reported several times since October 19 is still in the Wildlife Area. They also reported 2 **Black-bellied Plovers** and two late **Barn Swallows** at Cold Springs NWR.

November 11, birding along the Columbia River Aaron and June found 8 species of gulls including **Mew**, **Ring-billed**, **Bonaparte's**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **California**, **Thayer's**, **Herring** and **Glaucous-winged**. They also found a **Merlin** below McNary Dam. On the same day, John Gatchet found a **Red Fox Sparrow** at the parking lot at McNary Wildlife Area. Although the **Red Fox Sparrow** is not considered a separate Fox Sparrow species, it is normally found only in the eastern United States.

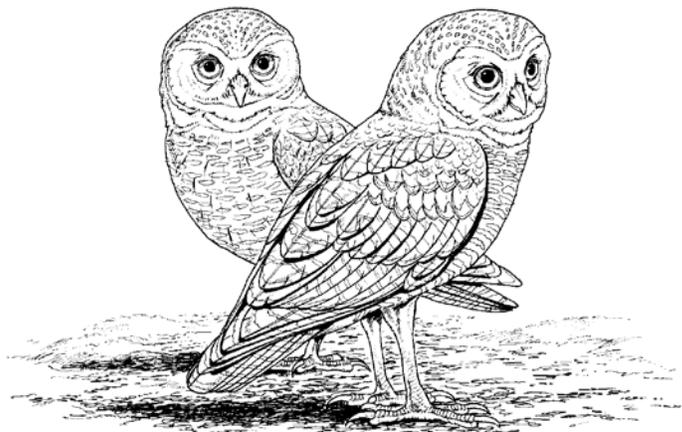
Aaron has been monitoring reconstruction work on the Indian Lake Dam for the past month and has visited the lake periodically inspecting the contract work. On his last trip of the season, November 18, Aaron found a **Pied-billed Grebe** on the lake and nearby 2 **Gray Jays**, one **Clark's Nutcracker**, a **Common Raven** and a flock of **Red Crossbills**. While talking with Aaron, the contractor reported seeing a "very large, tall and gray owl." From the description of the owl, Aaron immediately identified it as a **Great Gray Owl** and noted that Craig Kvern found one in the same location on April 30 this year.

Winter is just around the corner, and as the weather gets colder, more winter birds will be visiting our area. Supporting this fact is the report from Aaron of **13 Bohemian Waxwings** found November 20, near his Mission office. Club members have reported 252 species in the county so far this year, but Surf Scoter, Pine Grosbeak, White-throated Sparrow and Common Redpoll are among the species not yet recorded. While you are birding, keep a special lookout for these species. We want to hear about your bird sightings, at your feeders, in your neighborhood, or anywhere in Umatilla County. I will be away from Pendleton for several weeks, so for the next two months, please send all your bird sightings (not just new birds) to Aaron Skirvin at [umatbirder@yahoo.com](mailto:umatbirder@yahoo.com) or 276-1948.  
**Newsletter Editor:** Position Vacant



*Editor for November* :Jack Simons  
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Original art work by John Green  
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