

# **RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS OF OREGON & WASHINGTON**

**MAY 20 – 26, 2012**

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**TOUR REPORT**  
**RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS OF OREGON AND WASHINGTON**  
**INTRODUCTORY BIRDING TOUR**  
**May 20–26, 2012**

**By Bob Sundstrom**

An owlet, a young Great Gray Owl just out of the nest, stands motionless atop a fallen log. It blinks slowly at its surroundings, but hardly moves a feather. About a hundred feet away an adult owl, the owlet's mother, perches on the branch of a small conifer, her body close to the trunk, all but invisible with cryptic gray feathering patterned like the tree's bark. Flocks of Red Crossbills call overhead, as the birds bound from tree to tree, adults and lots of recent fledglings. Townsend's Warblers sing lazily, and three species of nuthatches are calling. Suddenly a Black-backed Woodpecker flies in and hitches up the trunk of a tall larch, showing its all black back and subtle face pattern. Another woodpecker flies in, stopping near the top of a broken-off tree, where there is a fresh nest hole. This woodpecker is tawny brown, with a barred back. It's not a flicker, but a female Williamson's Sapsucker.

This scene recounts a half-hour sequence of events on the Rivers and Mountains of Oregon and Washington tour in late May 2012. Our tour group was in the Blue Mountains of Oregon on a pleasant morning, the open forest floor bright with wildflowers. It was our second Great Gray Owl sighting of the morning. We had just come from watching a female owl on its nest, a bird we took time to admire for at least half an hour.

The day before, we had crossed spectacular high elevation grasslands in north central Oregon. There were owls that day too: a Short-eared Owl flying over the vast expanse of grass, and a family of Great Horned Owls nesting in a rock outcropping, the huge nestlings golden-brown with a few bits of down still on the face. The splendid drive through the grasslands was dotted with good bird sightings: Long-billed Curlews foraging off the roadside, a Gray Partridge flying off the shoulder and then pausing in the open along a fence line, Say's Phoebes and Rock Wrens at basalt outcroppings, and flashy Horned Larks and Lark Sparrows.

The weeklong Rivers and Mountains of Oregon and Washington tour begins in Portland, Oregon, and then runs east along the Columbia River Gorge, whose towering cliffs and tree-clad borders 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 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. Leaving Mt. Adams Lodge after two nights, the route then runs along the scenic Klickitat River gorge and then east along the Columbia Gorge.

From the Columbia we departed southeast, across the grasslands just noted, and back among forested slopes and along the Grande Ronde River to La Grande, Oregon at the foot of the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains are enough reason to head for La Grande, but there is also an extensive, protected marsh just south of town, where we saw nesting Sandhill Cranes, American

Avocets, Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes, American White Pelican, Cinnamon Teal, Virginia Rail, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and much more.

The tour traverses a remarkable diversity of beautiful natural landscapes: the river gorges, the broad meadows backed by stands of conifers, the high grasslands with rocky outcrops, the lovely oak-clad Klickitat River canyon, rivers running through pines and firs, and marshes alive with waterfowl and other birds. And spring is at its peak, birds singing almost nonstop.

Our time at Mt. Adams Lodge was splendid. Seed feeders were busy with Cassin's Finches, Evening and Black-headed grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and chickadees. Hummingbird feeders pulled in Calliope, Black-chinned, and Rufous hummers, all at close range. A Red-breasted Sapsucker frequented sap wells on a birch tree, the same tree from which the seed feeders were hung. A short walk on the lodge grounds quickly led to an impressive list of bird sightings: MacGillivray's, Townsend's, and Wilson's warblers; Hammond's and Olive-sided flycatchers; Cassin's Vireo; Western Tanager; Western Bluebird; and a brilliant Lazuli Bunting. A Townsend's Solitaire was a regular sight along the driveway. The lodge rooms were comfortable, the food excellent, the atmosphere relaxed. It was just a short drive from the lodge to find White-headed Woodpecker and Gray Flycatcher, a bit longer for Black-throated Gray Warbler and Lewis's Woodpecker. We saw ten species of woodpeckers during the tour.

It was hard to say goodbye to the lodge, but there were more birds to come, including those Great Gray Owls.

