Oregon Birds
The Journal of Oregon Birding and Field Ornithology
Volume 39 Number 2 • 2013
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**Front Cover:** Common Eider, Coos Bay, March 17, 2013. *Photo by Owen Schmidt (Portland)*

**Back Cover:** Bohemian Waxwing, near Mt. Ashland, January 2013. *Photo by Frank Lospalluto (Ashland)*

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### Oregon Birds

*Oregon Birds* is a publication of Oregon Birding Association (formerly Oregon Field Ornithologists), an Oregon not-for-profit corporation. Two issues are produced each year, a full-color Year in Review issue in the spring and an issue with articles in the fall.

**Editor:** Alan Contreras

**Note:** Craig Tumer of Portland will take over as Editor of *Oregon Birds* effective with Volume 40.

**Photo Editor:** Brandon Green

**Maps:** John Notis

**Editorial Assistants:** Paul Sullivan, Carol Karlen, Craig Tumer, Pamela Johnston


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**ISSN 0890-2313**
Changing Patterns of Occurrence of the Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) in Oregon

_Vjera Thompson_

Tropical Kingbirds disperse northward in the fall from their standard range in South America and Mexico. They are found in open habitat along the Oregon coast, and can be found near estuaries, in pastures, and small towns. They are often seen perched on a wire or other highly-visible perch.

The Tropical Kingbird season started normally in September 2012. As the reports continued and then started to pile up, it soon became obvious that there were more birds being reported than normal. But what is normal? I researched records of Tropical Kingbirds to see if I could create a baseline of Tropical Kingbird occurrence and distribution in Oregon.

I gathered 170 reports of Tropical Kingbirds. Records were gleaned from OBRC, *Oregon Birds*, and OBOL. The first OBRC record was October 9, 1976. Tropical Kingbird records from the OBRC continue through 2001, when it was removed from the OBRC review list. I searched OBOL records from 2002-2012, and *Oregon Birds* from 1988-2012.

During the period 1988-2001 that included both OBRC records and *Oregon Birds*, I noted that there were birds reported to *Oregon Birds* that
were not included in the OBRC records. I included these additional records that were not vetted by the OBRC.

I recorded all reported arrival dates and departure dates. There are probably a few birds that were entered twice in my database of sightings: if a Tropical Kingbird showed up in the same location in the same season, but there was a big gap in time between sightings, I included it as a new entry. If the record clearly indicated that the same bird had continued throughout the period, I treated it as one record.

Tropical Kingbirds are found occasionally in September, most frequently in October and November, and sometimes linger into December. Although Tropical Kingbirds usually disappear in December, one individual at the Hatfield Marine Science Center in Lincoln County hung around for the Christmas Bird Count on January 1st, 2013. Another late report was recorded on February 18th, 1985 at Cape Blanco, Coos County.

There are two summer records from the OBRC, both from Curry County. The first was on June 11, 1982, and the second was present from July 26 to August 8, 1998. Summer kingbirds need to be closely examined to rule out Western Kingbird, the more common kingbird in Oregon.

Tropical Kingbirds have been reported in every coastal county in Oregon. The records show that the birds arrive along the southern coast and move north as the season progresses. They are easiest to find in Curry and Coos County in October. The records for Lane, Lincoln, and Tillamook are clustered around October and November. In Clatsop County, there are more arrival records in November. Departure dates are not as well known, but Clatsop has had more Tropical Kingbirds linger into December than any other county.

There have been some well documented inland exceptions to their standard coastal fall patterns. There are a couple of inland records, with two reports from Sauvie Island, Multnomah County, in November 1996 and November 2006, one report from Yamhill County, in October 1998, and a record from Malheur NWR HQ in September 1995.

Some coastal locations have had multiple Tropical Kingbirds sightings. These are the best locations for each county:

- Cape Blanco, Curry County
- N. Spit, Coos County
- S. Jetty Road, Siuslaw River, Lane County
- Hatfield Marine Science Center, Lincoln County
- Nehalem Meadows, Tillamook County
- Seaside, Clatsop County

Fall 2012 was an exceptional year for Tropical Kingbird, the best on record. From 1976 to 1996, each fall there were 0-4 Tropical Kingbirds reports. From 1997 to 2011, there was an average of 9 Tropical Kingbirds reported each year. Numbers rose to a new level in 2008-2011, with more than 10 records each year. In 2012, there was almost double the previous high of 17 reports, with over 30 different birds reported, possibly as many as 38.

It is possible that Tropical Kingbird sightings have increased in recent years because of improvements in rapid communication technology and more awareness of Tropical Kingbird patterns. However, the jump in sightings in 2012 cannot be attributed primarily to increased awareness. It is clear that there were
more Tropical Kingbirds in Oregon in fall 2012 than have ever been recorded before. It remains to be seen if Oregon will host similar numbers of Tropical Kingbirds in fall 2013 or future years.

References:
I rode my mountain bike up Fishhole Creek Road, near Bly, Oregon, on March 29th, 2013, to explore that area for birds where the habitat is Western Juniper and low sage. Along the way, I heard and saw two different titmouse individuals. The location was approximately fifty miles from the nearest known hybrid zone at Lava Beds National Monument (Cicero 1996). Between the hybrid zone and Fishhole Creek Road, a known Juniper Titmouse specimen was collected near Lorella, Klamath Co., (Cicero, 1996), it would seem that the birds I encountered were likely Juniper Titmouse.

Fishhole Creek Road is 3-4 miles SE of Bly, OR, (see map), and I rode about 7 miles up that road, from Highway 140 to beyond Devil Lake. This location is further east than I have ever encountered titmouse in Klamath Co. I had encountered titmouse in that general area previously: one was in the early 1980s, three miles west of Bly, on Pine Crest Road, and another was about 10 miles south of Beatty, OR, about 14 mi. west of Bly, on Yellow Jacket Spring Road, in 1983. Most recently, about 10 miles north of the Fishhole Creek Rd. site, a single titmouse was heard during a stop on the Bly II Breeding Bird Survey route, on June 10, 2013.

Other reports of titmouse east of Klamath Falls have included one in the Sprague River Valley area in 2009 (Frank Lospalluto) and one north of Bonanza near the old Weyerhauser Tree Farm by Mike Denny in 1988 (Oregon Birds 14(3): 272); these were simply reported as Plain Titmouse prior to the split. Another ‘Plain’ Titmouse report was at Bly Mountain Cutoff north of Bonanza in January, 1980, (Steve Summers personal notes).
The birds seen/heard along Fishhole Creek Road are further north in latitude than the reliable Juniper Titmouse location that many travel to near Adel, Lake Co., OR, although there have been other Juniper Titmouse observations that have occurred further north in Oregon.

Using a fLip© camera, I recorded two different variations of their songs from both individuals and heard a possible third variation from one individual. The recorded songs I obtained had repeated and unchanging pitch for both single, and double note, song variations. The single note recording sounded nearly identical to the first portion of the first sample of Juniper Titmouse song found on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, while another recording along Fishhole Ck. Rd., one with repeated double notes, sounded identical to the entire second Cornell example for Juniper Titmouse.

An example of the single note singing recorded along Fishhole Creek Road, 3/29/2013 can be heard at: http://xeno-canto.org/143569.

References


Kevin Spencer
rrirapia@charter.net
From May 2012 to May 2013 the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OBRC) completed the following records. The first group of records are those for which the written report and/or photographs or specimens supported the stated identification and are accepted records. If photo(s) or specimen is indicated for a record it was accepted as verified. Other records were accepted as sight records.

Of the 54 records reviewed by the Committee, 52 were accepted, and 2 were not accepted. Five species were added to the list: Common Eider, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Guadalupe Murrelet, Little Bunting, and Cassin’s Sparrow. Two species were removed from the Review List: White-winged Dove and Brown Thrasher. The Official Checklist now stands at 527 species.

Information presented below for each species includes location of sighting, number of birds, sex and age if known, special information (such as collection and museum number) and date(s), initial of the observer(s) submitting written or other evidence for accepted records, and the OBRC record file number.

The OBRC record file number reads as follows: the first 3 digits are the AOU number for the species, the second 2 are the year in which the record was observed, and the last numbers are the consecutive numbers for the records as they are filed.

The OBRC thanks the following organizations for having made financial contributions in the past year to help with expenses: Cape Arago Audubon Society, Central Oregon Audubon Society, Audubon Society of Corvallis, Grant County Bird Club, Grande Ronde Bird Club, Kalmiopsis Audubon Society, Lane County Audubon Society, Audubon Society of Portland, Salem Audubon Society, Umpqua Valley Audubon, and Yaquina Birders and Naturalists.

The OBRC solicits nominations for membership. Each year the OBRC elects 3 of its 9 members for 3-year terms. Birders themselves interested in serving on the

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<td>Craig Turner</td>
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<td>Mike Patterson</td>
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OBRC should nominate themselves. All nominees must be members of OBA in good standing and the Secretary must receive all nominations before 15 November 2013. New terms begin at the new calendar year.

