

RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS OF OREGON AND WASHINGTON

MAY 22 - 28, 2011

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

**LIST COMPILED BY:
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Leader: Bob Sundstrom

Our Rivers and Mountains of Oregon and Washington tour starts in Portland, Oregon, then works east along the Columbia River Gorge, whose towering basalt cliffs and tree-clad lower reaches place it among the most scenic places in the United States. By the first afternoon, we turn north from the river toward towering Mt. Adams in the South Cascades, where we will spend two nights at Mt. Adams Lodge. The comfortable lodge sits at the foot of 12,281-ft. Mt. Adams on many acres of forested grounds. With the lodge as a base, we explore a wide range of habitats, from Ponderosa pine forest and high elevation fir forest to oak woods and marsh. After Mt. Adams Lodge, the route runs along the scenic Klickitat River gorge and then east along the Columbia Gorge. Our next destination is La Grande, Oregon, nestled in the Blue Mountains and near the Grande Ronde River. Birds of the mountains, stream sides, and broad marshes are found here. The final full day of the tour leads along the Grande Ronde River to a pass through the Blue Mountains, then across miles of high elevation grasslands before once again returning to the Columbia Gorge. The bird diversity across so many habitats is impressive, and the tour coincides with a rich flourish of wildflowers in nearly all the habitats.

The first full day of our 2011 tour began in the western lowlands along the Columbia, with stops in a variety of sites and habitats. A vividly colored Red-breasted Sapsucker was among the morning highlights, as were numbers of songbird migrants: trees dripping with Western Tanagers and Warbling Vireos, as well as the yellow flashes of Wilson's and Townsend's warblers. A Pacific Wren posed and sang at close range. We watched an American Dipper catch and then dispatch a sizeable minnow. As we pulled into the Mt. Adams Lodge grounds, we stopped before getting out of the van to watch two male Calliope Hummingbirds, whose wine-colored gorgets shone as they hovered at a feeder just a few feet from the van. A stroll on the grounds before dinner gave us our first Western Bluebirds and dazzling Lazuli Buntings of the trip.

The following morning, a walk on the lodge grounds offered a bounty of new birds: singing MacGillivray's and Nashville warblers, Hammond's Flycatcher, and Cassin's Finch among them. Rufous Hummingbirds buzzed across the grounds, trying to guard all the feeders at once. Black-headed Grosbeaks sang their lilting songs. After a lodge breakfast of huckleberry pancakes, a visit to a nearby grove of Ponderosa pines yielded wonderful views of the uncommon White-headed Woodpecker, plus Gray Flycatcher and Pygmy Nuthatch. Later that morning during a foray to higher elevation forest on the hem of Mt. Adams, we had superb studies of Hermit Warblers, and later Black-throated Gray Warbler a little lower down. We picnicked along Trout Creek, where the ground was carpeted with pale blue Lyall's anemones. In fact, we picnicked every day of the tour at lunch, enjoying the opportunity to dine among the birds and wildflowers. That same evening, a Common Poorwill sat on a mountain road for us, as we moved in close to it and watched in the spotlight.

Days in the La Grande area were filled with more birding highlights. At Ladd Marsh, as we watched an American Bittern in the spotting scope, a Golden Eagle soared overhead for a long time, surprisingly low to the ground. Sandhill Crane pairs escorted rufous-brown chicks, and a pair of Virginia Rails gave us the view of a lifetime, walking almost up to the group while calling loudly. Handsome Cinnamon Teals were abundant here, as were rough-voiced Yellow-headed Blackbirds. A pair of Northern Harriers flew by together and, as we watched, the male transferred the prey from its talons to the female in mid-air. Wilson's Snipes stood atop fence posts while Wilson's Phalaropes spun in shallow ponds.

Birding in the Blue Mountains, we were treated to great views of two different pairs of Williamson's Sapsuckers. One pair we watched changing places at the nest cavity, as a Clark's Nutcracker and Pileated Woodpecker perched nearby. At other mountain sites, a sky-blue Mountain Bluebird visited a nest hole in a huge dead tree and a Red-naped Sapsucker perched in a tall cottonwood—another of the nine woodpecker species seen on the tour. Great Gray Owls, a bird typically seen on the tour, were absent this year because of low prey availability. For the first time in more than 20 years none were using the nest platforms in the nearby forest.

