



Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 7, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August 2009

BREAKING NEWS

Big news for this summer occurred on August 16 when two new birds were added to the Umatilla County list. The new species are **SNOWY EGRET** and **BLACK PHOEBE**, numbers 306 and 307 for Umatilla County.

Andy and Ellen Stephiewski reported the Snowy Egret at Memorial Marsh in the late morning on the 16th. They flushed this bird and a Great Egret while walking along the main road through the area. They noted the bird was much smaller than the Great Egret and had a spike-like bill (both field marks for a Snowy Egret). The Stephiewskis called Aaron Skirvin and reported their find.

Late in the afternoon Aaron checked the area, found the egret and was able to verify the initial identification. However, while walking to the area where the egret was reported, Aaron heard a bird calling he could not readily identify. Finding the bird in his binoculars, he was stunned to see a Black Phoebe. Luckily, Aaron had his camera with him and was able to get photographs, documenting this new county bird.

Aaron noted that the last time two new species found in one day in the county was back in November 2003, when the Mike and MerryLynn Denny and John Gatchet found a Black Scoter and Rusty Blackbird below McNary Dam.

The following day, June Whitten checked the area early in the morning and was able to relocate the Black Phoebe. Dave Herr arrived after June left and was unsuccessful in locating the phoebe, but was able to find the Snowy Egret and get a few photos.

August 18, Dave again tried unsuccessfully to find

the phoebe, but still had an enjoyable morning birding in the area finding several species of shorebirds, and Dave was able to photograph both Sora and Virginia Rails.

Contributed by David Herr

Bird Club Meeting

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

COLUMBIA CONDORS: FORGOTTEN GIANTS OF THE SKY

**Presented by David Moen
Species Recovery Biologist at the Oregon Zoo**

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

SHOREBIRDING AT COLD SPRINGS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Prepared by Aaron Skirvin

Fall shorebird migration through Umatilla County begins in mid June when adult Western, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers pass through the area on their southward migration. Local birders usually have difficulty finding these early migrating shorebirds because their primary resting and feeding habitat is still underwater at McKay Creek and Cold Springs NWRs. Most years it's late July or early August



before mudflats are revealed at McKay and Cold Springs reservoirs as the water is drawn down due to irrigation releases from the reservoirs. By late July, the composition of the shorebird flocks changes from adult to juvenile birds.

Our shorebird migration season extends until late October, and Cold Springs Reservoir has the most favorable shorebird habitat throughout the season. Over the course of fall migration, Cold Springs attracts at least 25 species of shorebirds. To try to view some of the earlier migrating shorebirds, the Pendleton Bird Club held a field trip to Cold Springs on August 15, which was about 10 days after the reservoir level dropped enough to expose mudflats favored by many shorebirds.

Six bird club members participated in field trip on the 15th: Dave Herr, Carolyn and Joe Corvino (from Walla Walla), June Whitten, Ann Wyatt, and Aaron Skirvin. We kept track of all of the species and numbers of each species we found at Cold Springs. For about 2 hours, between 8 and 10 a.m., and from a point in the SE corner of the reservoir, we tallied the following birds: Black-bellied Plover 2 adults), Semipalmated Plover 1, Killdeer 35, Lesser Yellowlegs 1, Spotted Sandpiper 5, Semipalmated Sandpiper 1, Western Sandpiper 75, Least Sandpiper 9, Baird's Sandpiper 2, Stilt Sandpiper 1 (juvenile), Long-billed Dowitcher 4, Red-necked Phalarope 1, Canada Goose 450, Mallard 80, Cinnamon Teal 2, Northern Shoveler 5, Northern Pintail 5, Green-winged Teal 15, California Quail 20, Western Grebe 80, Clark's Grebe 2, American White Pelican 50, Double Crested Cormorant 20, Great Egret 2, Ring-billed Gull 22, Caspian Tern 2, Downy Woodpecker 1, Western Wood-Pewee 1, Rough-winged Swallow 4, Bank Swallow 40, Barn Swallow 2, Bewick's Wren 1, and Black-headed Grosbeak 1.