Accepted Records:

**Common Eider**
159-13-04 Coos Bay, Coos Co., 1 subadult male 15-17 March 2013 (photos by OS,NSt,BaT);

**Cook’s Petrel**
098.3-12-04 45km W. Cape Blanco, Curry Co., 1 bird on 17 April 2012 (RyM);

**Brown Booby**
115-12-05 25mi. W. Depoe Bay, Lincoln Co., 1 bird on 6 October 2012 (GG,photo by NSt);

**Little Blue Heron**
200-12-13 Malheur NWR, Harney Co., 1 immature 21-22 September 2012 (photos by PSu,TB,AC);

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**
203-04-01 Otter Crest, Lincoln Co., 1 adult on 14 April 2004 (photo by ARV);
Piping Plover
277-12-03 South Jetty Siuslaw River, Lane Co., 1 bird on 20 August 2012 (DSst); 025.1-73-02 65-165 NM West of Newport, Lincoln Co., 1 bird during June 1973 (photograph MWP);

Spotted Redshank
253.2-12-02 Fern Ridge Reservoir, Lane Co., 1 breeding plumaged bird 4-6 July 2012 RRo, photos by BUh, DAr); White-winged Dove 319-12-24 Brookings, Curry Co., 1 bird 21 August 2012 (JSu, photos by SBy)

Hudsonian Godwit
251-12-22 South Jetty Columbia River, Clatsop Co., 1 breeding plumaged male on 2 July 2012 (JoB); Common Ground-Dove 329-12-03 Cape Blanco, Curry Co., 1 bird 17-18 September 2012 (photographs OS,LoM);

Red-necked Stint
242.2-12-23 S. Jetty Siuslaw R., Lane Co., 1 bird on 23 July 2012 (photos by AC, LuB); Yellow-billed Cuckoo 387-09-22 Sandy River Delta, Multnomah Co., 1 calling bird on 22 July 2009 (JaW);

Curlew Sandpiper
244-12-24 Heceta Beach, Lane Co., 1 adult in partial breeding plumage 14 August 2012 (photo by TMi); Ruby-throated Hummingbird 428-12-05 Hart Mountain, Lake Co., 1 adult male on 1 June 2012 (photos JSh);

Red-legged Kittiwake
041-12-09 Near Yachats, Lincoln Co., 1 bird dead on beach 9 June 2012 (photos by AI, PSp); Crested Caracara 362-12-07 Langlois, Curry Co., 1 bird on 1 December 2012 (photo LoM);

Little Gull
060.1-12-14 Summer Lake WMA, Lake Co., 1 bird on 12 August 2012 (TR); Eastern Phoebe 456-12-20 Airlie, Polk Co., 1 bird on 1 June 2012 (WT, photos OS, NS, BrW)

Vega Herring Gull
052-93-04 Sauvie Island, Multnomah Co., 1 adult 10 January to 27 March 1993 (photos by HN) Wood Thrush 755-12-04 Whiskey Springs, Jefferson Co., 1 bird on 21 September 2012 (JSu);

Iceland Gull
043-11-18 Yaquina Bay, Lincoln Co., first cycle bird on 26 April 2011 (photos by WH); Brown Thrasher 706-12-30 Port Orford, Curry Co., 1 bird on 25 May 2012 (photo by LoM);

Black Skimmer
080-02-02 Coos Bay, Coos Co., 1 bird on 29 April 2002 (BCe); Phainopepla 620-12-08 Emigrant Lake, Jackson Co., 1 immature 4-6 December 2012 (photos HFu, GoP, TPh);
McCown’s Longspur
539-12-08
Borax Lake, Harney Co., 1 bird on 19 October 2012 (NSi);

Little Bunting
602-13-01
Joseph, Wallowa Co., 1 bird 28-29 January, also March, 2013 (AC, photos by CTu, TBr);

Hooded Warbler
684-12-18
Astoria, Clatsop Co., 1 male 31 December 2012 to 10 January 2013 (photos by MP, MLu);

Summer Tanager
610-12-21
Headquarters Malheur NWR, Harney Co., 1 breeding plumaged male 10-11 June 2012 (photos by AC, DwP);

Cape May Warbler
650-12-16
Frenchglen, Harney Co., 1 bird on 13 May 2012 (photos by TaA, ErC);

Blue Grosbeak
597-11-12
Crissey Field State Park, Curry Co., 1 female on 30 June 2011 (DMu);

Blackburnian Warbler
662-04-12
Tillamook Bay, Tillamook Co., 1 juvenile on 18 September 2004 (WG);

Painted Bunting
601-12-06
Bandon, Coos Co., 1 female early March 2012 (photos by MAy);

Black-throated Green Warbler
667-12-16
Fields, Harney Co., 1 breeding plumaged male on 29 May 2012 (VTh, CM, AC, OS, RRo);

Dickcissel
604-12-17
Fenk Road, Tillamook Co., 1 bird on 12 November 2012 (photos by SuN);

Cassin’s Sparrow
578-12-01
Floras Lake, Curry Co., 1 bird 10-11 October 2012 (photos by LoM, OS, RuN);

604-11-18
Nestucca Bay NWR, Tillamook Co., 1 bird on 10 September 2011 (photos by JHu);

Lark Bunting
605-12-24
Fields, Harney Co., 1 breeding plumaged male 15 May 2012 (RaW);

Rusty Blackbird
509-12-22
Ashland, Jackson Co., 1 female on 26 December 2012 (photos by RuN);

605-12-25
Cape Blanco, Curry Co., 1 winter plumaged bird 27 August 2012 (LoM);

Orchard Oriole
506-12-12
Page Springs Campground, Harney Co., 1 male on 8 June 2012 (photos by HFu, GoP);

Red Fox Sparrow
585-12-10
Brookings, Curry Co., 1 bird 16-18 March 2012 photo (SCh);

506-12-13
Headquarters Malheur NWR, Harney Co., 1 male on 17 June 2012 (photos by AdH);

585-13-11
Heceta Beach, Lane Co., 1 bird on 7 January 2013 (photo by Diane Pettey);

Baltimore Oriole
507-12-16
Headquarters Malheur NWR, Harney Co., 1 summer plumaged male 22 August 2012 (BrG);

Gray-headed Junco
569-12-04
Pueblo Mountains, Harney Co., two birds on 14 June 2012 (AdH);
507-12-17 Brookings, Curry Co., 1 adult male 22 August 2012 (photo by DMu);

Lawrence’s Goldfinch
531-12-12 Klamath Falls, Klamath Co., 1 breeding plumaged male on 12 April 2012 (photos by MES);

Not Accepted Records:

Hawaiian/Galapagos Petrel
098.5/6-11-03 40mi. W. Reedsport, Douglas Co., 1 bird on 24 August 2011. Although reported by an experienced observer the bird was seen in rather poor weather conditions and important identification details were lacking.

Rusty Blackbird

Observers

Tait Anderson (TaA)
Dennis Arendt (DAr)
Michael Ayers (MAy)
Alan Barron (AB)
Luke Bloch (LuB)
Tim Blount (TB)
Joe Blowes (JoB)
Trent Bray (TBr)
Steve Byland (SBy)
Eric Carlson (ErC)
Bob Celentano (BCE)
Sheila Chambers (SCh)
Alan Contreras (AC)
Michael Force (MiF)
Harry Fuller (HFu)
Brandon Green (BrG)
Greg Gillson (GG)
Wink Gross (WG)
Adrian Hinkle (AdH)
Wayne Hoffman (WH)
Jack Hurt (JHu)
Albert Johnstone (AlJ)
Mark Lundgren (MLu)
Ryan Merrill (RMu)
Tom Mickel (TMi)
Craig Miller (CM)
Lois Miller (LoM)
Don Munson (DMu)
Russ Namitz (RuN)
Harry Nehls (HN)
Susan Norris (SuN)
Mike Patterson (MP)
William Pearcy (MWP)
George Peterson (GoP)
Terence Phillipe (TPh)
Dwight Porter (DWP)
Tim Rodenkirk (TR)
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Noah Strycker (NST)
John Sullivan (JSu)
Paul Sullivan (PSu)
Don Sutherland (DSu)
Jeff Schwilk (JSe)
Barbara Taylor (BaT)
Vjera Thompson VTh)
William Tice (WT)
Becky Uhler (BUh)
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Brian Wagner (BrW)
Raven Wing (RaW)
Jay Withgott (JaW)

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In Oregon it SNOWs in June

First record of Snowy Owl (Bubo scandiaca) summering in Oregon

Jordan Harrison

We’ve all heard the saying, “You have to be lucky to be good and good to be lucky.” In many ways this idea applies to birding. One must be lucky enough to have the time to dedicate to practicing proper field identification. One must have a good enough ear to differentiate between one bird’s song and another’s. One must also be able to pay great attention to fine details; “Did those wingtips extend past the tail?” In the end, all of that skill and luck sometimes have to come together in one perfect alignment in order to catch a fleeting glimpse of that bird of a lifetime. Those sightings are great and unforgettable moments.

In the case of the latest snowy owl ever recorded in Oregon, most of that was not true. That sighting required lots and lots of luck.

As a working field biologist whose main area of expertise is birds, I would like to be able to say that I went out and systematically scoured the Zumwalt Prairie for any and all signs of rare or unexpected birds. That I followed weather patterns and surveyed prey availability for weeks. That I kept meticulous notes, notes that would make Aldo Leopold envious. I would like to say that when I analyzed all my notes and data, I figured out that A + B = C and the result was a super cool finding. I wish that was how this all came about, but it wasn’t.

Instead, it was the result of, “Hey, let’s go take a drive through the Zumwalt Prairie today.” The sighting occurred on the east side of Zumwalt Road, just before the junction with North Pine Road on June 2, 2012 at approximately 4:40 pm in the Zumwalt Prairie of northeastern Oregon. The snowy owl was perched on a fence post right next to the road and, of course, spooked as soon as I got my camera out. It was initially observed from a distance of approximately 100 meters.

The snowy acted in typical snowy fashion: Making a few short flights, being occasionally mobbed by passerines, and perching all too conspicuously for its own good. I followed him around for the better part of a couple hours, trying to take award-winning photos that mostly turned out fuzzy, and really trying hard to believe in what I was actually seeing.

