

Trip Report

Oregon Birding Association Wallowa Valley Field Trip

Saturday January 20 and Sunday January 21, 2018

Ken Chamberlain and Colby Neuman trip leaders, Report notes from Nick Mrvelj

Saturday January 20

After a quick fill up on caffeine and minimal breakfast, a group of 12 of us headed out in three car loads to behold what awaited us. We started out with an absolute bang, as upon pulling up to our first location on School Flat Lane, we found Trent Bray quietly observing 50+ COMMON REDPOLLS, with one individual that was/is an ideal candidate for a HOARY REDPOLL. This probable HOARY REDPOLL was originally found by Colby Neuman on 1/19. There were also several AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS in the area.

The Hoary Redpoll record was submitted and accepted unanimously by the Oregon Bird Records Committee as record #527-18-03. www.orbirds.org/recordsjuly2018.pdf p.66.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42090561>

Farther along School Flat Ln. we found another target bird, GRAY PARTRIDGE, as 8 individuals steadily moved beyond us and eventually out of sight.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111680>

The morning had much more in store for us, as we moved over to Golf Course Road. Although not a bird, we were delighted to spot an AMERICAN BADGER not far off the road. While enjoying a sustained viewing of the badger, Philip Kline spotted a large mass of birds flying in the distance. After driving closer to investigate, we soon figured out they were GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCHES. The GCRS steadily moved closer to us, offering exceptional views. Thanks to video footage obtained, we were able to safely estimate at least 950 birds.

The excitement wasn't over yet on Golf Course Road however, as farther along the road we came to a sizeable flock of HORNED LARKS. As we scanned the flock, we found a LAPLAND LONGSPUR, that was soon joined by at least 4 others of its kind. A SNOW BUNTING, pointed out by Colby, was an excellent addition to the flock, and yet again the group was greeted with optimal viewing conditions of each bird.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111710>

Our group, very pleased and seemingly glowing by now, then headed to Alpine Meadows Golf Course area, where we found at least two HARRIS'S SPARROWS and a single LINCOLN SPARROW.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111719>

By this point, it wasn't even noon yet, and we had already discovered many target species. High on confidence, we headed into Enterprise proper and very quickly located a known flock of waxwings. Predominantly consisting of CEDAR WAXWINGS, we were able to pick out at least 18 BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS as the snow started to fall.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111754>

Next, we visited the Enterprise Fish Hatchery and Enterprise WMA and tried unsuccessfully for a reported SWAMP SPARROW, while enjoying a break from the mostly car birding we had been doing up until that point. Running out of targets to chase, we decided to try for a wintering FERRUGINOUS HAWK that Ken and Colby had located the day before. It took quite some time, but eventually we were able to relocate it on a quiet and remote stretch of Crow Creek Road.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111812>

As day rapidly blended into night, we headed up in elevation to try for owls. A quick, snowy walk up Davis Creek Road yielded phenomenal views of a NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL, tooting its little heart out. I'm sure our whistling had nothing to do with that. After trekking back to the cars, we got a brief response to our GREAT GRAY OWL playback. Almost immediately afterward, we saw a large, elongated owl perched atop a conifer. The light available to us at this point was extremely minimal, and although it looked really good for GREAT GRAY OWL, we never were able to definitively rule out a GREAT HORNED OWL, as the bird flushed permanently soon after originally detecting it. Two NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWLS were also vocal in the area.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42111853>

What a day! Several participants picked up several life and/or state birds. Furthermore, everyone in the group got great looks at all our target birds.

Sunday January 21

With limited target birds left, we decided to head up to McCully Creek Sno-park to try for PINE GROSBEAKS. It was a sunny yet bitterly cold morning, and along the way we checked for a GYRFALCON unsuccessfully. However, we did see several active raptors, including a very handsome light morph HARLAN'S HAWK. Once we got up to McCully Creek Sno-park, we decided to head out on foot. The paths were mildly snowy and bird activity was decent, with a few loose flocks of chickadees/kinglets/nuthatches moving about. Although we inevitably struck out on PINE GROSBEAKS, we did find a few CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEES and a single WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH. This latter bird was of the "Interior West" group, with a subspecies of *tenuissima* suspected.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S42134530>

As the morning wound down, and the wind picked up, we decided to end day two around Wallowa Lake, which was rather slow, but did offer views of a few BARROW'S GOLDENEYES and an AMERICAN DIPPER.

As it was noon by this time, the group decided to stop for coffee/chocolate, and inevitably part ways. I'm sure we all left with a big grin on our face, as the trip was exceptional.

Total (countable) species seen on the trip was 68.

The eBird checklists linked above contain many photos and audio recordings of birds found.

Trip photos at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/100682706@N06/albums/72157668764203179>