About 10 a.m., Dave Herr left the group to bird the Memorial Marsh, located in the extreme SE corner of the refuge, and the other 5 birders drove to the Walla Walla River area, led by the Corvinos, to check out the birds there.

Dave soon found the yellowlegs' hangout at Cold Springs, tallying 25 Lessers and 10 – 15 Greaters in the Memorial Marsh. Other shorebirds he saw included 8 noisy Black-necked Stilts and 3 Solitary Sandpipers. He also heard both rails calling and saw Wood Duck, Mallard, and "a lot of brown ducks."

In the Walla Walla River area, we visited the Millet Ponds, Iowa Beef Ponds, and the "Blood" Ponds, all new birding spots for the three Pendleton birders. Highlights included several Wilson's Phalaropes at the Millet Ponds, at least 200 Red-necked Phalaropes at the Iowa Beef Ponds, and close views of Western, Least and 2 Semipalmated Sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitchers at the "Blood" Ponds.

Many thanks to the participants for turning out to look for shorebirds, and a special thanks to the Corvinos for showing us some of their favorite birding sites just across the stateline in Washington.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

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

www.pendletonbirders.org

EMAIL TO THE EDITORS...FROM AFAR

Prepared by Barbara Clark

Last month's article "Birds with White Spots" by Jack Simons brought this response:

On Fri, Jul 31, 2009 at 4:24 AM,
<mullbirds@btinternet.com> wrote:

I noticed your pages on Leucistic birds and thought you might like to see these images of a European Willow Warbler that visited us for two years running and on both occasions it raised a family before returning to Africa. It was not white in colour but was a very pale yellow (a little like a Canary bird) and in it's own right was quite beautiful.

<http://www.mullbirds.com/Leucistic%20Warbler.html>

Kind regards Alan Spellman

Alan Spellman
Lochdon,
Isle of Mull PA64 6AP

Editor's note: The Isle of Mull is 75 miles off the coast of Scotland to the NW of Glasgow. To the best of our knowledge, this is the farthest response to our newsletter to date! In follow-up emails with Alan, we have learned that a good time to visit Mull is in the spring during late May and June when the small



migrant birds from Africa are there for the summer. Alan reports that the White-tailed Sea Eagles and Golden Eagles are busy feeding chicks that usually fledge in July. In early May there may still be some remaining winter visitors including the great Northern Divers (known to us as Loons, Alan thinks) and many other species on the locks of which they have many, both sea lochs and fresh water lochs. He says that most people visit Mull to see the eagles which are easily seen from the road side, as well as Short-eared Owls, Hen Harriers, Peregrine Falcons, Kestrels, and Merlin. In June Mull delights the eye with carpets of wild orchids. Mammals include otters, the "dreaded" mink, and hedgehogs. In the sea you can see basking sharks and minkie whales. The whole island has a population of only 2800 residents with an increase in the summer. Alan sums it up by saying, "Mull is a magical place".

Alan invites us to view additional pictures of Mull.
www.mullbirds.com
<http://www.mullbirds.com/GALLERYTHREE.html>
<http://www.mullbirds.com/SELFCATERINGSITE.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Hawk Watch at Bald Mt.

**9:30 a.m. till ~ 2:00 p.m., Saturday,
September 19, 2009**

**Sponsored by the
Blue Mountain Audubon Society,
Walla Walla, WA**

**Meet at Bald Mt., which is at the
end of the pavement on the Jubilee
Lake Road, USFS Road #64.**

**Contact Aaron Skirvin for further
information: umatbirder@yahoo.com
or 541-276-1948**

BIG SIT! Bird Count

Sunday, October 11, 2009

**Contact June Whitten
at 276-9019 for details**

Bird Club Meeting

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

**PROGRAM TO BE
ANNOUNCED**

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

BIRD OF THE MONTH: TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Prepared by June Whitten

Certainly one of the most beautiful nesting species in Umatilla County, usually arriving in May and leaving in August, is the Townsend's Warbler. The bright yellow and black features on the head and breast are outstanding. The back is mostly gray and greenish on the nape. This 5-inch warbler nests in the forested areas of eastern Oregon. It may be seen at lower altitudes, too, as in passes through the lowlands during both spring and fall migration.