The most interesting observations came early the next day. I had a hard time re-locating him, although he was still in the same general vicinity as the night before. Once I found him I observed him intently focusing on a colony of Belding's Ground Squirrels (Spermophilus beldingi). I was lucky enough to see him make a couple of failed attempts before he finally scored an early breakfast of one very unlucky Belding’s.

Anyone could have been driving down Zumwalt Road and observed the snowy owl perched on that fence post that evening. In fact there were other vehicles that I saw that may or may not have seen him. The lesson learned here is to be always observant. Not just of birds, but of the entire world around us.

Whether we’re working as professionals, birding for fun, or just driving to the grocery store; we never know what luck might bring our way.

Jordan Harrison
trailweathered@gmail.com
In September 2012, my wife and I bought a two-story, wooden house in SW Portland. The house is on a slope above Woods Creek and there’s a city-owned greenbelt, so our “backyard” is large and wooded. Not too long after we moved in I noticed a couple of spots on the ground around the house (and one area at the base of a large Douglas Fir) that seemed to have a significant concentration of bird droppings, so I started looking up above these spots during the day, early in the morning (pre-dawn), and again in the evening to see what might be roosting there.

However, I had no luck until February 2013, when I started going outside later at night to listen for calling owls. On the night of February 10, I found a new area of bird droppings on a deck off the south side of the house, and started looking above that spot with my flashlight, going up the side of the house until I reached the eaves. There I saw a dark, indistinct object that I first thought, with my naked eye, might be a roosting bat.

I got my binoculars and, holding the flashlight in one hand and my binoculars in the other, I saw that the object was apparently composed of feathers...with two tails sticking out! I had no idea what it was other than being pretty sure it was not a bat, or an owl. The birds were clinging to the wood siding at the very top of the exterior wall of the house, just under the eaves, and next to the exhaust for our furnace, which was enclosed in a long, wooden chimney.

After scratching my head for a while, I went inside and googled something like “birds roosting on house siding” and one of the first few items listed was a post on OBOL by Scott Carpenter from March 2011 about his discovery of roosting Bewick’s Wrens (Thryomanes bewickii) on the side of his house.

I have Pacific Wrens (Troglodytes pacificus) in my yard, but had not seen or heard Bewick’s Wrens. But the “puffballs” in my photos didn’t look right for either wren, especially the stiff tails, neither of which showed the barring that should have been apparent on either of the wren’s tails. So, I took a few photos and e-mailed them to Scott, asking for his opinion. He responded that they looked like Brown Creepers (Certhia americana). That species had not even occurred to me, but of course that is what they turned out to be. Scott eventually came over to verify and photograph the birds, and one of his photos is shown below.

A few days later I looked around all four sides of the house to see if there was anything else roosting on the structure. There were no other roosting birds, but I did find bird droppings at several spots on the side of the house, or immediately adjacent on the ground, and it made me wonder if the birds had moved around searching for the most advantageous spot, before ending up next to the furnace chimney, which perhaps was slightly warmer at night.

Unsurprisingly, this wouldn’t be the first documented instance of Brown Creepers roosting or nesting on structures. For example, in “Chickadees, Tits, Nuthatches, and Treecreepers, by S. Harrap & D. Quinn (Princeton Univ. Press; 1995”), the following behavior is noted:

"Up to 11 birds have also been recorded roosting in April in a cavity in a beam in a barn. Otherwise presumably solitary at the roost, and in winter may roost on or even inside buildings."

"Less commonly, the nest is placed in a natural cavity such as a knothole or abandoned woodpecker excavation, even in fence posts, behind loose shingles on buildings, or under a piece of tin on an outhouse roof."
Chickadee Chomps Cicada

*Thomas Meinzen*

On August 1, 2012 I was walking around the side of our house, going to clean our birdbath, when suddenly an extremely loud buzzing sound caused me to look up. A flutter of movement by the lilac caught my eye. As I approached the activity, the harsh buzzing increased in volume until it drowned out even the neighbor’s lawnmower. I was surprised to see something fluttering on the ground and then laboriously hopping up to the lowest branch of the lilac. My astonishment grew as the form showed itself as a Black-capped Chickadee with a giant, vibrating beak extension.

Upon closer inspection, I found that in fact the loud buzz was emanating from a very large cicada that the chickadee had just, miraculously, snatched from the leaf litter below the lilac. The monotonous sound continued as the little bird struggled with its prey, even dropping it once. After picking it up from the ground, the chickadee resumed its attempts to quell the beast. I watched, amazed, as the chickadee pulled off strips of pink cicada meat, one by one, and swallowed them. I could not help but think of the Peregrine Falcons or Merlins I had observed performing this same behavior, if on a rather larger scale.

It took the triumphant chickadee about ten minutes to eat the whole cicada. With a final chatter, the chickadee flew off for the birdbath I was about to clean. A nice Cicada Steak always goes well with a cold glass of water and, um... some sunflower seeds, right? When I checked the ground below after the chickadee had left, all that remained were a few tattered insect wings and a some shreds of hard black exoskeleton.

Black-capped Chickadee vs. Wooly Bear

*Holly Reinhard*

While doing bird surveys at Jackson-Frazier Wetland for my Oregon State University Systematics of Birds class in 2011, I was quite surprised to come across a Black-capped Chickadee picking away at a Wooly Bear caterpillar. I was not aware that a bird would have any desire to eat something so prickly and fuzzy.

*Photo by Holly Reinhard taken November 2011, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Corvallis, Benton County.*
Canada Geese defend grazing ground in flock of white geese

John Shewey

In April, 2012, Tim Blount and I watched with great interest and amusement as two Canada Geese defended a large circle of feeding territory near Burns, Harney Co. from any and all incursion by thousands of Ross’s and Snow Geese. The Honkers had some predetermined border in mind and any white goose that crossed the invisible line was instantly charged and often attacked by a Honker.

So long as the white geese did not violate the invisible borders of this circular kingdom, the two Canada Geese went about their business. Thereby the two Canada Geese maintained, by force, the large circle they had carved out amid all the white geese. This action may be related to a gander defending its mate.

Photo courtesy John Shewey -- http://www.birdingoregon.com/field-notes.html

A possible Spruce Grouse in western Union County, Oregon

Jeremy Breese

I was birding in the Spring Creek area of Union County off FR2155/034 around 9:15 AM on March 25, 2012. The habitat was open understory with heavy pine litter and fallen trees from a previous fire, 40% canopy cover of mixed conifers the only one of which I could ID was lodgepole pine. There were many people shooting as it was the weekend and what came next really startled me as it was very close. It sounded like a muffled gunshot and as I was about to yell it happened again but twice and with a slightly different sound to it; almost like a hammer, not a gun, and I realized what I was hearing was a grouse, the booming effect of what I assumed to be a Spruce Grouse.

I told my friend it was okay as she was taking cover at that point and it happened twice more as we were approaching and then just stopped. I scoured the trees above and ran like a maniac in hopes of seeing a fleeing chicken, to no avail. After watching some footage and listening to audio clips of many species (i.e. Spruce, Ruffed, Dusky, Sooty, Sharp-tailed, and even possible woodpecker drumming) by elimination as my basis of identification there was nothing that came close to what I heard from any other species besides the Spruce Grouse.

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An individual Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiaca*) established a foraging territory near Burns Oregon during the 2011-2012 irruption event. This was a rare appearance, as large irruptions in the Pacific Northwest occur at 8-12 year intervals (Patterson 2007) and the last known sighting in the Burns area was 1979 (R. Vetter, Pers. Comm.). The diet of Snowy Owls on their breeding territories and their wintering areas elsewhere have been well documented (Patterson 2007), but I have found no published references about their diet during a rare winter appearance in eastern Oregon. This paper reports the diet and foraging behavior of this individual Snowy Owl in southeastern Oregon.

In Oregon, when Snowy Owls do irrupt, they usually arrive from late Nov. to Dec. (Patterson 2003). This owl appeared on November 18, 2011 and although was occasionally absent, foraged in a 110 acre field for 54 days until it departed on January 25, 2012.

The field is located 5 miles SE of Burns Oregon (43° 33' 58"N -118° 57' 20"E). Winter site fidelity to a specific area is well documented (Parmelee 1992). This field’s short meadow hay (*Alopecurus pratensis*) stubble is similar to the flat open grasslands of the Snowy Owl’s traditional tundra habitat. In Oregon during winter, Snowy Owls are found in open prairies, fields, or shorelines, spending most of the day sitting on low perches with unrestricted views (Patterson 2003). This meadow hay field is surrounded and bisected by metal and wooden fence posts, which vary in height from 4 feet to 6.5 feet, and is bordered on one side by a State highway.

... during a particularly active foraging period from 15:45 to 16:30, the owl captured a total of 6 prey items in 45 minutes.”
Before the owl appeared; the owner of the field installed a 16 foot tall wooden perch to lure birds away from perching on a nearby solar panel. After the owl appeared, volunteers installed 2 temporary 6.5 foot tall wooden perches in the center of the field to lure the owl away from hazards posed by perching adjacent to a State highway. The owl used the fence posts, along with the 3 installed perches for foraging platforms. Snowy Owls prefer stubble fields with edge habitats such as fence rows and roadside ditches (Boxall, P. C. and M. R. Lein. 1982b). This owl preferred to forage from the tallest wooden fence posts clear of underbrush adjacent to the State highway. This species selects habitats with high prey availability (Boxall, P. C. and M. R. Lein. 1982b). These perches provided access to a ditch bordering the highway where the owl captured a majority of the prey.

To avoid disturbing the owl, I observed from a distance of at least 400 feet using 10x40 binoculars and a window mounted 20x60 spotting scope while remaining in a parked vehicle. I was able to record the owl’s dawn and dusk foraging behavior for 51 days totaling 92 hours between November 24, 2011 and January 25, 2012.

