

## OBA Field Trip Report

### Bonney Butte Hawk Watch

September 10, 2022

Erik Bergman, Trip Leader

As part of the first OBA Birding Weekend, seven OBA members ranging in age from 14 to senior citizen met in Government Camp for a trip to the HawkWatch International raptor survey site atop Bonney Butte. While waiting for all participants to arrive, a couple of us warmed up by identifying BREWER'S and RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS in the parking lot. A band of CANADA JAYS took food from our hands while COMMON RAVENS soared overhead. Most surprising was a SAY'S PHOEBE, which flew around the Summit Ski Area before passing over us and across Highway 26. [eBird checklist](#)



Together we convoyed to Bonney Butte. The road starts out paved, then turns to gravel and worse. The final four miles are rocky and rutted Forest Service roads. Careful driving at 5-15 mph enabled all our SUVs to reach the parking lot just above Bonney Meadows Campground. From the lot we hauled our gear on the half-mile hike up a gated gravel road to the top. Along the way we picked up BLACK-CAPPED, CHESTNUT-BACKED and MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, STELLER'S JAY and a lone CLARK'S NUTCRACKER. At the ridgetop we met the HawkWatch International crew of

Karl, Sarah, Rebecca, Gillian and Tim. This hardy group spends around two months onsite each fall counting raptors and other migrants. Unfortunately, they were not netting and banding birds, because their new blind (financed in part by an OBA grant) was still under construction.

On a clear day the view from Bonney Butte is spectacular, with Mt. Hood looming to the north, Mt. Adams popping over the horizon to the northeast and Mt. Jefferson rising in the south. This was anything but a clear day, however, due to wildfire smoke from NE Oregon blown in by strong east winds that shook the trees and made detecting any small forest birds quite difficult. Ideal hawk-watching weather would be blue skies with a dash of clouds to add contrast and offer "landmarks" for pointing out soaring birds, along with westerly winds that enable the raptors to travel quickly and efficiently along the west side of the butte. Instead, the sky was gray-brown. We had our work cut out for us under challenging conditions.



Decoy owl: "*Bubo plasticus*"

Our first raptors of the day sailed by: TURKEY VULTURE and RED-TAILED HAWK. Drawn in by a decoy Great Horned Owl, a SHARP-SHINNED HAWK skimmed past us at eye level before it realized the plastic owl was no threat. Most remarkable were the numbers of LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS headed southbound; we tallied 22 by 10:30 a.m. For most of us who had never seen one in Hood River County, this was a major bonus. A pair of TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE and a YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER rounded out our first hour on the summit. [eBird checklist](#)



*Lewis's Woodpecker by Trista Newman*

During the lulls between birds, we talked with the HawkWatch team to pick up ID tips and share birding stories. Our convivial group grew as additional birders hiked in. Time passed quickly and pleasantly even with few raptors to view. We hoped the raptor



*Townsend's Solitaire by Trista Newman*

traffic would pick up as noon passed. What happened instead was even more LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS – 41 more in an hour! An AMERICAN KESTREL was also deceived by the owl decoy and gave us a close-up look. We did add to our TURKEY VULTURE and RED-TAILED HAWK count and heard a RED CROSSBILL. [eBird checklist](#)

The final hour up top proved the slowest of the day with just two species tallied. Our group decided it was time to wrap it up, with some staying up top, some heading home, and two of us deciding to check out Bonney Butte Meadow and its campground. The meadow and its stream proved quite birdy, yielding NORTHERN FLICKER, CANADA JAY, AMERICAN ROBIN, DARK-EYED JUNCO and YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER. Anyone taking that hard road to the hawk watch should consider checking out the campground area as well. [eBird checklist](#)

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