The high elevation grasslands were a scenic delight, and offered some nice birds too. The tall, rolling hills were dotted with wildflowers—orange paintbrush, yellow lupine, blue camas. As we came around one bend, a Long-billed Curlew was in furious aerial chase on the tail of a raven. We later watched a curlew at leisure in the scope. Western Meadowlarks and Horned Larks posed along the way, and we were lucky to see two different pairs of Chukars at very close range as they stood still at the edge of the road—likely standing sentry over unseen chicks.

It was a memorable week in the scenic Northwest, at a great season.

ITINERARY

May 22: Arrivals in Portland and a get-acquainted dinner. Night at Hampton Inn.

May 23: After breakfast at the hotel, drove across the border to Washington with first birding at Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Mid-morning, driving east along the Columbia River on the Washington side, stopped at William Clark Park, then Beacon Rock State Park where we picnicked and birded. We continued east visiting the Little White Salmon fish hatchery, then north via Hwy. 141 to Glenwood. After a break, we birded the lodge grounds for an hour before dinner. First of two nights at Mt. Adams Lodge.

May 24: Optional outing before breakfast on trails through the wooded grounds of Mt. Adams Lodge. After breakfast, birded ponderosa pine habitat near Glenwood for White-headed Woodpecker and other birds, then drove via the town of Trout Lake up into Gifford Pinchot National Forest, birding forest roads up to the snow line. We picnicked at Trout Creek campground in the national forest, returning to lodge mid-afternoon. Late afternoon, we drove about 15 miles of the Glenwood-Goldendale Rd. along Klickitat Canyon, returning to the lodge for dinner. There was an optional after-dinner drive up Mt. Adams road in search of poorwills and other night birds. Second night at Mt. Adams Lodge.

May 25: Departed Mt. Adams Lodge after breakfast, along Glenwood-Goldendale Rd. then along the Klickitat River to town of Lyle. Birded oaks near Lyle for Acorn Woodpeckers, picnicked at Maryhill Museum, then crossed the Columbia River into Oregon at Arlington. We drove east

along I-84 in Oregon with rain falling much of the way. Dinner was at Ten Depot Street. First night in La Grande.

May 26: After breakfast at the motel, we drove south to bird Ladd Marsh wetlands and La Grande treatment ponds. Mid-morning travelled to Hilgard Jct and along Hwy 244 and the Grande Ronde River to Bird Track Trail, with picnic at adjacent campground. After lunch we drove to Spring Creek area of Wallowa-Whitman National Forest to bird until late afternoon. Dinner was again at Ten Depot Street with an optional after-dinner drive into the Blue Mts. for night birds, returning by 11:00 p.m. Second night in La Grande.

May 27: After breakfast, departed west via Hwy 244 along the Grande Ronde River and across the Blue Mts. to Ukiah then north on Hwy 395 and west and north on Hwy 74 through high elevation grasslands. We picnicked at the city park in Heppner then continued north to cross the Columbia at Arlington. We then drove west to Lyle where we birded along Old Hwy 8 and Balch Road. We had the final drive toward Portland, reaching hotel around 6:00 p.m. Farewell dinner at Sheraton and final night at the Hampton Inn near the Portland airport.

May 28: Departures for home.

BIRD LIST [*italics* for uncommon sightings; ***bold italics*** for rarities]

GREBES:

Pied-billed Grebe

Eared Grebe – colorful breeding plumage grebes near La Grande

CORMORANTS:

Double-crested Cormorant

BITTERN & HERONS:

American Bittern – good scope study of a bittern in the tall grass of Ladd Marsh, as a Golden Eagle soared overhead

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret – one bird along the road in Oregon

AMERICAN VULTURES:

Turkey Vulture

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Canada Goose

Wood Duck

Gadwall

Mallard

Cinnamon Teal – lots of handsome males in the marshes near La Grande

Northern Shoveler

Redhead

Lesser Scaup

Lesser Scaup

Hooded Merganser – a female with 3 ducklings south of La Grande

Common Merganser – good views near the Little White Salmon hatchery

Ruddy Duck – males sporting bright blue bills

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

Osprey

Bald Eagle – a fair number, including a pair hunting over Ladd Marsh

Northern Harrier – a rare view of a male to female aerial prey transfer, and another pair mating

Cooper's Hawk – a hunting adult just behind Mt. Adams Lodge

Swainson's Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Golden Eagle – a wonderful study of an adult soaring overhead, where the marsh meets the grassy hills south of La Grande

FALCONS:

American Kestrel

Peregrine Falcon – one flying over the Mt. Adams Lodge was a surprise

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Chukar – superb views of several along Hwy. 74, in the grasslands interspersed with basalt outcroppings

Gray Partridge – Pat spotted a pair in a hayfield along the Grande Ronde River, just a few miles east of Hilgard Jct.