Usually, I began my observations before the owl became active at dawn or dusk and found the peak foraging activity was within 1 hour of sunrise and 1 hour of sunset (approximately 07:00-09:00 and 15:00-17:00).

On December 11, 2011 during a particularly active foraging period from 15:45 to 16:30, the owl captured a total of 6 prey items in 45 minutes. The owl gulped down the first 5 prey items head first, but was observed picking apart and eating small pieces of the 6th prey item. Parmelee (1992) reported after a few prey items have been eaten whole, others are carefully picked and eaten in small pieces, starting at the head.

I recorded 3 types of behavior related to foraging including the number of non-capture attempt flights, unsuccessful capture flights, and successful capture flights. I recorded 606 perch-to-perch non-capture attempt flights. During these repositioning perch-to-perch flights, the owl made no attempt to capture or seek prey. I also recorded 200 perch-to-ground unsuccessful capture flights. The owl attempted to capture prey but was unsuccessful. Finally, I recorded 120 perch-to-prey successful capture flights. The owl attempted to capture prey and was successful. When the owl attempted to capture prey (200 + 120 = 320 total capture flights), the success rate was 38%.

During winter, the Snowy Owl hunts in all weather conditions (Parmelee 1992). This owl successfully captured prey during a variety of weather conditions including temperatures ranging from -2 to 48°F, winds up to 20 mph, heavy rain, snow, and in close proximity to passing and parked vehicles. The owl’s foraging activity was interrupted by avian mobbing by Short-eared Owls (Asio flammeus), Northern Harriers (Circus cyaneus), Rough-legged Hawks (Buteo lagopus), and Common Ravens (Corvus corax).
When humans remained in their vehicles, this owl appeared to tolerate parked cars as close as 20 feet. However, the owl’s foraging activity was also interrupted by photographers (human mobbing) who left their vehicles. Of interest, I observed the owl safely crossing the State highway while flying from perch-to-perch at least 80 times, occasionally near passing vehicles.

When the owl was absent from the foraging territory, I was able to collect 31 pellets from observed roost and perching sites. Although other raptor species were observed in the vicinity, the pellets were collected from sites used exclusively by this individual Snowy Owl. These sites were scattered throughout the 110 acre foraging territory at the base of wooden fence posts that are clear of underbrush, and adjacent to the ditch bordering the State highway.

The pellets were stored in plastic bags and labeled with collection location and date. These pellets were dried, photographed, measured for length, and then baked for 45 minutes at 325˚F. Pellet length ranged from 0.9 inches to 3.7 inches. Each pellet was dissected and all lower jaw and skull bones were retained. Robert Grove PhD examined the bones and determined the prey species along with prey numbers per pellet. The number of individual prey per pellet varied from 0-12.

Of the 31 pellets collected, 28 contained Montane Vole bones for a total of 99 individuals; 2 contained Deer Mice (Peromyscus maniculatus) for a total of 3 individuals, 1 contained California Quail (Callipepla californica) for a total of 1 individual and 1 contained Dark-eyed Junco (Junco hyemalis) for a total of 1 individual. Based on pellet analysis Montane Voles comprised 95% of all prey.

According to Patterson (2007), Snowy Owls visiting the coastal areas of Oregon and Washington during irruptive years appear to adapt readily to locally available prey species, consuming small mammals and birds. From my observations, this individual Snowy Owl in southeastern Oregon exploited the most abundant prey found in stubble meadow hay fields and adjacent ditches by consuming primarily Montane Voles. The owl had ample access to prey and did not appear to be undernourished. This owl successfully foraged in a 110 acre field for 54 days in close proximity to human activity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jon Reponen for permission to collect pellets and install temporary perches in his field. In addition, I would like to thank Bruce Hazen, Richard Vetter, and Dr. Robert Grove for their support during this project. I’d also like to acknowledge the 320 visits by Snowy Owl admirers ages 6 to 80 who observed the owl during this remarkable event. Michael Schwitters and Steve Dowlan reviewed the paper.

LITERATURE CITED


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A New Harney County Big Year Record

Tim Blount

It was so furtive that I immediately questioned what I was sure I had just seen.

An early-May foray to look for migrants at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) headquarters hadn’t produced much, other than a few Yellow-rumped and Yellow Warblers.

But I knew things could change any day, and while walking back to my truck, I considered possibilities: Northern Parulas flitting through the cottonwoods; Least Bitterns hiding in the rushes along Sod House Lane; a Summer Tanager in bright-red plumage. Or how about a Black-and-White Warbler on the trunk of that cottonwood over there?

What? I hardly believed my eyes, but then the striking little warbler appeared on the tree trunk just a little higher than before.

Still awestruck, and studying the bird intensely through binoculars, I recalled my childhood in Nebraska when I was locally known as that crazy kid who would hitch a ride with any birder just to get out in the field, and then search for birds at breakneck speed. The Black-and-White Warbler had been one of my favorites as a kid, and I realized, as I stood there watching this rare visitor to Oregon, nothing had changed in that regard. I also realized this species brought my Harney County total for the year to 216.

My family had moved from Nebraska to Salem, Oregon, when I was 15 and I began birding with Richard Palmer and the late Gerry Smith, among others. During those years I met Alan Contreras, Tom Crabtree, and John Shewey, who became my fishing and birding partner and most trusted friend.

Eventually I took a job in Boise in the fly-fishing industry and married Aundrea, a woman who lives for elk hunting and loves the outdoors as much as I do. We worked in Boise but were looking for jobs in more remote places in eastern Oregon. Her choice was La Grande and mine was Burns. Unbelievably I won. I moved to Burns in November, 2011, and she stayed in Idaho until we could find her work here.
Eventually Aundrea found work in Burns and moved here, but it took a while, and in that interim, I revitalized my birding with a near-rabid enthusiasm fueled by the fact that I now lived in Oregon’s most renowned birdwatching area.

In February of 2012, on a long, dark, eastern Oregon winter evening, I made the mistake of watching The Big Year, starring Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson. Most in the birding community know that this movie is about a birding big year. Yep, dumb move for a birder with more time than money. A seed was planted that cold night and it finally took root in March: I would pursue a Harney County Big Year. I decided to keep quiet about it and just see how things played out. I began birding frequently and as migrants began appearing that spring, my list quickly grew. At first I didn’t even consider going after any record that existed, but as I researched lists and past sightings—and as my own list expanded—Phil Pickering’s Harney County year-record of 237, set in the 1980s, began to seem feasible.

I discovered eBird and its awesome database. I now had a record of past sightings including date and location for Harney County. I scrutinized back issues of Oregon Birds magazine and developed strategies for adding more species. Almost immediately I also realized that the Oregon Birders On Line (OBOL) site was another fantastic tool. I eagerly anticipated Alan Contreras’s lengthy spring stays in Harney County; his daily post of sightings on OBOL became a guide to where I should go to see the many vagrants that he and his birding partners were finding. I hadn’t talked to Alan in years, but I contacted him, and in the course of conversation I let him know of my big year. He immediately began feeding me information on where and when to find new species to add to my list. Of all the weapons in my big-year birding arsenal, Alan became the most valuable—and he was my biggest supporter.

So I had the tools and support I needed. Then it came down to finding the birds. I assumed that I would find most of the residents and common migrants, so uncommon to rare migrants would be key. The first came in April with a Snowy Owl seen south of town on Highway 205. It was followed by a Great-tailed Grackle, the aforementioned Black-and-White Warbler, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a Black-throated Green Warbler.

As spring turned into summer, an Ovenbird, Summer Tanager, and Catbird were added. As fall began, the county record of 237 was in sight. A Blackpoll Warbler set up the tie and an American Redstart became number 237. The next new bird would set the record, and a Northern Waterthrush at Roaring Springs Ranch on September 8 became number 238. Fall continued and the list grew with Chestnut-sided Warbler, Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Little Blue Heron, Anna’s Hummingbird, and Magnolia Warbler. As 2012 came to a close, winter provided Bohemian Waxwing, Harris’s Sparrow, and the final find of the year, a Snow Bunting on Stinking Water Pass on December 30.

The final count was 253, 16 species more than Pickering’s 237. His record had fallen, but his feat was all the more impressive for the simple fact that he did not live in Harney County: he had to keep visiting the county to compile his list.

Of course I also had many misses—birds I expected to find but didn’t, such as Black Rosy Finch, American Dipper, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. All three nest in the county, but I couldn’t find them. I likewise missed some of the spring vagrants because I wasn’t able to visit MNWR headquarters during prime vagrant times. So this record is vulnerable and that makes it fun. Obviously the resident birder has a distinct advantage in compiling a county list. That being said, visiting at the correct times could put a birder in contention.

In July I decided to start a web site, www.harneybirder.com, to document the Big Year and to provide a repository of information on birding in southeast Oregon. I have tried to keep it updated with near-real-time sightings. Many visitors to the site in 2012 became followers of my Big Year, and lots of people offered help, advice, and encouragement as the list grew; and when the final tally was in, they sent congratulations. I truly appreciated all of that support and encouragement, and it was fun making new friends.

If you haven’t already surmised as much, I think it’s important that I point out that this Harney County

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Many birders traveling Hwy. 101 north of Florence use Baker Beach Rd. to visit the swamp south of Lily Lake. Most birders ignore the east side of the swamp, which actually has a greater variety of habitat and is quite easy to get at, as it is right on Hwy. 101. This guide is intended to help birders get an idea of how to bird this site.

I said that the site is easy to get at. That is true - it is adjacent to the highway and the trail from the large gravel parking lot to the open grasslands is only twenty feet long. However, the first ten feet are almost straight down and consist, most of the year, of equal parts mud and long, slithery grass. One birder joked that she’d have better luck going down it on a snow-disc, and she may be right. I suspect that if more birders visit this spot, it may develop a more step-like access point.