The nest, made of bark, moss, grass, twigs, and lined with moss and feathers, is usually constructed near the end of a horizontal limb of a conifer. The 3 to 5 small (0.7 inch) eggs are white with brown mottling. When incubating, the female allows close approach, but then dives toward the ground and disappears into the brush. Generally, these warblers are seen near the tops of the evergreen trees where they forage for insects, spiders, and some seeds. They may hover or catch insects in flight.¹

Townsend's Warblers are a bird of the west, nesting in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Their migration for the fall and winter months takes them



to Mexico, Central America, and the southwestern United States. In winter, they may join mixed flocks and eat some berries and plant nectar as well as insects.²

Hermit Warblers, more common in the Cascades and Coast mountains of the Pacific Northwest, are similar to Townsend's, not only in appearance but also genetically. They are closely related and hybridization is common. According to an article in "Birder's World" magazine, February 2009, the genetic battle between Townsend's and Hermit Warblers will be a winner-take-all outcome. And, according to a genetics researcher at the University of Washington, the eventual winner has already become clear: Townsend's. Even though we are witnessing an extinction in progress, it will be another 5,000 years before only Townsend's will remain in the current ranges of both warblers. The coastal populations will bear the neutral genetic footprint of the then extinct Hermit Warbler.

Townsend's Warbler is named after American ornithologist, John Kirk Townsend. He is credited with first describing this bird, but he chose the name of his friend and fellow ornithologist, Thomas Nuttall, and so sidestepped the convention against naming a species after oneself. He was later honored to have the warbler named after him.³

Townsend's Warblers are best found in Umatilla County in late May and June while the males are still singing in their territories in the forests of the Blue Mountains. They may be found in most of the forested areas of eastern Oregon.

1. The Birder's Handbook; Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye; 1988

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Townsend's_Warbler

3. Ibid

JOHN KIRK TOWNSEND (1809—1851)

Prepared by June Whitten

John Kirk Townsend was a very talented early American naturalist. His death at the age of 41 robbed American ornithology of a man who was never able to fulfill his full potential. Even though he is commemorated with the names of several species of western birds, he is virtually unknown to most Americans today. He was honored to have several species named after him: Townsend's Warbler; Townsend's Solitaire; Townsend's Ground Squirrel;

Townsend's Chipmunk; Townsend's Vole; Townsend's Mole; Townsend's Pocket Gopher; and *Lepus townsendii*, the white-tailed jackrabbit.

He was a friend of the well-known artist, John James Audubon, and supplied about a seventh of all the bird species in John James Audubon's classic book, *The Birds of America*; and approximately a tenth of all the mammals for Audubon's book, *Viviparous Quadrupeds*.

John Kirk Townsend made lengthy excursion from Independence, Missouri to the Pacific Coast and even continued on to Hawaii when he was only 24 years old. He collected specimens, kept copious notes, and wrote a book, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains*, 1839, about the birds and wildlife he collected and identified on this trip. He was able to safely deliver his specimens to the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia. Townsend was trained as a physician and pharmacist, which no doubt was very helpful to him as a scientist and collector.

Some of the species collected and described by Townsend, include Mountain Plover; Vaux's Swift (which he named after his friend, William Sanson Vaux; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Bushtit; Sage Thrasher; Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, Hermit, and MacGillivray's Warblers; Lark Bunting; and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Several other species were later named from his specimens: Black-footed Albatross; Swainson's Hawk; Black Oystercatcher; Western Gull; Green-tailed Towhee; Brewer's and Harris' Sparrows.

