

OBA Field Trip to Wheeler and Grant Counties

May 30 to June 1, 2025

By Jill Punches, Field Trip Leader

Wheeler County's scenery make it a popular destination for cyclists and motorcycle enthusiasts, but not many birders make it there; Wheeler has the fewest number of species reported on eBird at 243 species. This field trip introduced OBA members to some hotspots and birds common to Wheeler County.



Our trip started out with dinner in Fossil Friday late afternoon where we met at Brenda's Blessings to order dinner and ate at the local park. After dinner, we went to Bear Hollow County Park and had a couple of Flammulated Owls calling to each other before dark. Note that Wheeler County has the most reports of Flammulated Owl in Oregon. We had good looks at a Hammond's Flycatcher, too. We made a brief stop at Shelton Wayside as it was getting dark and were inundated with MacGillivray's Warblers. We then headed to Mitchell, our base for 2 nights.

On Saturday, we met in Mitchell, Oregon and birded around the park and up on the bluff. We saw a Prairie Falcon flying along the rocks on the other side of Highway 26 and had a good variety of expected birds, including Say's Phoebe, Bullock's Orioles, Western Kingbirds and Western Wood-Pewee. We saw a Black-chinned Hummingbird perched on a wire as we were leaving. We then headed to Dollarhide Pond just outside of Mitchell and continued Upper Bridge Creek Road where we had Red Crossbills, Cassin's Finches, and Mountain Bluebirds. We ate lunch at Barnhouse Campground. We then went into Grant County where we found a Yellow-breasted Chat at the intersection of Hwy 26 and Hwy 19. We hiked at Blue Basin which is one of the units of John Day Fossil Beds. The sun on the rocks makes this hike especially hot and some people turned around, but Rock Wren and

Canyon Wren

were both present. Some people headed back to Mitchell early and 5 of us birded

Waterman Road to Fopiano Reservoir.

Mountain Bluebirds are common along the way and we saw 4

Loggerhead

Shrikes. We saw

a pair of Wilson's Phalaropes at the reservoir. We enjoyed dinner together at Tiger Brewing.



On Sunday, we met at a coffee cart and found a singing Warbling Vireo. We birded the riparian area along Gable Creek Road briefly and then headed to the Painted Hills, another unit of the John Day Fossil Beds. We made stops at the picnic table rest area and Painted Cove; The trail there is the best way to bird the nearby reservoir on private land a quarter of a mile away. We had good looks at **Lark Sparrows** and saw American White Pelicans in the water. We made some stops along Burnt Ranch Road where we saw



Bufflehead and a pair of Osprey; Osprey numbers seem to be increasing in Wheeler. Our final stops were along Ochoco Pass and the Wheeler County side of Ochoco Divide Campground. We saw Mountain Chickadees, Western Tanagers, a Red-breasted Nuthatch family and many other “good” birds, but missed our target woodpeckers and a Fox Sparrow previously reported.

It was a good weekend to bird in Wheeler and we had fun. Collectively, our group saw a total of 90 species; Note that 90 species often puts an individual in the top 5-10 birds for the year in Wheeler and this includes some notable misses, such as Common Nighthawks and Wild Turkey. Based on eBird reports, Common Nighthawks arrived in Wheeler County late this year; typically they are abundant and even seen flying around during the daytime, but no one had reported them for the year until a few days after we left.

Attached is the official trip list: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/380531>



All photos by Jill Punches