## **ITINERARY:**

**May 20:** Arrivals in Portland and get-acquainted dinner. Night at Hampton Inn.

**May 20:** 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, birding stops at Beacon Rock State Park and Ashes Lk. Lunch in Stevenson. Continued east, visiting the Little White Salmon fish hatchery, then north via Hwy. 141 and B-Z Corners Rd. to Glenwood and Mt. Adams Lodge. Late afternoon watched seed and hummingbird feeders and walked Lady Slipper Trail and old airstrip area. First of two dinners and nights at Mt. Adams Lodge.

**May 21:** Optional outing before breakfast on trails through the wooded grounds of Mt. Adams Lodge. After breakfast, birded ponderosa pine habitat near Glenwood and at Conboy Lake NWR for White-headed Woodpecker and other birds. Picnicked back at lodge, then drove Glenwood-Goldendale Rd. to 142 and about halfway down 142 along Klickitat Canyon toward the Columbia R. Looped back to lodge via Klickitat-Appleton Rd., O'Neal Rd., and Fisher Hill Rd. Dinner at Mt. Adams Lodge. Second night at Mt. Adams Lodge.

**May 23:** Departed Mt. Adams Lodge after breakfast, along Glenwood-Goldendale Rd. all the way to Goldendale, then south on Hwy. 97 to the Columbia and across into Oregon. I-84 to 74. Drove 74 through grasslands, south to Heppner where we picnicked, then east to 395; south on

395 and over Battle Mt. Summit to Ukiah; then east on 244, with a short side trip south on FR51 for Williamson's Sapsuckers; continued east on 244 along the Grande Ronde River, and on to La Grande. Dinner at Ten Depot St., first night in La Grande.

**May 24:** After breakfast at the motel, drove to Spring Creek area of Wallowa-Whitman National Forest to bird until late morning, then drove to Hilgard Jct. and along 244 to Bird Track Trail to bird and picnic. Afternoon drove south to bird La Grande treatment ponds and Ladd Marsh wetlands. Dinner again at Ten Depot St., then optional after-dinner drive into the Blue Mts. for night birds.

**May 25:** After breakfast, departed east to town of Cove and then up Mill Ck. Rd. on Mt. Fanny as far as Moss Springs Campground, where snow blocked road higher. Mid-morning backtracked to La Grande, then north and west via I-84, stopping for lunch in Arlington, Oregon. Crossed into Washington via Hwy. 97, then followed Hwy. 14 and the Columbia west to Lyle, where we birded along Old Hwy. 8. Crossed back into Oregon via Hood River Bridge, then continued west to Portland.

**May 26:** Departures.

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

**GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:**

Canada Goose

Gadwall – quite a few pairs at Ladd Marsh and La Grande ponds

Mallard

Blue-winged Teal – at least one drake at Ladd Marsh

Cinnamon Teal – many richly colored drakes at Ladd Marsh

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail – a fair number at Ladd Marsh

Green-winged Teal – at least one drake

Redhead

Lesser Scaup

*Bufflehead* - very uncommon this late in spring; females near Little White Salmon Hatchery and at La Grande treatment ponds

Common Merganser – large, handsome ducks at various sites near the Columbia River

Ruddy Duck – males sporting bright blue bills and ruddy flanks

**GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:**

Gray Partridge – seen in at least two spots during the drive through the Oregon grasslands

Ring-necked Pheasant

California Quail – best view of this tasseled quail was a male on fence post near Mt. Adams Lodge

**GREBES:**

Western Grebe – disappearing into the marsh vegetation at Ladd Marsh

**PELICANS:**

American White Pelican – Joe spotted the first one at Ladd Marsh; many others turned up along the Columbia on the drive back west

**CORMORANTS:**

Double-crested Cormorant

**BITTERNS & HERONS:**

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret – a few at Ladd Marsh

Black-crowned Night-Heron – ditto

**IBISES:**

*White-faced Ibis* – 8 at Ladd Marsh were likely part of an irruptive expansion this spring

**AMERICAN VULTURES**

Turkey Vulture

**EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:**

Osprey – seen daily, often carrying fish

Bald Eagle – seen along the Grande Ronde River primarily

Northern Harrier – surprisingly prevalent over the Ladd Marsh grassy expanses

Cooper's Hawk – several seen in flight, local nesters

Swainson's Hawk – a number of nice views, including one at a nest near Cove

Red-tailed Hawk – widespread, common

Golden Eagle – soaring over the Oregon grassy hills

**FALCONS:**

American Kestrel

Peregrine Falcon – one soaring over Ladd Marsh

Prairie Falcon – a first one zoomed by near the Columbia near Maryhill, another over the Oregon grasslands