Barbara and Richard Mearns are British naturalists who have pursued their life-long interest in many parts of North America. Their books include a biography of John Kirk Townsend. Much of the above information was taken from an article by these authors in "Birder's World" magazine, August 2009. The title of the article is "Birding the Townsend Trail" and relates their experiences in following the same route Townsend took in 1834 with Nathaniel Wyeth as leader. The route was later closely followed by the Oregon Trail.

Scott Weidensaul, in his book, *Of a Feather; A Brief History of American Birding*, also relates many of the accomplishments of John Kirk Townsend. He tells of the hardships of the excursion to the Pacific Ocean and some of the crew's privations impact on Townsend's work. An owl he collected was roasted



and eaten by Nuttall and another man. And, having amassed a nice assortment of snakes and lizards, Townsend preserved them in a two-gallon jug of whiskey. But one fellow whose “appetite for ardent spirits was of the most inordinate kind”—had drunk the reptiles dry, ruining them.

While John James Audubon remains well known and was probably the best artist of the times, there were many more American naturalists in the 1800’s that are worth learning more about: John Kirk Townsend, Thomas Nuttall, and Alexander Wilson among others. And, by the mid-to-late 1800’s, a few women naturalists began to make history as well.

TEST YOUR WATERFOWL IQ

- 1.) What is the top recorded air speed of a duck in North America?
 - a. 75 mph
 - b. 100 mph
 - c. 150 mph
- 2.) Which one of these diving ducks does not nest over water?
 - a. Bufflehead
 - b. Canvasback
 - c. Ring-necked Duck
- 3.) What was the age of the oldest known duck harvested in North America?
 - a. 17 years old
 - b. 25 years old
 - c. 29 years old
- 4.) By how much does a mallard duckling increase its weight during its first two months of life?
 - a. 5 times
 - b. 10 times
 - c. 15 times
- 5.) Which one of these ducks is not also found in Europe?
 - a. Blue-winged Teal
 - b. Gadwall
 - c. Mallard

1. B. The fastest individual duck recorded on this continent was a Red-breasted Merganser that attained a top speed of 100 mph while being pursued by an airplane.
2. A. Buffleheads nest in tree cavities usually created by flickers, a species of woodpeckers.
3. C. The oldest known duck to be taken by a hunter was a Canvasback harvested at the ripe old age of 29. The oldest known goose to be taken by a hunter was a Canada Goose of the same age.
4. C. Ducklings grow incredibly fast on a protein-rich diet of insects and other small invertebrates.
5. A. Blue-winged Teal are found only in North America. Gadwall and Mallards are Holarctic in distribution, meaning they are found throughout the northern hemisphere.

Ducks Unlimited Magazine, July/August 2009, Pgs.34-35.

Contributed By Jack Simons

PLACES TO BIRD IN THE NORTHWEST

Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

When traveling between Seattle and Portland, give yourself a two-hour break just south of Olympia. The Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge has 7 miles of trails including a 1-mile loop trail and a 5.5 mile loop trail which provide views of wildlife habitats and access to observation decks and photo blinds. The Nisqually River Delta, a biologically rich and diverse area at the southern end of Puget Sound, supports a variety of habitats. Here, the freshwater of the Nisqually River combines with the saltwater of Puget Sound to form an estuary rich in nutrients and detritus. These nutrients support a web of sea life—the benefits which extend throughout Puget Sound and beyond.

Answers: ***Test Your Waterfowl IQ***



As surrounding wildlife habitat is lost to development, Nisqually Refuge has become an increasingly important place for wildlife, especially migratory birds. For some birds, the refuge is a place to feed and rest before continuing on, while for others it is the end of their seasonal journey. Western Sandpipers and other shorebirds feed and rest on the estuarine mudflats and marshes. Ducks and geese feed and rest on the freshwater ponds and marshes.

