



# Kákya Táymut

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

Volume 8, No. 1 Pendleton, Oregon January 2010

## 2009 UMATILLA COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

**WE HAD ONE OF THE HIGHEST COUNTS EVER** of both bird species and birders on the 2009 annual Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count, which was held on January 2, 2010. Umatilla County's count was part of the nationwide 110<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by the National Audubon Society. The goal of our count was to find, identify, and count as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period within a count circle 15 miles in diameter. The center of Umatilla County's count circle is located near the base of Cabbage Hill about six miles southeast of Pendleton.

Twenty-nine bird counters (21 participants last year), including 4 feeder watchers, enjoyed a day of nice weather and great bird finding. While a typical Umatilla County CBC will tally 70 to 72 bird species, this year we found **78** species, including **seven** species new to the count. The highest count was 81 species on January 3, 1992. This year's count tied for second place with the 78 species found on January 1, 2005. Last year, we found 67 species and counted 9,383 individual birds in the count circle. This year, we tallied 8,041 individual birds. Rules for the Christmas Bird Count allow the addition of species found during "count week" — three days immediately prior to and three days after count day. This year, one additional species, Northern Shoveler, was seen within the count circle during count week but not on count day.

Bird counters and birds experienced very pleasant weather conditions (after a very cold December) with little wind, no precipitation and warm temperatures on count day. With virtually no snow in the Poverty Flat area, my

group was able to do more walking than usual in the high country.

This year's highlights have to be the seven new species seen on the count: Cackling Goose, Eared Grebe, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Anna's Hummingbird, American Dipper, and Lesser Goldfinch. One Dusky Grouse was seen this year, only the second time this species was recorded since we started the count in 1987. One grouse was seen on the December 30, 1995 count. Raptor (hawks, owls, and eagles) numbers were fairly high this year with 397 birds of 14 species.

Because of the interest and dedication of the following 29 participants, we had the highest turnout since the January 5, 2002 count, when 30 birders participated. Participants on this year's count were: Jenny Barnett, Connie Betts, Andrew Clark, Barbara Clark, Marilyn Cripe, Katrina Dielman, Debra Doyle, Becky Hiers, Neal Hinds, Sandi Hinds, Jane Holmes, Jennifer Karson-Engum, Tanya Harrison, Dave Herr,



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**Bird Checklists, ID Challenge,  
Club Member's Photo Gallery,  
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**[www.pendletonbirders.org](http://www.pendletonbirders.org)**



Betty Klepper, Craig Kvern, Diana LaSarge, Bruce Mayfield, Dolly Robison, George Ruby, Jack Simons, Sharon Simons, Aaron Skirvin, Virginia Storey, Lorna Waltz, Ruth Whittaker, Duane Whitten, June Whitten, and Dale Wilkins. A sincere thank you to all for making the time to help count birds; your efforts paid off because we had better coverage of the circle than most years. I believe this year's count results better reflect the actual bird diversity in our circle than the counts for the past several years.