Once you slide through the roadside trees, you will be walking on a peculiar tundralike surface made up of thick tufted grass. This means that you need to wear some kind of footgear with ankle support, or you won’t have any ankles left by the time you crawl back up the trail. Much of the year, this grass is wet, though because of the slope, there are usually no nasty mudholes.

The general topography of the birding area is three grassy lobes surrounded by an edge of typical coastal kack: blackberries mixed with alder, willow, teasel and other dense grasses and shrubs. However, the western edge of the northern and central lobe abuts the lightly wooded marsh surrounding Lily Lake. The south lobe...
is slightly higher and has more shrubbery and small trees around it.

The Lily Lake area and Baker Beach Rd. are best from mid-autumn through late spring, when it holds wintering birds or migrants. Noteworthy birds include wintering Sora, occasional Red-shouldered Hawk and Black Phoebe and such rarities as Northern Waterthrush, Tropical Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher and Northern Parula. Swamp Sparrow occurs here in some winters. Wintering sparrows can be found around the edges of the fields and the snags around the lake are favorite raptor perches.

Baker Beach road is an easy-to-miss gravel turnoff west from 101 about eight miles north of the Hwy. 126-Hwy. 101 junction in Florence (2.5 miles south of Sea Lion Caves). The turnoff is just north of the C&M Stables, an obvious pasture area usually full of horses. These pastures often contain a few grazing geese in the winter, usually Canadas, sometimes Cacklers and occasionally White-fronted or Snow. Cattle Egret has also been seen here.

In the marsh along the road Virginia Rails are found year round. This is a fairly regular place for Sora in winter. Wood Ducks breed, as do swallows, Marsh Wrens, Song Sparrows, and other songbirds. Look for woodpeckers including Pileated, and Red-shouldered Hawks in fall and winter.

At the end of Baker Beach Rd. (less than a mile from Hwy. 101) is a horse campground (people also camp here) and parking for a trail to the beach (roughly 300 yards) through the dunes. Baker Beach has Snowy Plovers year-round. Often the winter flock of a dozen or so birds is near where the trail reaches the beach. In breeding season (March 15 to Sept. 15) the area near the foredune is roped off to protect plover nests.

Although Lily Lake does not get much use by waterfowl, a loop trail west of the lake is worth walking (NOTE: it gets some horse traffic). One end of the loop starts at the parking lot and follows the west edge of the bluff. This is sometimes loose sand for a hundred yards or so. The trail provides access to open habitat to the west (sometimes wet) and pine woods on the east. Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle can sometimes be found perched at the northern end of this loop.

The creek along the northern end of the trail sometimes has ducks or even shorebirds. This area is deserving of more coverage by birders. The trail crosses a low sand ridge east to the marsh by Lily Lake, returning south through an open forest and emerging by the “No Parking” sign at the highest point on Baker Beach Rd.

The complete loop is about a mile and a quarter long, the western leg can be slow going on sand or hummocks; the eastern leg is flat and easy on short grass and a firm surface.

Big Year wasn’t just mine. There were so many people who took ownership of the pursuit of this record. I am fully aware that the final number would not have been as big without them. I birded most with John Shewey of www.birdingoregon.com and his help throughout the year was invaluable—too bad the Ruby-throated and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds we lucked into in the same place at the same tree on Hart Mountain didn’t count because they were in Lake County!

In any case, having tackled this project, I think it’s fair to say that I can offer some sound advice to anyone contemplating a Big Year:

- Research your target area. Use resources such as eBird, OBOL, Oregon Birding Association, mapping resources such as Google Earth, and local expertise.
- Time: Regardless of how much time you have to contribute to the pursuit of a your record, use it wisely. In your research you should find the best times for certain birds. Don’t spend time looking for a bird you will likely be able to find next month when there is another bird that may only be here for a week or two.
- Create a strategy and stage your searches.
- Talk to other birders. If you have birded Harney County in the past two years and some guy stopped and asked you if you had seen anything interesting, there’s a good chance it was me. The more eyes the better, and it behooves you to use them as much as possible. Besides, you may make a friend.
- Love your spouse, family, or significant other and don’t forget them. Doing a big year can be daunting and it’s easy to get so wrapped up that you forget your base. The bird may just not be worth what it does at home.

Oregon’s largest county has amazing opportunities for birders. Some of the best migrant traps in the Northwest are found in Harney County. Malheur NWR headquarters and the Fields oasis are famous for stray passerines. The Scharff Migratory Bird Festival showcases awesome numbers of migrant Ross’s and Snow Geese, cranes, ducks, and shorebirds in the Burns area. Habitat diversity is tremendous: basin deserts, sage plateaus, Great Basin steppe, canyonlands, isolated ranges with aspen and mountain mahogany, pine forests, massive wetlands, riparian corridors—it is the perfect birding area and this amazing diversity was one of my favorite parts of accomplishing my Harney County Big Year.
The Next Generation:
Sean Burns

Interviewed by Diane Pettey

How old were you when you started birding?
I don’t really know when it went from just being interested in birds to actual birding, but it had to have been somewhere in my early elementary school years.

What got you started birding? Was there a particular bird, experience, or teacher/mentor?
What got me started birding was probably a trip to Lower Klamath lake in one of my early elementary school years. Another thing was my mother (who is a wildlife biologist working with the western snowy plover) would come home from working on the beach and tell me about all of the shorebirds she saw and how to identify the different species she saw during the day.

What was your most recent lifer in Oregon?
My most recent life bird in Oregon was the Red Knot.

What has been your most memorable birding experience so far?
My most memorable birding experience was Camp Avocet. Camp Avocet is a birding camp put on by the American Birding Association in Lewes, Delaware.

What kind of birding related activities have you done?
Some of the birding related activities I have done are bird photography and participating in the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Teams (COASST) program. The COASST program is a citizen science program put on by the University of Washington to survey seabird mortality on the beaches, as well as the overall condition of the beach.

Name one other interesting thing about you that may or may not relate to birding.
One other interesting thing about me is that I am a cross country and track runner.

Are you planning a career related to birds? Do you think you will go to college to study birds? Any idea where?
I am considering pursuing a bird-oriented career choice. I will probably study birds in college but I don’t have any idea where I would go at this point.

Dunlin. Photo courtesy Bruce Campbell.
I started visiting Pixieland, part of the Salmon River Estuary restoration effort in northern Lincoln Co., in fall, 2012 about a month after it opened to public foot traffic. I quickly became enchanted with what was then a dry, grassy “wet” land. From the downed logs to the ribboned new plantings, evidence of hard work was everywhere. Since that first visit, I’ve been keeping records of what I see: nearly 100 species of birds, and lots of other interesting wildlife including, last winter, a family of River Otters.

Restoration efforts in the Salmon River Estuary have been ongoing since the mid-1970s as part of the Cascade Head Management Plan. Pixieland, on the site of a short-lived amusement park by that name, is one of several sections of the Salmon River Estuary that have been restored - that is, dikes taken down to restore hydrology, and non-native plants removed and replaced with native plants. It is a joint effort of the US Forest Service, the Salmon Drift Creek Watershed Council and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

There are two main trails (old road beds) - one running east-west along the highway, the other cutting an “L” through the area, basically following the river. Throughout, the grassy marsh is interspersed with a variety of trees, old and new... where Northern Harriers and other raptors stalk their prey. Dry in the summer and early fall... and teeming with wildlife in the wetter fall and winter months.

EAST-WEST TRAIL

The east-west trail is dry and easy to walk for the first quarter mile until the road bed ends. I’ve found several types of sparrows along this walk, especially where the road ends. You can continue walking, crossing small creeks, down to some wooded areas that are great for warblers and other small passerines. Past the woods (crossing Fraser Creek) the grassy wetland stretches out - there are no trails, and walking is nearly impossible and not recommended! Looking over the grass, you can see wetland inhabitants like Marsh Wrens, Common Yellowthroat and listen for more secretive marsh birds.

RIVER TRAIL

The river trail heads north from the parking area, getting close to the river, then curves west, ending near the US 101 Salmon River bridge. Most of the year you need at least ankle-high muck boots on the trail, and knee-high wellies if you plan to go off-trail. Several nest-boxes are visible as you walk - these are temporary structures put in place to augment habitat lost when the tree-covered dikes were removed.

Snags on the opposite side of the river (east) are favorite raptor hangouts (watch for Bald Eagles year-round, and Peregrine Falcons in the winter). The smaller trees along the river provide shelter for finches,
warblers and sparrows; and in the winter, provide cover from which Red-shouldered Hawks and Accipiters find ready prey. Fraser Creek flows into the Salmon River at the end of the river trail. The tidal effect is back, thanks to the planned removal of tree-covered dikes. Low tide mud is used by Barn Swallows nesting under the bridge, and by Spotted Sandpipers.

REPORTING SIGHTINGS:

I’ve been keeping records since my first visit in hopes of documenting the evolution of the area as the native plants and restored hydrology continue to rejuvenate the wetlands. If you visit, please report your findings via eBird (Pixieland is now a designated “hot spot”, Salmon River Estuary - Pixieland) or email them to me at d_villa@mail.com.

LOCATION AND PARKING:

Pixieland is located near the junction of Oregon 18 and US 101 highways [map]. There is a small pull-out off of Highway 18 with room for 6-8 cars. The Pixieland management plan recommendation includes a sizable parking area as well as trails, observation decks and informational kiosks if and when funding is available.

In the meantime, don’t be put off by the main "trail" - or by the "clearcut" effect you first see -- but don’t forget your boots!