**RAILS & COOTS:**

Virginia Rail – nice views of one stalking back and forth through at a pond edge at Ladd Marsh

Sora – ditto, in the same spot

American Coot

**CRANES:**

Sandhill Crane – first espied distantly at Conboy refuge in Washington; others at Oregon's Ladd Marsh

**PLOVERS, SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:**

Killdeer

Black-necked Stilt – nesting pairs at Ladd Marsh

American Avocet – a lovely pair flew back and forth, calling, at Ladd Marsh, then settled on the pond

Spotted Sandpiper – a frequent site along rushing streams

Long-billed Curlew – nice views of nesting adults atop the grassy hills east of Heppner

Wilson's Snipe – heard

Wilson's Phalarope – several scoped at Ladd Marsh

Red-necked Phalarope – scoped a distant one at Ladd Marsh, where a northbound migrant

**GULLS, & TERNS:**

Ring-billed Gull

California Gull – an abundant nester on spoil islands in the Columbia

Glaucous-winged Gull – non-adults along the Columbia

Caspian Tern – a few along the Columbia R.

**PIGEONS & DOVES:**

Rock Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove – ubiquitous throughout the tour

Mourning Dove

**OWLS:**

Flammulated Owl – heard at fairly close range near Spring Ck., the owl wouldn't come in for a view

Great Horned Owl – wonderful view of adults and large nestlings on a rimrock feature east of Heppner

Great Gray Owl – a tour highlight, we had wonderful scope views of one female on a nest and then a an owlet standing on a fallen log, as the female looked on from a tree perch

*Short-eared Owl* – a nice surprise, Joe spotted one on the crest of a hill in the Oregon grasslands

**SWIFTS:**

Vaux's Swift – seen daily, sometimes low to the ground

White-throated Swift – zooming across a tall, basalt cliff face on the north side of the Columbia

**HUMMINGBIRDS:**

Black-chinned Hummingbird – a male visited the Mt. Adams Lodge feeders

Calliope Hummingbird – great views of purple throated males and buffy breasted females

Rufous Hummingbird – most females seen at the feeders; males briefly away from feeders

**KINGFISHERS:**

Belted Kingfisher

**WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:**

Lewis' Woodpecker – splendid view of this gorgeous woodpecker in the Klickitat River oaks

Red-naped Sapsucker – two along the Grande Ronde River in some huge cottonwood snags

Red-breasted Sapsucker – first sighting was a very accommodating bird at Beacon Rock State Park; an even more accommodating sapsucker frequent sapwells on the birch tree at Mt. Adams Lodge

Williamson's Sapsucker – two boldly patterned males along FR 51 in Oregon, then a fine view of a tawny, barred female at Spring Ck.

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

White-headed Woodpecker – after several hours of fruitless searching elsewhere, one turned up quickly at Conboy refuge and stayed around for minutes for nice views

*Black-backed Woodpecker* – lucky to see, one turned up as we were admiring a Great Gray owl

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker – heard

**FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES:**

Olive-sided Flycatcher – at several spots, including one singing at Mt. Adams Lodge

Western Wood-Pewee – widespread and common

Hammond's Flycatcher – nice views at Mt. Adams Lodge, heard elsewhere

Dusky Flycatcher – decent views of one, others heard

Gray Flycatcher – in the pine woods just outside Glenwood

Pacific-slope Flycatcher – heard

Say's Phoebe – fairly common on the drive via Heppner

Ash-throated Flycatcher – in the oaks of upper Klickitat Canyon

Western Kingbird – both kingbirds showed nicely on roadside fence lines

Eastern Kingbird

**SHRIKES:**

Loggerhead Shrike – a pair at a nest tree along Hwy. 74, ever harder to find in the region

**VIREOS:**

Cassin's Vireo – singing its burry song around Mt. Adams Lodge and elsewhere

Warbling Vireo

**JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:**

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub-Jay – seen in areas of Garry Oak in Oregon and Washington

Black-billed Magpie

American Crow

Common Raven

**LARKS:**

Horned Lark – nice view of a male in the grasslands, many other flitting near the road

**SWALLOWS & MARTINS:**

Tree Swallow

Violet-green Swallow – the most widely seen swallows, we could see their violet tails as they flew below us over the Klickitat River

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – at nesting areas along many streams

Bank Swallow – the least prevalent swallow of the tour

Cliff Swallow

Barn Swallow

**TITMICE through CREEPERS:**

Black-capped Chickadee

Mountain Chickadee – a candidate for revising as two species, we saw what would be called Bailey's