**Results of the count are as follows:** Canada Goose 1397, Cackling Goose 11, Gadwall 2, American Wigeon 32, Mallard 215, Northern Pintail 10, Northern Shoveler (count week), Green-winged Teal 47, Ring-necked Duck 10, Lesser Scaup 55, Common Goldeneye 12, Hooded Merganser 8, Common Merganser 63, Ruddy Duck 1, Ring-necked Pheasant 163, Ruffed Grouse 2, Dusky Grouse 1, Eared Grebe 1, Wild Turkey 31, California Quail 65, Great Blue Heron 24, Black-crowned Night-Heron 2, Bald Eagle 13 (8 adults and 5 immatures), Northern Harrier 67, Sharp-shinned Hawk 3, *Accipiter* species 5, Red-tailed Hawk 158, Rough-legged Hawk 44, *Buteo* sp. 2, Golden Eagle 3 (2 adults and 1 immature), American Kestrel 77, Merlin 1, Peregrine Falcon 1, Prairie Falcon 3, American Coot 16, Ring-billed Gull 2, Rock Pigeon 290, Mourning Dove 286, Eurasian Collared-Dove 41, Barn Owl 2, Western Screech-Owl 4, Great Horned Owl 12, Short-eared Owl 2, Belted Kingfisher 4, Anna's Hummingbird 1, Downy Woodpecker 8, Hairy Woodpecker 3, Northern Flicker 67, Pileated Woodpecker 8, Northern Shrike 7, Steller's Jay 3, Black-billed Magpie 381, American Crow 57, Common Raven 59, Horned Lark 13, Black-capped Chickadee 48, Mountain Chickadee 9, White-breasted Nuthatch 3, Red-breasted Nuthatch 9, Pygmy Nuthatch 18, Bewick's Wren 8, Winter Wren 4, American Dipper 1, Golden-crowned Kinglet 7, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1, Hermit Thrush 1, Townsend's Solitaire 1, American Robin 113, American Pipit 2, Cedar Waxwing 2, European Starling 2163, Song Sparrow 100, White-crowned Sparrow 185, Dark-eyed Junco 464, Red-winged Blackbird 52, Western Meadowlark 50, House Finch 209, Pine Siskin 1, American Goldfinch 262, Lesser Goldfinch 2, House Sparrow 531.

*Contributed by Aaron Skirvin*



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 11, 2010

### **BIRDS OF ECUADOR**

Presented by Dave Herr

Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton

### Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 11, 2010

### **2<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL HUMONGOUS BIRD ID CHALLENGE**

Presented by Jack Simons

Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton

### Bird Club Meeting

6:30 p.m., April 8, 2010

### **POTLUCK DINNER followed by BIRDS IN LITERATURE AND ART**

Presented by Shannon Van Kirk  
and Alison Timmons

Pendleton First Christian Church  
North Main St., Pendleton

## NEIGHBORING CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS (CBC's): North and South

*Barbara Clark*

John Day's 29<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Saturday, December 19, 2009. They had 18 people, including two from Bend and one from Baker City, scouring their circle this year. In addition there were other contributors with reports of bird activity from their yards. Their day started off cool, with light rain and intermittent sun in the afternoon which allowed them to observe 60 species and 5,633 individual birds.

Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count was also held on Saturday, December 19, 2009. They report 35 people searching their 15-mile circle in rain and fog, as well as those who watched their feeders. They found 66 species of birds. With the addition of count week birds (birds seen 3 days before and 3 days after count day) their total species for the Count was 75. They totaled 16,435 individual birds not including the numbers of birds on their Count Week list. Their count included three new count species: Northern Pintail, Eurasian Collared-Dove, and Anna's Hummingbird.

Our Umatilla County Bird Club traditionally holds its Count the second Saturday after Christmas, unlike our neighbors to the north and south who do their counts on the Saturday before Christmas. As Aaron Skirvin reported earlier in this Newsletter, we had 29 counters (including 4 feeder counts) who found 78 species, including 7 species new to the count. Two new species in Umatilla County, the Eurasian Collared Dove and Anna's Hummingbird, coincided with Walla Walla's new species. 8,041 individual birds were counted in the Umatilla County CBC.

John Day noted that waterfowl species and numbers were down this year, as were some of the smaller birds. They suggest that this was probably due to the cold snap (recall those single-digit temperatures in early December) the week prior to their bird count. Their highlights included more Rough-legged Hawks than have been seen since 1985 and more House Sparrows counted since 1986. They counted only 3 Bald Eagles in their count area, the fewest since 1982.



Walla Walla's uncommon sightings for the CBC included 1 Golden Eagle, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 2 Wilson's Snipe, 1 Long-eared Owl, 3 Northern Shrike, and 2 American Dipper. The Umatilla County Count observed all of these species with the exception of the Wilson's Snipe and the Long-eared Owl. This year Walla Walla listed high numbers for Wild Turkey (343) and American Crow (836). John Day reported seeing 222 Wild Turkeys and 2 American Crows. Umatilla County counted 31 Wild Turkeys and 57 American Crows.