Ring-necked Pheasant – at Ladd Marsh

Wild Turkey – Mary spotted turkeys in several locations, the first along the Glenwood-Goldendale Rd.

California Quail

RAILS & COOTS:

Virginia Rail – the view of a lifetime, as a pair just about walked right up to us, while calling loudly

Sora – heard all over Ladd Marsh

American Coot

CRANES:

Sandhill Crane – distantly at Conboy refuge, and closer views of adults with chicks at Ladd Marsh

PLOVERS, SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

Killdeer

Black-necked Stilt – quite a few along Airport Rd. east of Ladd Marsh

Spotted Sandpiper

Long-billed Curlew – First view was a curlew chasing away a raven, followed by scope views of a curlew that flew in close enough in the high grasslands for excellent scope views. Saw yet another chasing a Red-tailed Hawk.

Common Snipe – standing atop fence posts, right at the edge of the road!

Wilson's Phalarope – These whirling dervishes turned up at the La Grande treatment ponds and in a pond along Pierce Rd.

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

Mew Gull – An unexpected species, there was a first-cycle Mew Gull at Beacon Rock State Park, along the Columbia River.

Ring-billed Gull

California Gull

Glaucous-winged Gull – one along the Columbia near Stevenson

PIGEONS & DOVES:

Rock Dove

Band-tailed Pigeon – flying rapidly over the highway the first morning

Eurasian Collared-Dove – common throughout much of the tour route

Mourning Dove

NIGHTJARS:

Common Poorwill – a very good, close view of one after dark, about 5 miles north of Mt. Adams Lodge

SWIFTS:

Vaux's Swift – impressive numbers of swifts apparently still flocked in migration

HUMMINGBIRDS:

Calliope Hummingbird – stunning males at feeders by the windows of the Mt. Adams Lodge dining area

Rufous Hummingbird – best views also at Mt. Adams Lodge feeders

KINGFISHERS:

Belted Kingfisher

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:

Acorn Woodpecker – one along Old Hwy. 8 west of Lyle, Washington

Red-naped Sapsucker – Anne spotted one in a tall cottonwood along Bird Track Trail

Red-breasted Sapsucker – several great views, including one at close range at Ridgefield refuge and one along the forest road up to Mt. Adams as it worked its sap wells in a small conifer

Williamson's Sapsucker – Amazing studies of this western montane specialty. We watched a pair at a nest hole in the Spring Creek forest, then another pair near the Blue Mts. summit along Hwy. 244

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker – a pair in the same woods as the following species

White-headed Woodpecker – with a little patience, we had superb looks at this uncommon species along Lake Rd. near Glenwood

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker – one posed for scope views at the same spot as the first Williamson's Sapsuckers

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES:

Olive-sided Flycatcher – perched atop a 10' tall sapling, at Ridgefield

Western Wood-Pewee

Hammond's Flycatcher – singing and posing behind Mt. Adams Lodge

Gray Flycatcher

Say's Phoebe

Ash-throated Flycatcher – good views at the same spot as a Cassin's Vireo, southeast of Glenwood; also heard a number of places in the oak stands in the area

Western Kingbird – seen every birding day of the tour

VIREOS:

Cassin's Vireo – played hard to see near Mt. Adams Lodge, but finally had a very good view of a singing vireo in the oaks along Glenwood-Goldendale Rd.