Spring brings many songbirds—goldfinches, warblers and Tree Swallows can be seen in the forests and fields. Woodpeckers, hawks and small mammals are found in the woodlands, croplands and grasslands. Mixed conifer forests on the bluffs above the delta provide perches for Bald Eagles and Osprey, and a nesting site for a colony of Great Blue Herons.

The refuge is located 8 miles east of Olympia, Washington, just off of Interstate 5. From Interstate 5, take exit 114 and follow the signs to the refuge. Refuge trails are open daily during daylight hours. The office is open Monday through Friday 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. Daily fee is \$3.00 per family. Valid Refuge Annual Pass and Federal Duck Stamp admit one family. Interagency Annual, Senior, and Access Pass admit four adults. Children 16 and under are free. Fishing and boating are permitted in designated areas. Hunting, jogging, pets, bicycling, fires, camping and firearms are prohibited on the refuge. Contact information:
<http://www.fws.gov/nisqually>.

*Extracted from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Brochure:
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
by Barbara Clark*

JULY – AUGUST BIRD SIGHTINGS

Compiled by David Herr

August has turned out to be a great birding month. Although the water at McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs is still a little high, almost all of the normally expected shorebird species have been recorded. However, the big news occurred on August 16 when two new confirmed species were added to Umatilla County's bird list, increasing the total from 305 to 307. See the lead article in this newsletter for details.

Checking the Albee Bluebird Trail on July 19, Jack and Sharon Simons reported they saw two different sets of fledged **American Kestrels**, with three juvenile birds in each set.

Birding in the south part of the county on the same day, Aaron Skirvin (Aaron) and June Whitten (June) had a great day. Some of the highlights included 6 **Grasshopper Sparrows** along Circle Road near Pilot Rock and **Swainson's Thrushes, Western Flycatchers, Brown Creeper, Warbling Vireo** and a drumming **Pileated Woodpecker** along Pearson Creek Road (SE of Pilot Rock). The Ukiah sewage ponds yielded **Redheads, Ruddy Ducks, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, Gadwalls** and 17 **Wilson's Phalaropes**. At Tower Burn they found the expected **Green-tailed Towhees, Lewis's Woodpecker, Prairie Falcon** and the **Golden Eagle**. June noted they have seen this eagle on their last five trips to the area.

Birding along Webb Slough (located in the southern portion of the county about 15 miles SW of Pilot Rock) on July 19, Wayne and Patty Bowers observed over 30 different species. Some highlights included 10 **Lark Sparrows**, 4 **Brewer's Sparrows**, 15 **Chukars** including 10 young, and a brood of 8 **Gray Partridge**.

Connie Betts reports that she has been regularly seeing a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in her yard near the Pendleton Community Park. On July 20, 3 **Common Nighthawks** were in the area.

Andy and Ellen Stepniewski birded at McKay Reservoir July 25. They reported the year's first **Semipalmated Sandpiper** loosely associating with 15 **Western** and one **Least Sandpiper**. Also reported were 10 **Long-billed Dowitchers**, one **Greater Yellowlegs**, 2 **Spotted Sandpipers**, one **Wilson's Snipe** and one **Wilson's Phalarope**. Checking McKay later in the day, Aaron added **Semipalmated Plover** to the day's species list.

Nancy Brown reports the **Osprey** pair that nests on a pole in the Umatilla Electric Cooperative yard (near Hermiston) has raised two young this year. Nancy notes that in previous years they have only raised one.

While checking water levels (to determine suitable shorebird habitat) at Cold Springs Reservoir July 29, Aaron found 2 **Killdeer**, 2 **Spotted Sandpipers** and one **Greater Yellowlegs**. Along with the expected **Western Grebes**, there were at least 3 **Clark's Grebes**.