As you might expect, the individual species counted in all three circles are similar, however, the number of individuals varies considerably. It does appear that more counters in the circles yield more individual counts. It also could be said that weather plays a big role in both bird activity and people willing to come out for the count.

*With thanks to both **The Upland Sandpiper**, Newsletter of the Grant County Bird Club—John Day and **The Magpiper**, Newsletter of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society in Walla Walla.*

## GOOD CATS ARE INDOOR CATS

*June Whitten*

Cats are natural predators and are born to hunt birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. No matter how well-fed a cat is, the natural instinct to hunt is always present. There are more than 90 million pet cats in the U.S., the majority of which roam outside at least part of the time. In addition, there are millions of stray and feral cats roaming the streets, parks, and neighborhoods looking for anything to assuage their hunger. Scientists estimate that roaming cats kill millions of birds and other small wildlife annually.



In 1997, the American Bird Conservancy launched a campaign, **CATS INDOORS! CAMPAIGN FOR SAFER BIRDS AND CATS**, to encourage pet owners to keep cats indoors. Keeping cats indoors will not only save birds and other wildlife, it is much safer for the cats. Indoor cats do not run the risk of being run over, poisoned, injured by dogs, contacting

contagious diseases and parasites, or being lost or stolen.

The easiest way to train a cat for indoor life is to begin its life indoors as a kitten. It is important that the kitten has plenty of exercise and may be trained to a leash for walks in the yard. It is also desirable, but not necessarily a priority, to build an outdoor play facility, which does not allow the kitten to roam freely but does allow some fresh air and sunshine. Another recommendation is to have two kittens together for company for each other, especially if the owner is away from home several hours a day.

It is possible to train an older cat to stay indoors, although the cat may not be too happy at first. The winter is a good time to do this as the cat may not wish to go out as much in colder weather. The same rules apply to an older cat. Be sure it gets plenty of exercise, train it to a leash if possible, and spend some extra time playing with the cat when it is first sequestered in the house. Some people choose to gradually change an outdoor cat to an indoor cat, while others may make the change all at once. It is important to provide interesting places for the cat to lounge, play, and scratch. This can be done by providing scratching posts, corrugated cardboard or sisal rope, and interesting play things.

As birders, we need to do everything possible to maintain the bird population, which for many species is dwindling at best due to habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and other impacts from humans. Keeping cats indoors is good for the cats and the birds. Please encourage any cat owner to consider keeping cats indoors. More information on indoor cats may be obtained from <http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html>, where some of the information for this article was obtained.

## SWAN #P804

*Dave Herr*

On October 31, 2009 I was birding along the east end of the main reservoir at Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge. Near the shore was a flock of about 20 Tundra Swans. As I observed them, I noticed one had a neck collar and since I had my camera with me I snapped several pictures. Luckily I could read the collar and after a quick check on the Internet found information for submitting the band number at [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov). As I was filling out the required information I was intrigued to note the USGS still refers to this species under its old name "Whistling Swan".



*Tundra Swan. Photo by Dave Herr.*

After waiting about 6 weeks I received a reply with information about the bird. It is a female swan hatched in 2006 and banded in July 2007 at the Becharof NWR in Alaska. A "Google" search showed that Becharof NWR is located on the peninsula that leads out to the Aleutian Islands. Tundra Swans breed in the tundra regions of Alaska and Canada and in the fall migrate down along the Pacific coast and winter inland as far as Montana. Tundra Swans can be found most winters in Umatilla County January 2010, there were up to 9 at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area.

Two species of Swans may be encountered in Umatilla County, the more common Tundra Swan and the rare Trumpeter Swan. Differencing between these two species can be challenging. Often the Tundra Swan will have a yellow marking on the lore (a "teardrop area under the eye on the bill), however this marking is not always present. For more detailed information comparing differences in physical characteristics visit: <http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/swan-identification.html>



## IT WAS A “DOWNY DAY”

*Bruce Mayfield*

Bird Club members, Aaron Skirvin, June Whitten and Bruce Mayfield started out on a birding trip to Ukiah via Mud Springs Canyon Road/Alkali Canyon Road on January 10, 2010. Fog and low clouds forced a change in destination to the Columbia River. The route was Coombs Canyon Road, Mud Springs Canyon Road, Echo-Rieth Road, Echo Meadows Road, Stanfield, McNary Dam and Wildlife Area, Hwy 730, and Holdman Road. Weather was low clouds and temperatures were in the high 30's.