Hutton's Vireo – heard at Ridgefield refuge

Warbling Vireo – one of the most common migrants seen on the trip, starting the first morning at Ridgefield when they seemed to be foraging in every other tree

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Gray Jay – in the Spring Ck. area

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub-Jay

Clark's Nutcracker – at the same Spring Ck. site as our first Williamson's Sapsuckers

Black-billed Magpie

American Crow

Common Raven

LARKS:

Horned Lark – nice looks a birds with “horns” in the high level grasslands

SWALLOWS & MARTINS:

Tree Swallow

Violet-green Swallow

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Cliff Swallow

Barn Swallow

TITMICE through CREEPERS:

Black-capped Chickadee

Mountain Chickadee – This species is thought to be an imminent split into the following two:

“Bailey’s” Chickadee – the Mountain Chickadees seen around Mt. Adams

“Gambel’s” Chickadee – those seen in the Blue Mts.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – at arm’s length, the first morning

Bushtit – in a residential neighborhood and at Ridgefield, the first morning

Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch - two forms: *aculeata* (“Slender-billed”) at Ridgefield, and *tenuissima* elsewhere

Pygmy Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

WRENS & DIPPERS:

Bewick's Wren – singing loudly the first morning at Ridgefield

House Wren

Pacific (formerly Winter) Wren – came out singing for terrific views at Beacon Rock State Park

Marsh Wren – at Ladd Marsh

American Dipper – At a bridge crossing of the White Salmon R. along Hwy 141, we watched a dipper catch and then dispatch a sizeable minnow, only to ultimately watch it slip off a rock back into the river.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS:

Golden-crowned Kinglet – males flashing orange and yellow crowns

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – singing and mobbing near the Blue Mts. Summit on Hwy. 244

THRUSHES & ALLIES:

Western Bluebird – many good views of this darker blue species

Mountain Bluebird – This flash of sky blue feathers was first seen the last day at the entranced to Starkey Experimental Forest northeast of Ukiah.

Hermit Thrush – singing after dusk in the forest north of Mt. Adams Lodge

American Robin

MIMIDS:

Gray Catbird – singing and peeking out of the willows along the Grande Ronde

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling

WAXWINGS:

Cedar Waxwing – a few arriving migrants

WOOD WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler – close view of a singing male in the Spring Ck. area

Nashville Warbler – lots of good views, at Mt. Adams Lodge and along the Klickitat drainage

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler – mostly Audubon's, a few migrating Myrtle's

Black-throated Gray Warbler – close view of a male, right down to the yellow loreal spot, a few miles west of Trout Lake

Townsend's Warbler – migrants at Ridgefield refuge, others singing in the Blue Mts.

Hermit Warbler – great view of a couple of males on the slopes of Mt. Adams, where the snow prevented travel to higher elevation

MacGillivray's Warbler – excellent views of this western specialty as it sang at Mt. Adams Lodge

Common Yellowthroat

Wilson's Warbler – migrants and birds singing on nesting territories

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Spotted Towhee

Chipping Sparrow

Lark Sparrow – scoped a singing male in the Balch Rd. oaks

Savannah Sparrow

Grasshopper Sparrow – crossing the road in the high grasslands

Song Sparrow – of several subspecies, including the heavily marked *morphna* of western lowlands

Lincoln's Sparrow – a very twitchy male near the pass in the Blue Mts.

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco – of the “Oregon” type

GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS:

Western Tanager – It was a special treat to see so many tanagers, especially red and yellow males, as migrants were passing through a variety of habitats throughout the tour.

Black-headed Grosbeak – singing males and a female at the Mt. Adams Lodge feeders

Lazuli Bunting – One of the trip highlights was the many fine views of scintillating males!

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:

Red-winged Blackbird

Western Meadowlark

Yellow-headed Blackbird – close views of boldly colored, noisy males

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Bullock's Oriole

FINCHES:

Purple Finch – several along Balch Rd., in Washington

Cassin's Finch – the prevalent red finch at Mt. Adams Lodge

House Finch

Red Crossbill – heard flying over

Pine Siskin

MAMMALS, HERPS & OTHER CRITTERS:

Bighorn Sheep – we saw multiple rams with curled horns along Columbia Gorge

Mule Deer

Black-tailed Deer

Elk – seen on four days, at different locations

Snowshoe Hare

Mountain Cottontail

Muskrat

Yellow-bellied Marmot

Cascade Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

California Ground Squirrel

Columbian Ground Squirrel

Douglas' Squirrel

Red Squirrel

Eastern Gray Squirrel

Townsend's Chipmunk

Yellow Pine Chipmunk

Pacific Chorus Frog

Chinook Salmon – swimming toward the Little White Salmon hatchery