BREEDING BIRDS:


OTHER BIRDS OF INTEREST:

White-throated Sparrow (fall 2012)
Lincoln’s Sparrow (fall 2012)
Rough-legged Hawk pair (winter 2012/13 - primarily observed west of US 101, but also seen hunting in Pixieland)
White-tailed Kite (winter 2012/13)
Townsend’s Solitaire (spring 2013)
Palm Warbler (spring 2013)

My Pixieland photos are here: http://s1014.photobucket.com/user/villaesc/library/Birds/Pixieland
The pinnacle of new awakenings and adventures for a 16-year-old birder from the Portland Audubon Society came July 8, 1942, while canoeing on the vastness of Malheur Lake.

My guide was Ray Erickson from Iowa State University, whose graduate thesis was on Canvasback breeding habits. Malheur Lake at the southern margin of the breeding range was notable then with 300 breeding Canvasback. Erickson later became Malheur Refuge biologist and went on to the Division of Wildlife Research when the endangered species program was underway. Ray, among other challenges, worked with captive reared Whooping Cranes.

Striking out from the south shore just west of Cole Island Ridge Dike we threaded our way into the heart of the then 40,000 acre vastness of ever fluctuating Malheur Lake. The uproar from mixed calls produced by a host of marsh dwellers grew. For nine hours we paddled or gingerly hopped off onto floating islands and muskrat houses to examine nests.

Ray told me about the dominant hard-stem bulrush (tule) which emerges head high from the deep water marsh to provide cover and attachment, or that forms floating islands for colonial nesters. In winters past when the lake froze hard the spring ice break-up accompanied by strong winds simply mowed down the bulrush and matted, rolled and wove it into floating masses that would support a person who stepped gently.

Our first nesting colony was of Eared Grebes. Adapted from my diary:

“In most all cases the grebes slipped off their floating nest after covering it. A typical nest I examined had seven chalky white eggs, although when first laid they are a light blue. The eggs were completely covered with dead bulrush of which the nest was also composed. It was a strong structure, well woven and floating freely.
The eggs were warm, showing that the grebes left quietly at our approach. One nest had fresh water milfoil for a lining.

“I saw Western Grebes carrying young ones on their back. On each occasion they had one aboard but probably could support more. We tried to catch a young grebe but they dove well, and some went under while clinging to the diving parent.

“We visited a large colony of White Pelican who along with Farallon Cormorants (Double-crested Cormorant) were on one of those floating islands. The cormorants were through nesting, and the nearly full grown young took readily to the water but could not yet fly. It was interesting to see them open their bills wide and gulp in air before diving. One nest had two eggs and two newly hatched young that were coal black and naked. When I held them they felt like fat greasy blobs. It seemed like they would melt in the sun.

“The pelican eggs are large and very chalky. Ray said the colony was only 1/4th of what it had originally been because winds had broken the island apart. There were abandoned nests and dead nearly grown young, along with eggs lying about, mute testimony to nature’s natural control of a species. Ray said about 1/8th of the young birds would reach adulthood. I also learned that the queer projection on the top end of the pelican’s bill is a breeding ornament. Around the nests were little piles of regurgitated minnows.

This tule island must have contained several acres at first, and it was strong enough in places to support me. The nests were all made of this material and built up about a foot off the surface. The water here was seven feet deep.

“Treganza’s Heron (Great Blue Heron subspecies)—of all the young birds I saw, I would give first prize for homely baby to the blue heron. The nest contained three young, originally four as one caught its neck in the woven tule and strangled. At our approach the young herons crawled into the water. The nest was a low platform of cattail and bulrush partially submerged from the weight of the young. By grasping and pulling with their bills and pushing with feet and wings they moved inch by inch. It was a funny awkward attempt. We caught them and put them back in the nest while they gave low quawks and stabs. They are the queerest young critters you ever saw.

“Black-crowned Night Heron—I saw many young in all stages. The funniest thing was to hear one screeching for its parents when it got into a coot’s nesting territory. Every time it was pecked it would squawk. The young are all plain brown. Nests averaged a foot off the tule island surface and one was 2 1/2 feet. They are composed of dead tule and the eggs are blue.

“White-faced Glossy Ibis—this was the best find of the day. While in the Forster’s Tern colony I asked Ray, rather wishfully, if it would be possible to see one of these birds. ‘Not very’ was his reply. ‘They are pretty scarce.’ A few minutes later and Ray exclaimed ‘there are your birds, Tom.’ Was I ever thrilled! We flushed this pair from the tules, about 20 yards ahead of the canoe, and soon after another pair. They flew in wide low circles, black bodies turning an iridescent green and purplish bronze when the sun struck them.

We immediately began hunting for a nest and soon found it. It was composed of inward bent rushes interwoven into a basket form. It
contained two azure blue eggs which were cold, indicating incubation had not begun and they were still laying. There was fresh defecation on one side of the nest. It was interesting to note that the nest contained no dead material, but was entirely of green bent down rushes growing right there. There was likely another nest as the second ibis pair kept circling us.

“We observed many newly hatched Gadwall. Of the Cinnamon Teal I learned from Ray that it is impossible to tell the female from the female Blue-winged Teal, even when comparing skins. Redhead—the 1st nest (pointed out by Ray) had four covered eggs that were submerged when a Ruddy Duck took possession by laying 15 eggs on top of the Redhead nest.

“The second nest, a fine large floating structure of dead tules with an interwoven ramp of dead tule had 17 Redhead eggs which gave her possession over the Canvasback who built the nest and laid only three eggs. Ray knew the current ownership because white Redhead down lined the nest. The Canvasback has sooty down. The Redhead would raise the Canvasback or kick them out.

“A Raven located this nest for us, as it had just begun to destroy the eggs and flew at our approach. I saw several ravens over the lake and they must do a large amount of nest destruction. I also saw Redhead eggs laying in the open or floating in the water. The probable answer is that before the hen has time to construct a nest she lays eggs wherever.

“Canvasback—saw only the above nest which the Redhead occupied. Ray is studying this species for his master’s degree and has so far located 25 nests. This is the southern extent of their range with about 300 here in the summer. Ruddy Duck—observed two of their floating nests; the one already mentioned that was sinking under the weight of 15 eggs. The other held seven eggs with creamy rough surface and were shocking large for such a small duck. So large they were bigger than the Canvasback’s egg.

“American Coot—the most common marsh nesters. Saw nests containing 4, 6 and 7 creamy eggs speckled dark brown or black. Nests were large affairs of floating woven tule. They had ramp ways common to many of the birds with floating nests. Nests were easy to spot among the tules and the young with their fuzzy red heads. I learned that any queer unknown noise in the marsh was due to the coot with its variety of noisy calls.

“Long-billed Curlew—a pair among the avocets at Cole Island. Must have had young nearby as they circled us all the while giving their rapid whistling cry. Long-billed Dowitcher—a flock of 20 feeding on Blitzen River mudflats near headquarters with Least Sandpipers. Must be the first of early return as Clarence Sooter (refuge biologist) also reported several flocks.

“Avocet—to me the most beautiful of shorebirds along with the Black-necked Stilt. I saw a colony of 20 pairs scattered along the dike. Most of the nests were on grassy islets although
12 were right in the open on the dike. One was right in the car track on top. They were hollow depressions and composed of dried grayish stems of *Atriplex* scattered thinly on the ground.

“The eggs, like most other shorebird eggs, were triangular in shape, large at one end and tapered to a point. They were olive green and heavily blotched brown or blackish. The nests had been placed on the road due to high water. Those at the edge of the dike were a platform and contained 3, 4, 6 and 7 eggs with an average of four. Where there were seven I believe some pairs shared a nest. One avocet nest with three eggs was built over another with three. Eggs at the water edge were covered with clayish grey mud, probably from adults with dirty feet and breasts. Nests above the water had perfectly clean eggs. Black-necked Stilt—one pair near the avocets.

“Forster’s Tern—we visited a large colony. The nests were on another floating tule island, and the eggs lay in a slightly built up depression of dead tule. I saw 3 to 4 eggs in a nest. They were drab olive green and heavily blotched dark brown. It was a sight to see hundreds of these dainty white terns hovering overhead against the blue. All were crying in a harsh *keer keer* note. One pair, on [our] approaching their nest power dove and missed our heads by inches. When downwind of these colonies the odor tells you they are there. The worst odor was when Ray broke a rotten pelican egg.

“We didn’t dare look upward for fear of getting splattered, as the terns were letting go with a lot of whitewash, maybe accidentally on purpose, although I really couldn’t say. For neighbors the terns had that colony of Eared Grebes and also the Ibises.

“One of the most interesting things seen and explained to me by Ray was the male damsel fly carrying his mate who was laying eggs. After mating the male clasps the female, who would otherwise drown, around the neck with his tail pincers and carries her over the water, while she inserts the eggs through her tail into the pond weeds.

“I also learned bulrush stems are quite palatable when the green epidermis is scraped off. It has a sweet juicy flavor, is a little starchy and a favorite food of the muskrat that I watched eating it. Ray also taught me new terms, altricial for birds raised in the nest and precocial referring to those like ducklings ready to go on hatching.”

In total from my diary we saw 76 species that July 8, 1942. including my first Franklin’s Gull. Other than that host of nesting wildfowl and the muskrats and a few mink this was a day canoeing with a companion and mentor back into time. No sign of man or landmarks. No GPS to get home by—just intuition, the sun’s position, bent stem tule markers and a compass. It was Malheur Marsh at its most productive time.

John Scharff, refuge manager who shaped so many young men in his 36 years there, starting with the CCC boys, had taken this young birder from Portland in hand and sent him off with Ray Erickson for the most memorable birding day and summer of his life.