Birds in the upland areas consisted of Black-billed Magpies, Common Ravens, Horned Larks, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, European Starlings, White-crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Rock Pigeons, Mourning Doves, Northern Shrikes and Great Horned Owl, to name most species. Echo's Eurasian Collared-Doves were also found. Along the Umatilla River, in the vicinity of Yoakum and Nolin, ice blocks randomly stacked along the shoreline could still be found. Great Blue Herons hunting in the hay fields were not easy to spot. Sparrows and Spotted Towhees in the brush took some coaxing to see. Stanfield greeted us with a Great Egret in fine plumage standing in Stage Gulch Creek.

The stop at McNary boat dock (just upstream from the dam) produced birder Stefan Schlick from Portland. Using his scope we saw a male Redhead Duck near the grain elevators. Stephan was wondering where the Black-crowned Night-Herons were usually seen at McNary Wildlife Nature Area. He stated he observed Harris's Sparrows by the Spawning Pond. Because the ponds are being drained, Black-crowned Night-Herons have moved someplace other than Rookery Pond. Some could be seen on the island in Frog Pond 2. In the area were Tundra Swans and the usual Mallards, American Wigeons, Wood Ducks, Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Bald Eagles (adult and immature), California Quail, Common Loon,



*Brown Creeper. Photo by Karen Baxter*

Pied-billed Grebe, and Double-crested Cormorants. Birdseed was left at the main parking area and a few White-crowned Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows and Juncos enjoyed the feast.

At McNary Spillway Park, we tossed out bread for the handful of gulls around the dam. Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls, and Glaucous-winged Gulls were seen following the trail of bread down the river.

The find of the day was on a cottonwood tree: two **Brown Creepers**. Karen Baxter, who joined us briefly at the park, took photos of the Creepers. Golden-crowned Kinglets were in the same area on a pine tree. Nice way to end the day at McNary.

We returned home via Holdman Highway seeing Red-tailed Hawks, Kestrels, Starlings, American Robins and more Black-billed Magpies along the route. We identified a total of 58 species on this bleak and foggy day. Seven Downy Woodpeckers were seen over the course of the trip. They ranged from the upland brushy areas to McNary Nature Area making it a “Downy Day”!

## POTLUCK: TASTY SUCCESS

On January 14<sup>th</sup> thirty-six birding enthusiasts gathered at the First Christian Church to dine on an outstanding smorgasbord of salads, soup, hot dishes,



chicken, and desserts. After the meal Aaron Skirvin presented facts and photos of 2009 Umatilla County

birds. The majority of Aaron's photos were ones taken by our own members which are archived on the club website manned by Jack Simons. Thanks to each and everyone who organized the potluck and prepared the food and the program.

## **BIRD OF THE MONTH—BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)**

*June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin*

Records kept by the Pendleton Bird Club indicate substantial increases in the Bald Eagle population in Umatilla County over the past 10 years. Bald Eagles have gone from rare and unusual to fairly common and regular during the winter months. Last year's local Christmas Bird Count yielded a high count of 36 Bald Eagles. This year the eagle count dropped considerably to 13 total eagles; reasons for the decrease are not known, but there seem to be fewer Bald Eagles in the county this winter compared to last.

This year the eagles seem to be more concentrated. The Christmas Bird Count on January 2, 2010, showed 3 adult Bald Eagles and 4 juveniles at McKay Creek NWR and 1 more from Schroeder Road along McKay Creek. Other Bald Eagle sightings included some on Cabbage Hill and along the river between Mission and Cayuse. Other impressive sightings include 7 Bald Eagles near the McNary Wildlife

Nature Area (5 in one tree) and 6 or 7 more at Cold Springs NWR on January 3, 2010. It is not uncommon to see them on Camas Prairie near Ukiah, the rural areas around Pilot Rock and upper McKay Creek, or along the Gurdane/Vinson Road during calving season. Ranchers were once of the opinion that the eagles were after new-born calves, but in truth they are eager to clean up the much easier to obtain and nutritious placenta (after-birth).