Braving the 100 degree heat on August 1, Mike and MerryLynn Denny of College Place, WA, checked to see what species were attracted to the pond and springs at Hat Rock State Park. Some of their notable finds included 2 **Common Nighthawks**, 6 **Eastern Kingbirds**, a **Red-eyed Vireo** (the first they ever found at this location), an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** and a **Western Wood-Pewee**. They also found 5 **Common Loons** east of Juniper Canyon on the Columbia River between milepost 201 and 202. On August 2, Neal Hinds saw 12 **Great Egrets** at Cold Spring NWR.

To beat the heat on August 3, Aaron and June birded in the Blue Mountains. Along the Summit Road (closely follows the Union-Umatilla County line between I-84 and Hwy 204), they noted several **Olive-sided Flycatchers**, lots of young birds and were surprised to find a **Vesper Sparrow** along a high-elevation open ridge top at almost 5700 feet. Later, checking Langdon Lake they found 6 **Common Goldeneyes**.

August 3, Connie Betts reported with the hot weather, few birds have been visiting her yard in SW Pendleton. She and Russ have been seeing about dozen **Common Nighthawks** in the evening. Jack Simons reported with the heat, things have also slowed down around his home near Mission as well. Checking Mission Ponds on August 2, Jack found only one **Pied-billed Grebe**. Lorna Waltz had 3 **Black-capped Chickadees** visit her feeders near the Umatilla River in Pendleton on August 5.

August 8, Barbara Clark observed 30 **Common Nighthawks** flying between her home and the crest of McKay Dam. **Common Nighthawks** are often seen during the evening in flocks prior to fall migration.

August 10, Jack Simons reported he has been seeing 2 juvenile **Pileated Woodpeckers** in his pasture and noted he recently saw the first wave of **Turkey Vultures** traveling south. Checking Memorial Marsh (in the Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge, SE of the main reservoir) the same day, I (Dave Herr)

found a number of shorebird species including both **Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs**; **Long-billed Dowitchers**; **Solitary, Spotted and Pectoral Sandpipers**; **Black-necked Stilts** and **Killdeer**. August 14, Aaron found one **Short-billed Dowitcher** at McKay Reservoir.

As noted in the introduction, the big news for this report period occurred on August 16, when two new birds were added to the Umatilla County list. The new species are **SNOWY EGRET** and **BLACK PHOEBE**.

Almost lost in the excitement of the discovery of the **SNOWY EGRET** and **BLACK PHOEBE** on August 16, 15 species of shorebirds were reported by the Stepniewskis at McKay Creek and Cold Springs NWRs. In addition to the shorebirds, waterfowl and egrets they saw, the Stepniewskis reported finding 3 species of wrens (**Bewick's, House, and Marsh**) and several migrating songbirds, including **Western Tanager** and **Olive-sided Flycatcher**. Aaron and June, birding along Gurdane Road on the 16th, reported seeing over 200 **Vesper Sparrows**, several **Brewer's** and **Grasshopper Sparrows**, a male **Wilson's Warbler**, several **Western Tanagers**, an immature **Swainson's Hawk**, 2 female **Lazuli Buntings**, and two flocks of **Gray Partridges** containing 7 and 13 birds.

The fall migration is now underway. Large flocks of Violet-green and Tree Swallows are evident and the adult shorebird migration has already passed Oregon and the juvenile movement is now arriving. Birding is going to be great for the next couple of months, so spend some time birding and send all your sightings to me, Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or 541-276-6413.

Newsletter Editor: Barbara Clark, 541 278-1252

Email Address: bainbrid@gmail.com

Technical Editor: Aaron Skirvin, 541 276-1948

Email Address: umabirder@yahoo.com

Field Sightings Editor: Dave Herr, 541 276-6413

Email Address: dsherr1@mac.com

Photo Editor: Jack Simons, 541 276-8566

Email Address: styletoil@eoni.com



Original art work by John Green
Copyright 1989, Dover Press