Tom McAllister
12705 River Road, 302A
Portland, OR 97222
mcallister.toms4@gmail.com
There were some parallels between this year’s Annual Meeting in The Dalles and last year’s at Klamath Falls. We were on the border again, and ventured into a neighboring state for one of our field trips. We got excellent assistance from people who live in and bird the area, and we got together east of the Cascades to bird new places in good weather. As if with the strength of 10, Stefan Schlick took on the planning almost single-handedly. Of the 75 to 80 in attendance, we had visitors from Pennsylvania and the Seattle area besides members old and new.

Friday night Russ Namitz presented a series of maps to illustrate his travels while doing his 2011 Oregon Big Year. The routes were repeated and retraced as he put in over 40,000 miles in pursuit of the usual, the unusual, the highly localized, and the rare visitor. He had a necessary sense of humor about the quandary of rare birds appearing at opposite ends of the state. He also spoke of the generosity of those who helped him to see the birds that brought him to the new state Big Year record of 318.

The Dalles made a springboard into Wasco and Sherman counties in Oregon, and Klickitat Co, Washington, which deserve to be better known. The variety of sites to visit brought us some state and county birds, including Tri-colored Blackbird, Long-billed Curlew, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Bank Swallow. Many thanks to the great roster of field trip leaders who took us to ranches, forests, and marshes.

Saturday evening’s business meeting promised that some alterations to the by-laws will be presented next year. We nominated Harv Schubothe of Bandon and Cathy Nowak of Union for election as directors. Our back-to-back presentations were devoted to swifts.

Eric Horvath cited the work of Owen Knorr in pursuit of Black Swift nests in Colorado that inspired him to search for more nesting sites in Oregon. To photograph a Black Swift brooding young at Salt Creek Falls, he delved into a wet, wet world, rappelling alongside the waterfall to make a long exposure through the veil of water. He showed how he makes these watery exploits to locate sites with the necessary rock niche behind the falling stream. The sparse distribution of suitable rock substrate keeps the birds returning to certain waterfalls year after year.

On the Vaux’s Swift front, Larry Schwitters presented an equally enthralling account of the efforts of Vaux’s Happening, which includes migration reports by swift watchers and efforts to stop the loss of roosting sites, and identify more roosts. He took us through the tangled process of saving the chimney roost at Monroe, Washington, and the discovery of a previously undocumented one at Selleck, Washington. Temperature monitoring of the Monroe chimney has shown that Vaux’s Swifts seek warmth to help them survive days when it’s too cold to forage. When crows began predation on emerging swifts, a video camera helped in the design of effective crow deflectors.

Come explore Bandon at the 2014 annual meeting!
OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION FINANCIAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR: 1/1/2012 - 12/31/12
Presented at OBA Annual Meeting June 8, 2013
SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT 1/1/13 to 05/31/13

2012:
At the end of Fiscal Year 2011, Oregon Field Ornithologists total bank balances were $13,004.73 with an additional $5976.03 inventory for a total of $18,980.76 representing a total decrease from the previous year of $3,515.02. Total Income for 2012 was $13743.78 expense was $17258.80. Our largest expense is production of Oregon Birds. The joint meeting with Western Birding Association operated at a loss of $1,251.00 which was approximately one-third of the decrease from 2011.

January 1 to August 2013 (Supplemental Report):

As of August 31, 2013 (most recent period) total bank balances are $18,872.46. In addition we show $5,976.03 as inventory (Rogue Valley Guide) for a total Net Assets of $24,848.49. The current fiscal year to date reflects an increase of $5,867.73 which includes a modest “profit” from the Annual Meeting of $1,219.

OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION
INCOME & EXPENSE
2012

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Mary Anne Sohlstrom, Treasurer
Thank you to the members of the Oregon Birding Association for the privilege of serving as editor of Oregon Birds.

- Alan Contreras
Alan Reid

Alan D. Reid was born on August 22, 1929 in Bridgeport, CT and died on August 3, 2013 after complications from a fall at home which broke his hip. He was retired from the U.S. Forest Service. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Lorena M. Reid, and son Richard A. Reid of Springfield.

From the obituary in the Register Guard, Eugene.

I ran across Alan Reid a couple of times. Once at Lost Lake when he explained the nest boxes he had there for the Barrow’s Goldeneyes and also told me what shorebird I was observing and trying to ID. The other time was at Malheur HQ, where he pointed out a warbler or two for me. Really a down-to-earth nice guy to meet for someone like me who was finally going beyond the backyard birding a little bit. I always appreciated his help.

He was the first one who told me about Cabin Lake, one of several places where he was involved with nest boxes. He came up on OBOL a number of years ago and asked for someone to care for his nest boxes as his health did not allow him to make the rounds anymore; and nothing more was heard from him. Hopefully someone (or several groups!) did; I didn’t feel capable to attempt it.

I asked him at Lost Lake near Santiam Pass if he had “asked permission” to put up the boxes. He said that he had not asked. The only problem he had was when he put up shiny metal shields to keep predators out of the nest boxes. The Forest Service didn’t like that so he painted the metal to blend into the forest and the problem was solved. He saw a need and he helped. Good guy. I always appreciated meeting him "out in the field."

John Thomas
Silverton

Alan was a practical-minded person who liked to get things done. Most of my conversations with him were about things that he thought should be fixed or improved. Generally speaking, he was right. Even though he came from a generation that mostly preceded digital computers and the Internet, he had a good sense of how things ought to work.

He was very committed to the idea of citizen science, but not in an unquestioning way. For many years he sent in nest-box data cards to Cornell, but when he realized that Cornell wasn’t dedicating resources to process those data cards, he looked around for another solution. That’s how he got involved with BirdNotes, although ultimately we weren’t able to provide a much better solution for nest-box data.

Even while pointing out the shortcomings of BirdNotes, Alan regularly contributed data and site descriptions from the places that he frequented. He knew every little oasis from Pine Mountain to Glass Buttes. Those were places that not many other Oregon birders have covered with any regularity (until some recent ECAS field trips thanks to Judy Meredith), so his reports are still the main source of information about how birds rely on those sites.

He also wrote up directions and site descriptions which are still accessible on the BirdNotes website.

With his hands-on efforts he did a lot of good for birds, without calling attention to himself. Next time you’re driving the highway to Malheur, as you’re passing Glass Buttes, there’s a stretch of road where there’s not a whole lot to think about. That would be a good time to remember Alan Reid, the guy who turned off the highway at places like that, put up nest boxes, and maintained them.

Joel Geier
Adair
An Anomalous Hummingbird from Southeast Oregon

Maitreya

with assistance from John Sullivan

Introduction

Early on the morning of May 5, 2011, I discovered a male hummingbird at Fields, Oregon. The hummingbird was observed sitting and preening, while perched on a lattice, just outside of the south facing kitchen window of my house at Fields. Because of the relative placements of the lattice and the window, I was unable to view the bird through binoculars. However, by holding my Nikon S 8100 digital camera outside of the window, I was able to obtain several high quality images and a short video of the bird.

My initial reaction upon viewing the images was that the bird was probably of hybrid descent from a mixed pair of the hummingbird species that are known to breed in south Harney County, Oregon: Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycerus*), Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*), and Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*).

Notwithstanding that the bird’s appearance is possibly suggestive of a hybrid *A. alexandri* × *S. calliope* or *A. alexandri* × *S. platycerus*, a detailed analysis of the photographs and video reveal several unique morphological features, which cannot be readily explained as a result of any combination of the proposed parental hummingbird species.

In addition, with the possible exception of the appearance of the gorget, the bird does not display intermediate morphological characteristics, such as those that have been documented to occur in other hybrid hummingbirds. The distinguishing characteristics of the anomalous hummingbird, hereafter referred to as “*Selasphorus singularii*”, include plumage details; the formulae, shape, and color of the rectrices; the shape of the primaries; and the measurements for the length of the bill, length of the wing chord, and length of the tail fork.

These metrics for the bird were generated using a trigonometric analysis, wherein the width of the individual slats of the lattice, the distance from the camera to the hummingbird, the placement of the lattice relative to the walls of the house, and the angle of view from the camera to the hummingbird are known values established by precise measurements.

If the bird is not a hybrid, two additional hypotheses as to its morphology may be considered. Because of the vast expanse of the northern Great Basin region, there is a minute chance that this record is the first identification of a previously undocumented species with many extant individuals.

It is also possible that the unique morphology of the bird is indicative of novel expression of hummingbird DNA, which, if passed on to subsequent generations, would mean that this bird is the first of its kind.

**Color photos appear on the inside back cover**

It is not my purpose here, nor do I have the knowledge to answer the question of the bird’s origin. My intention is to document the bird’s unique morphology as an initial step in the process of understanding the mystery of this bird in the hope that similar hummingbirds will be observed in the future.

**Description**

**Head** – The gorget color of *S. singularii* is metallic orchid, and the gorget feathers appear to be wider than typical for any of the small gorgeted hummingbirds of western North America. Also, small white feathers dispersed under the large gorget feathers can be seen in the captures from the video. These oversize gorget feathers and the underlying small white feathers have been hypothesized to indicate that *S. calliope* is one parent species of the bird. Significantly, none of the feathers above the bill display any gorget color, thus casting doubt on the hypothesis that Anna’s Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) or Costa’s Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*) could be one parental species.

**Tail** – The rectrices of *S. singularii* display no white tips, indicating that the bird is an adult male. The tail displays many unique features in the individual feathers, and in the formulae of the rectrices, where R1 < R2 < R3 < R4 < R5 in both length and width. These formulae cannot be explained as a result of the bird
descending from any of the local breeding hummingbird species.