Due to the over-use of pesticides (particularly DDT) and poisoned mammals and reptiles, the Bald Eagle population dipped dangerously low



in the 1960's which prompted them to be placed on the Endangered Species List in 1967. By 1995, their status was upgraded to Threatened and on June 28, 2007, the Bald Eagle was taken off the Endangered Species List. The Bald Eagle, however, is still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Although Bald Eagles formerly nested in Umatilla County, it has been several years since any nests have been reported locally. It's a remarkable observation to see eagles between May and September, but they have been reported from McKay Reservoir, Albee/Ukiah area, and the North Fork John Day River in summer. Most eagles are reported in the winter from mid-November through March.

The west coast population of Bald Eagles has increased greatly over the past 20 years, thus increasing the Umatilla County winter population. More importantly for eagles in our area, the restoration of salmon to the Umatilla River over the

past 15 years has reestablished a plentiful and reliable food supply, and many eagles' diets includes salmon and other fish.

While some eagles seem to prefer fish, other individuals seem to feed mainly on carrion, including road-killed deer. Eagles that winter at Cold Springs NWR seem to focus mainly on waterfowl as their principal food source which is another factor adding to the increased local wintering



*Bald Eagle. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.*

Bald Eagles are found throughout most of North America, from Alaska and Canada to northern Mexico. About half of the world's 70,000 Bald Eagles live in Alaska. Combined with British Columbia's population of about 20,000, the northwest coast of North America is by far the greatest stronghold for Bald Eagles. This location is popular with the eagles partly because of the salmon, which die after spawning in the rivers. Dead or dying fish are an important food source for most Bald Eagles. They are also valuable scavengers and readily clean up carrion along roads and pastures. They are

renowned for their excellent eyesight which enhance their chances to find food.

The scientific name signifies Bald Eagles are considered a sea (*halo*) eagle (*aetos*) with a white (*leucos*) head (*cephalos*). Only adult eagles have the pure white head and tail. It takes a young eagle 4 to 5 years to acquire adult plumage. Juvenile eagles have broader wings and longer tails than adults and have a mottled mixture of mostly dark browns with some white feathers as well. The female Bald Eagle is 35 to 37 inches long, larger than the approximately 31-inch male. An adult has approximately 7,000 feathers!

Strong fliers, Bald Eagles may achieve speeds of 30 to 35 MPH and can fly as high as 10,000 feet. Four pounds is approximately the weight an eagle can lift and fly with. They are often seen pulling and dragging larger fish or carrion. Even in the wild, they may live to be 30 years old.

Although Benjamin Franklin did not think highly of the Bald Eagle and preferred the Wild Turkey as the national symbol of the United States, the Bald Eagle was chosen as the National Emblem in 1782 when the great seal of the United States was adopted.

*“Thus the eagle, full of the boundless spirit of freedom, living above the valleys, strong and powerful in his might, has become the national emblem of a country that offers freedom in word and thought and an opportunity for a full and free expansion into the boundless space of the future.”*

Maude M. Grant

## **DECEMBER-JANUARY SIGHTINGS**

***Dave Herr***

Fog, snow, freezing rain and cold temperatures have typified the start of this report period. Through this harsh winter weather, the **Anna’s Hummingbird**, first observed on December 5, by Jennifer Karson-Engum and her husband Micah in their SE Pendleton yard, has stayed in the neighborhood. Last seen by Jennifer on January 22, its continued survival is due primarily to Jennifer and Micah’s efforts to provide a functioning hummingbird feeder, even in the freezing weather.