Chickadee around Mt. Adams and Gambel's Chickadee in the Blue Mts.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – good views at Ridgefield, despite the rain

Bushtit – a pair at Ridgefield showed very well

Red-breasted Nuthatch – widespread, in all conifer zones

White-breasted Nuthatch

Pygmy Nuthatch – in the Ponderosa pines near Glenwood

Brown Creeper – creeping up trunks in both states

**WRENS & DIPPERS:**

Rock Wren – a family group in some roadside rimrock

Bewick's Wren – seen by some at Ridgefield

House Wren

Pacific (formerly Winter) Wren – a singing bird at Beacon Rock State Park gave quite a concert

Marsh Wren – in the cattails at Ladd Marsh

American Dipper – on the White Salmon River, which was running very high

**KINGLETS:**

Golden-crowned Kinglet – a males showing off its fiery crown at Ridgefield, thanks to Joe

**THRUSHES & ALLIES:**

Western Bluebird – the common bluebird of the trip, seen every day

Mountain Bluebird – a gorgeous male near Glenwood competed for attention with a double rainbow

Townsend's Solitaire – one was present on several occasions along the driveway into Mt. Adams Lodge, offering nice views of this western thrush

Swainson's Thrush – mostly heard, fleeting views

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

**STARLINGS & ALLIES:**

European Starling

**WAXWINGS:**

Cedar Waxwing – recently arrived migrants

**WOOD WARBLERS**

Orange-crowned Warbler – singing along Mill Ck. Rd. outside Cove

Nashville Warbler – the best view was a male in a shrub near a meadow south of Glenwood

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler – of the “Audubon’s” form, perhaps to be re-designated a full species

Black-throated Gray Warbler – at Beacon Rock State Park, mingling with a Hermit Warbler, and in the oaks along the Klickitat

Townsend's Warbler – seen in what appeared to be late migrant flocks

Hermit Warbler – a lovely male at Beacon Rock State Park finally offered wonderful views

MacGillivray's Warbler – great views at several spots

Common Yellowthroat – at Ridgefield and Ladd Marsh

Wilson's Warbler – seen at several spots, including Ridgefield refuge

**SPARROWS & ALLIES:**

Spotted Towhee – at least two different subspecies seen, *oregonus* of western Washington and Oregon, and the more heavily spotted *curtatus* of the eastern side

Chipping Sparrow

Vesper Sparrow – along the roadside in the grasslands

Lark Sparrow – seen by some along the roadside in the grasslands

Savannah Sparrow

Song Sparrow – we saw *morphna* in the west and *merrilli* in the east

White-crowned Sparrow – the *pugetensis* subspecies in western Washington/Oregon

Dark-eyed Junco – the “Oregon” form, *oreganus*

**GROSBEAKS, BUNTINGS & ALLIES:**

Western Tanager – yellow and black males with red faces, very striking

Black-headed Grosbeak – lots of nice views, beginning with a pair at Ridgefield refuge

Lazuli Bunting – scintillating males at several locations, common along the Klickitat

**BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:**

*Bobolink* – a scarce and very localized bird in the region, we lucked into a male west of Cove, Oregon

Red-winged Blackbird

Western Meadowlark

Yellow-headed Blackbird – braying their loud songs at Ladd Marsh

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Bullock's Oriole – superb views of brilliant orange males, especially along Old Hwy. 8

**FINCHES:**

Purple Finch – a tree top singer at Ridgefield refuge

Cassin's Finch – amazing studies at the Mt. Adams Lodge feeders

House Finch

Red Crossbill – chattering through the conifers at Spring Ck.; nice scope views, flocks of 50 or more



Pine Siskin – a few at the Mt. Adams Lodge feeders  
Lesser Goldfinch – Nancy spotted one along the Klickitat  
American Goldfinch  
Evening Grosbeak – a few visiting the Mt. Adams Lodge feeders

**OLD WORLD SPARROWS:**

House Sparrow

**MAMMALS, HERPS & OTHER CRITTERS:**

Coyote

Bighorn Sheep –along Columbia Gorge

Mule Deer

Elk – seen on four days, at different locations

Snowshoe Hare

Yellow-bellied Marmot

Cascade Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

California Ground Squirrel

Columbian Ground Squirrel

Douglas' Squirrel

Red Squirrel

Fox Squirrel

Yellow Pine Chipmunk

Pacific Chorus Frog – heard

Bullfrog – heard