To some extent, *A. alexandri* shares this formula as it relates to the length of the rectrices, and it also has a similar notched tail shape. However, in *A. alexandri* the innermost rectrix is the widest. In *S. calliope* also, the innermost rectrix is shortest, but this feather in *S. calliope* is wide and spatulate. In contrast, the R1 feathers in *S. singularii* have a markedly narrow and lanceolate shape, which is far more extreme than the shapes of the inner rectrices that are found in *A. alexandri*, *S. platycerus*, or *S. calliope*. The shape of these R1 feathers is novel among the breeding hummingbirds of North America and appears to be a unique expression of hummingbird DNA. Additionally, a trigonometric analysis was used to estimate the length of the tail notch for *S. singularii* at 5.9 millimeters. According to Pyle, this measurement is greater than the 2 millimeter maximum value for *A. alexandri* and also exceeds the 4 millimeter maximum value given for *C. anna*, which has the largest tail notch of any hummingbird that regularly breeds in Oregon.

It should be noted that the largest value noted by Pyle for the tail notch in *Selasphorus* and *Archilochus* species, 5 millimeters, is that of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), a species that has been recorded in Oregon fewer than 5 times.

Discussion of the color of the rectrices is necessarily limited by what we can observe in the extant photographs. The innermost rectrices exhibit a metallic green color similar to the upper tail coverts, and it appears that R2 through R5 are primarily dark grey. This color pattern for the tail is generally consistent with *A. alexandri*.

However, there are significant patches of rufous in the rectrices, particularly at the bases of the outer web of the R1 and R2 feathers and, to a diminished extent, the bases of the outer web of the R3 feathers. The presence of rufous in the rectrices is one feature cited as evidence of the bird’s hybrid ancestry. The adult males of both *S. platycerus* and *S. calliope* display significant rufous in their tail feathers. In *S. platycerus* there can be rufous at the bases of all rectrices, with rufous being most pronounced on the R2 and R3 feathers. *S. calliope* displays a similar pattern of rufous at the base of the rectrices.

**Upperparts** – When viewed from the back, the upperparts of *S. singularii* strongly resemble *S.
platycerus. The feathers of the nape, mantle, rump, and tail coverts are all metallic green.

Bill – The bill of S. singularii displays no striations, indicating that it is the bill of an adult hummingbird. Trigonometric analysis of two images was used to measure the length of the visible culmen (no attempt was made to compensate for the portion of the bill which is obscured by feathers). The values derived for the length of the culmen were 20.8 and 20.2 millimeters, giving a mean value of 20.5 millimeters.

This value is consistent with the maximum value given by Pyle for A. alexandri. Significantly, 20.5 millimeters is 1 millimeter greater than the largest value given for C. anna, 1.6 millimeters greater than the maximum value given for S. platycerus, 2.5 millimeters greater than the maximum value given for S. rufus, and 5 millimeters greater than the maximum value given for S. calliope. Therefore, the bill length of S. singularii strongly contradicts the hypothesis that S. calliope is a parental species.

Underparts – As seen in the photographs, the underparts of S. singularii resemble those of an adult male S. platycerus. There is a horizontal band of white feathers immediately under the gorget; there is a central vertical band of white feathers, giving a vested appearance; outside of the central white feathers are two bands of grey feathers extending from below the gorget to the vent; posterior to the vent is a small patch of white; the sides and flanks are primarily rich buff, lending support to the argument that the bird should be included in the Selasphorus genus; and there is an additional band of white feathers between the rich buff of the flanks and the metallic green of the mantle and rump.

Wings - Of particular interest is the shape of the primaries. The adult male S. platycerus is known for the unique split and tapered morphology of its P10 feathers. As can be seen in the capture from the video, the outer primary of S. singularii exhibits no hint of the unique P10 shape of S. platycerus. A. alexandri is also known for two diagnostic features of its primary feather morphology. In A. alexandri (and A. colubris) the inner primaries become increasingly narrow, with a formula of P1 < P2 < P3< P4 < P5 < P6 in both length and width. Also the outer primaries of A. alexandri are flared outward at the distal end, giving a club-footed look to the folded wing. S. singularii displays no hint of the diagnostic primary shapes of A. alexandri. In contrast, the primaries of S. singularii are quite similar in shape and formula to primaries of C. anna as depicted in Pyle.

Based on a trigonometric analysis of the photographs, the wing chord of S. singularii is estimated to be 51.6 mm. According to Pyle, this measurement is consistent with the longest values given for S. platycerus and C. anna; exceeds by 7 millimeters the longest value given for A. alexandri; and exceeds by 11 millimeters the longest value give for S. calliope. Taken as a whole, the combination of long wing chord measurement and lack of diagnostic morphology in the shape of the primary feathers argues strongly against the possibility of hybrid origin for S. singularii.

The length of the wing chord alone casts significant doubt on the hypothesis that S. calliope is one parent of S. singularii. In the case of the parental S. platycerus hypothesis, the length of the wing chord is consistent, but the diagnostic shape of P10 is completely lacking. And for A. alexandri, both the length of the wing chord and the lack of diagnostic Archilochus primary feather morphology refute the parental hypothesis.

Summary

Selasphorus singularii displays morphological characteristics that are similar to the other small gorgeted hummingbirds of North America. The details of these morphological characteristics, however, cannot be described with any degree of confidence as the result of a hybrid pairing of known hummingbird species. The morphology of S. singularii is unique, to the extent that we cannot readily identify even one parental species.

In S. singularii, the general coloration of the underparts and of the upperparts strongly resemble S. platycerus. But S. singularii shows no hint of the diagnostic P10 morphology of the male S. platycerus. S. singularii exhibits a deeply forked tail, but in S. platycerus the central rectrices are the longest, resulting in a negative value for tail fork. The measurements of the bill length and wing chord for S. singularii are greater than the maximum values given for S. platycerus.

In S. singularii, the color of the gorget strongly
resembles the color band of the gorget of the male *A. alexandri*. Additionally, the bill length of *S. singularii* is consistent with the maximum value for *A. alexandri*. However, *S. singularii* shows no hint of the diagnostic primary feather morphology of *A. alexandri*. The measurements for the wing chord and tail notch of *S. singularii* are greater than the maximum values given for *A. alexandri*.

In *S. singularii*, the long gorget feathers with small white feathers hidden underneath are suggestive of *S. calliope*. But, the narrow and lanceolate shape of the R1 feathers in *S. singularii* stand in stark contrast to the short and spatulate shape of the R1 feathers of *S. calliope*. In *S. singularii*, the measurement for the wing chord is 11 millimeters greater, the measurement for bill length is 5 millimeters greater, and the measurement for tail fork is 5 millimeters greater than the maximum values given for *S. calliope*.

In *S. singularii*, the shape of the primaries and the length of the wing chord are highly consistent with *C. anna*, but these primaries cannot be said to be intermediate between *C. anna* and another species. Additionally, in *S. singularii* there are no colored gorget feathers above the bill, a feature which has been noted in all recorded hybrids of *C. anna* with *Selasphorus* species.

In *S. singularii*, the formulae for the rectrices are unique and cannot be explained as inherited morphology from any of the proposed parent species. Likewise, the narrow, lanceolate shape of the rectrices and in particular the R1 feathers, is unique and cannot be explained as inherited morphology from any known species. Nor can the unique aspects of the rectrices be explained as intermediate morphology between two known species. Any assertion that *S. singularii* is an F1 hybrid necessarily involves the assertion that there is also novel expression of morphological characteristics that are not present in the proposed parent species.

For several decades, the novel expression of new morphological characteristics in an existing species would have been held to be a product of random mutation, which would nearly always prove to be maladaptive. However in recent years two breakthroughs in the science of noncoding DNA have revolutionized scientific understanding of the mechanisms by which adaptive changes in phenotype can occur.

It has been shown that variations in phenotype can occur when noncoding DNA controls the expression of a gene. Second, the *de novo* origin of new genes from noncoding DNA has been documented in numerous species including *Drosophila*, *Plasmodium vivax*, rice, mouse, rat, and human. If it is the case that either or both of these biological processes have contributed to its observed phenotype, then there is the possibility that *S. singularii* is not a hybrid of any sort. To the contrary, both parsimony and statistics suggest that a hypothesis of origin based both on hybrid and noncoding DNA explanations is less likely than a hypothesis of origin that is based on the biological processes of noncoding DNA alone.

Of course, further study of *S. singularii* would be required before a definitive explanation of the origin of its unique morphology could be produced. We may or may not ever have a chance to again study such a bird. It may depend on whether or not *S. singularii* has the ability to fly a courtship display to the satisfaction of a female hummingbird.

But there is no reason not to be hopeful about the fate of *Selasphorus singularii*. Perhaps hidden in the shape of his tail feathers are avian adaptations that will serve him well in the high, arid landscapes of the northern Great Basin.

References


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NAMC and Oregon Birds are now on the Web!

Oregon’s North American Migration Count results for each season are now on the OBA web site. Read Chuck Gates’s review and analysis at http://www.oregonbirds.org/. Also, back issues of Oregon Birds are now available on the OBA web site, courtesy Phil Hicks of Grants Pass, who never stops working!

Fourth Annual Oregon Birds Photo Contest

First Prize: $50 and a one-year membership in OBA. 2nd and 3rd prize receive a one-year membership.

Submit up to two of your best bird photos taken in Oregon or waters offshore of Oregon to our photo editor Brandon Green at brandon.green18@gmail.com. Each photo should not exceed 2mb in file size. We will send all entries to our out-of-state judge and the winners will appear in Oregon Birds vol. 40 No. 1 in April, 2014. Photos must not have been previously published in Oregon Birds.

Eligibility: OBA members and their immediate family members are eligible to submit.

Ineligible: OBA board members and the Oregon Birds editor are not eligible to submit.

Deadline: December 31, 2013
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(showing term expiration dates):

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