In the last issue of the Newsletter, I asked folks if they noticed a larger than normal number of **House Sparrows** at their feeders this winter. Several folks responded, and it seems all have noticed an increase. Barbara Clark indicated she has more than usual at her feeders near McKay Dam. After putting up her feeders in her yard on Pendleton’s North Hill in mid-



*Long-tailed Duck. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker*

December, Tanya Harrison noted she is being “mauled” by **House Sparrows**, emptying her feeder in one day rather than the normal three days. And, Duane Whitten counted over **48 House Sparrows** in his feeder in SW Pendleton on December 17, far more than he usually sees. I’m not sure what is responsible for the increase in **House Sparrows**. It will be interesting to see if this apparent increase in the local population continues.

Tanya Harrison reported seeing a **Peregrine Falcon** near Echo on December 8. For several years, Ginger and Rodger Shoemake and Mike and MerryLynn Denny from Walla Walla and College Place, respectively, have been running a winter raptor survey in northern Umatilla County. The route starts at the western face of the Blue Mountains and runs west into the southern Walla Walla Valley in northern Umatilla County. This survey always turns up a large number of raptors, and a survey run on December 13 was above average. **Ten** species of raptors were found and included an amazing **239 Red-tailed Hawks**.

December 18, June Whitten, Connie Betts and Aaron Skirvin birded the back roads through Stanfield and Hermiston on their way to the Columbia River. Although it was a rather foggy and wintery day, June reports they were able to find 64 species. By far the best bird of the day was a female **LONG-TAILED**

**DUCK** on the river above the Port of Umatilla facilities. Other species included hundreds of **Common Goldeneyes**, **3 Barrow's Goldeneyes**, **Horned, Eared, Pied-billed** and **Western Grebes**, several **Common Loons** and the immature **Snow Goose** that has been in this area for some time. Gulls observed on the Columbia River included **Glaucous-winged, Mew, Herring, Ring-billed, California** and a probable **Western x Glaucous-winged** cross. They found **2 Merlins**, one in Stanfield and one in Hermiston.

After putting up her thistle feeders in mid-December, Tanya Harrison reports **American Goldfinches** are now waiting in line for their turn to feed. December 19, Aaron found the Cold Springs Reservoir almost completely frozen. There were few **Canada Geese** but several thousand **Mallards**. He also saw a flock of about 25 shorebirds that he speculates were **Dunlin**, but they were too far away to ID. Aaron said the most dramatic event was watching an adult **Bald Eagle** chasing a female **Mallard**. The eagle nearly caught the duck twice in the 400-yard chase, but in the end the duck got away.

The following day Aaron and June birded from Stateline along Highway 730 to the Umatilla Marina. Along the way they spotted **4 Common Loons**, one calling. At the Port of Umatilla there were lots of **Common Goldeneyes**, but they were unable to relocate the **Long-tailed Duck**. They found **3 Eared Grebes**, **2** at Hat Rock State Park and one at McNary Beach Recreation Area. An immature **Tundra Swan** was in the Umatilla Marina and **2 Peregrine Falcons** were chasing **Rock Pigeons** at the Umatilla Bridge.

On December 21 June reported **2 Eurasian Collared-Doves**, **36 House Finches**, **8 Dark-eyed Juncos**, **14 Morning Doves**, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **7 Fox Squirrels** at their feeders in SW Pendleton. Using a remote camera received as a Christmas gift, Duane Whitten has photographed a number of Mule Deer coming to their feeders at night for birdseed.



*Eurasian Collared-Dove. Photo by Aaron*

Nancy Brown of Hermiston participates in the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Project Feeder Watch every year. Although House Finches are common at feeders in the winter, for the last several years Nancy has had **PURPLE FINCHES** at her feeders. Nancy reports she had up to **6 PURPLE FINCHES** at her feeder on December 8, 22 and 29, 2009, and 6 on January 5 and 12, 2010. They are a great addition to the Umatilla County 2010 year list.

Driving on Johns Road, north of Pendleton, Doug Webb and Ron Snyder found a large white owl flying low over the wheat stubble on the afternoon of December 22. It landed on a telephone pole and they were able to get out of their truck and observe the bird. It was identified as a **SNOWY OWL**. **SNOWY OWLS** are not found in Umatilla County every year, and this is another a great addition to the Umatilla 2009 county list.

Dolly Robison saw **3 Eurasian Collared-Doves** outside of Stanfield on Christmas day. Dolly reports the **Eurasian Collared-Doves** she had been seeing around her home have disappeared. They did the same last winter, and she expects they will return in the spring. Dolly reports she has periodically seen a **Great Egret** along Stage Gulch Creek that flows through Stanfield.

Aaron Skirvin, June Whitten, and Bruce Mayfield birded the Columbia River December 27. There were several **Horned**, **2 Eared**, several **Pied-billed** and **4 Western Grebes** at Hat Rock. Placing some birdseed at the McNary Wildlife Nature Area (MUNA), they attracted **2 Harris's Sparrows** along with other expected species. They found one **Bohemian Waxwing** with the **American Robins** and **Cedar Waxwings** feeding on Mountain Ash fruits at Fountain Pond. Passing through Stanfield they noted **2 Great Egrets**, several **Wilson's Snipes** and one immature **Black-crowned Night-heron** in Stage Gulch Creek. During their travels they noted quite a few **Red-tailed** and **Rough-legged Hawks**, **American Kestrels**, **Northern Harriers**, one **Golden Eagle** and **4 Bald Eagles**.

I (Dave Herr) spent the last early morning of 2009 looking for a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** to add to the County Year list. Playing a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** call, I found 3 different birds along the Umatilla River upstream from Cayuse. Aaron and June also spent the last day of the year birding. They tallied 57 species. Their best finds included **Chukars**, 3 **Bald** and 2 **Golden Eagles** at Wegner Gulch and at MWNA, **Cedar Waxwings**, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, and **Spotted Towhees**. One **Northern Pintail** was on the pond at Hat Rock State Park.

On his morning walk along the Umatilla River behind his home a few miles east of Pendleton, Jack Simons spotted 2 **Bald Eagles** and returned home to watch a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** chasing the birds at his feeder. In the ensuing fray a female **House Finch** crashed into his kitchen window and fell to the ground stunned. Jack rescued the finch and put it in a cage with another pet bird. The two birds did not get along and Jack decided to release the **House Finch**. As soon as he did the finch flew to the tree where the **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was hiding. Jack is happy that although the Sharpie took after the finch, the finch eluded the hawk and escaped.



*Yellow-rumped Warbler(female). Photo by Joy Jaeger*

January 1, 2010, several folks participated in a Umatilla County Big Day count. Aaron reports the folks on the count tallied a total of 78 species. Some notable finds included Neal Hind's report of a **Harris's Sparrow**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **Hooded Mergansers**, several other ducks, a **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Fox Sparrows**, **Spotted Towhees**, and other species at MWNA. Neal had a couple of other good finds, too, including a drake **Northern Pintail** and an **Eared Grebe** at Hat Rock State Park. I (Dave Herr) looked for owls up the Umatilla River above Cayuse and found one **Northern Saw-whet Owl** near Thorn Hollow. Aaron, June, and Connie Betts looked for birds in the southern part of the county on January 1. Highlights included a



flock of **Chukars** and a lone **Rock Wren** near Vinson; **Wild Turkeys** and a **Clark's Nutcracker** near Ukiah, and two **Cackling Geese** among a flock of **Canada Geese** at Wildhorse Golf Course.

The Umatilla County annual Christmas Bird Count was held January 2, 2010. A detailed account is located in a separate article in this newsletter.

January 3, Connie Betts had a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** along with many **House Finches**, **Dark-eyed Juncos** and several **European Starlings** at the feeder in her SW Pendleton yard. January 4, Connie had over **100 American Robins** in her yard and January 6 there were at least 10 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** there. The same day, Jack Simons found 3 **Pileated Woodpeckers** in the cottonwood trees in his pasture behind his home. Jack notes that 3 **Pileated Woodpeckers** is a new high for his property. Birding at MWNA on January 3, Aaron and June found an **AMERICAN BITTERN**, a **Harris's Sparrow** and at least 8 **Bald Eagles** at the MWNA, a female **LONG-TAILED DUCK** at the Port of Umatilla and an adult **Golden Eagle** at Hat Rock State Park. Dolly Robison, as well as Aaron and June reported a **Great Egret** in Stage Gulch Creek in downtown Stanfield.

Larry and Jacque Goodhew from Walla Walla found 2 **Harris's Sparrows**, 2 **Spotted Towhees**, 3 **Song Sparrows** and at least 6 **Golden-crowned Sparrows** at the main parking lot of the MWNA.

January 9, Karen Baxter reported finding 6 **Tundra Swans** at Frog Pond at MWNA. The following day Aaron and June saw 2 adult and 9 immature **Tundra Swans** at the area. The following day Portland birder Stefan Schlick found the year's first **Varied Thrush** at MWNA.

Flying in his private plane over the west county on January 14, Bruce Mayfield estimated there were still over **300 Snow Geese** at the Cold Springs Reservoir. On their way to Walla Walla along the Mission Road January 18, Diana LaSarge and Marcia Bunnell watched a **Great Blue Heron** stalking mice in an

adjacent field. Later, walking along Mill Creek (SE of Walla Walla, WA) they found 6 **Canada Geese**, 5 **Cackling Geese**, one male **Mallard** and a female **Common Merganser**.

On Martin Luther King Holiday, January 18, Connie Betts, June, Aaron and Aaron's grandson, Gabriel, birded in the northern part of the county. Birds of note included 3 **Prairie Falcons**, 2 along the Rieth Road to Echo and one along White House Road near Echo Meadows. They found one **Great Egret** along Rosenberg Road in the Echo Meadows area and another **Great Egret** in Stage Gulch Creek in Stanfield. They observed at least 7 **Bald Eagles** patrolling Cold Springs NWR, apparently looking for an injured goose or duck. They did not count the ducks on the reservoir, but reported that nearly all of the few hundred ducks were **Northern Pintails**. The group estimated there were over **10,000 Canada Geese** and an amazing **2,200 Snow Geese** on the far side of the reservoir. This number of Snow Geese is unprecedented in Umatilla County, and I would love to know what drew them to our area this winter.

January 18, I birded at Memorial Marsh east of Cold Springs Reservoir. Temperatures were in the 60's and with calling Pacific Chorus Frogs, singing **Song Sparrows** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** it seemed like spring! Yet, we know there is a lot of winter left to come. So check your feeders and favorite birding spots and let me know what winter birds you are seeing. Please send all your reports to me, Dave Herr, at [dsherr1@mac.com](mailto:dsherr1@mac.com) or 541-276-6413.

## [Hot off His Desk, Ready to Download](#)

Go the Bird Club website to obtain your 3-page Key for identifying Winter Sparrows. Please give Jack until Wednesday to complete this task...thanks!

Aaron Skirvin developed a dichotomous key to assist birders in identifying our local, winter sparrows (members of family Emberizidae). This key is for use between mid October and late March. From spring migration through late summer, additional species are found locally. These species are not present during the winter, and are not included in the key. The key does not include the finches (family Fringillidae), such as Pine Siskin, House Finch, or American Goldfinch, which may resemble and be confused with sparrows. The following 16 species of sparrows are included in the key: **Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Sage Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, Savannah Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Snow Bunting, and Fox Sparrow.**

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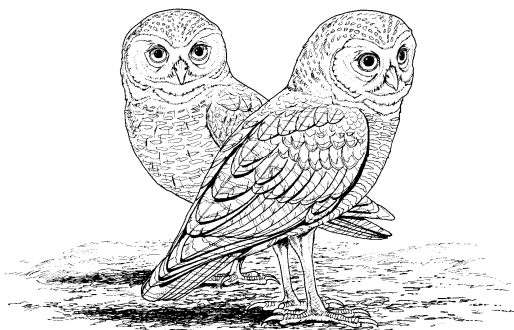
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