

Oregon Birds & Botany | Trip Report

July 18–26, 2021 | Written by Bob Meinke



With guides Bob Meinke and Steve Shunk, and participants: Sharon, Debra, Alan, Dee, Larry, Lynne, Bill, Alice, Jay, Janie, and Leslie





Sun., July 18 Welcome to Pasco, Washington | Dinner at Anthony's

The tiny terminal in Pasco was a welcome relief after most of the group had transited through much larger airports during their flights into the Northwest. And despite a couple of close calls with connecting flights in Seattle, all had arrived by mid-afternoon. Alice and Jay, as well as Janie, being local Oregonians, chose to skip the flying and simply drive up to Pasco. We arranged to have their cars left at the hotel in Pasco, to be picked up at the end of the tour.

After checking in at our hotel, we met for introductions and a review of our route and plans for the next eight days. Major topics for discussion included the ongoing wildfires in Oregon, and the extraordinary high temperatures the Northwest had recently experienced. Bob (who had already been in the area scouting for a week) and Steve assured the group that we were carefully monitoring the fire and smoke situation, and that we could easily adjust our tour schedule, if need be.

As it turned out, although we were prepared, schedule adjustments never proved necessary—we were able to largely avoid areas with drifting smoke, so there were no route changes. Additionally, the record-setting heatwave (*hello, climate change*) that had plagued Oregon and Washington earlier had largely abated by the time we arrived, and the temperatures during the tour (especially in the mountains) ended up being surprisingly comfortable.

We were then off to dinner, for drinks and seafood along the Columbia River. Anthony's at Columbia Point operates its own fleet on the coast, 250 miles to the west, and brings its catch in daily. Considered one of the premier seafood restaurants in the Northwest, we settled in to get acquainted and share travel stories. The fully vaccinated group was clearly relieved to be able to travel once again. After some amazing desserts, we headed back to our lodgings early. Spending the first night in Pasco gave everyone the chance to relax a bit after the day's travels, and we were fresh and ready to go early the next morning.

Mon., July 19 Baker City and Geiser Grand Hotel, via the Blue Mountains

A hot buffet breakfast was ready by 6:00 AM, and we were out on the road a little over an hour later. Our destination was McNary National Wildlife Refuge, near the junction of the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The xeric habitat here is often referred to as Columbia Basin steppe, and is characterized by Rabbitbrush, Sagebrush, Snakeweed, and a wide range of herbaceous species and bunchgrasses.

The birds we saw here were representative of the lowland passerines, waders, and waterfowl that are typical of the inland Pacific Northwest in mid-summer. Steve soon had his scope out, and the group was getting good views of Wood Duck, Canvasback, and Canada Geese, along with a flock of Black-necked Stilts and a lone Greater

Yellowlegs. Overhead were numerous Ring-billed and California Gulls, as well as several beautiful Caspian Terns. White Pelicans were seen above us in formation, and several Osprey were spotted.

We also walked the nature trail at McNary, and had our first look at Eastern Kingbird, a species at the western edge of its range here. California Quail, Virginia Rail (heard), Tree and Bank Swallow, Cedar Waxwing, Marsh Wren, Lesser and American Goldfinches, Song Sparrow, and Yellow-rumped Warbler were all recorded. It was a beautiful morning, perfect for a walk along the river. Belding's Ground Squirrels were seen several times.

We needed to check out of our Pasco hotel by 11:00, so we headed back and departed shortly afterwards for the Oregon border, not far to the south. Passing through seemingly endless wheat fields (dryland farming and cattle ranching dominate the landscape in much of southeast Washington), we soon crossed into Oregon. Nearing lunchtime we drove to Pendleton, stopping at Great Pacific, a quirky local brewpub. We were quickly seated together at a long table after ordering at the counter. Portions were large and we had more than enough! The service was amazingly efficient and we were on our way sooner than expected, heading east towards Baker City.



Within an hour we began our ascent of the Blue Mountains, with their extensive montane coniferous forests. Our first stop was at Emigrant Springs State Park, refreshingly cool compared to the lower valley we'd just left. The habitat here was comprised of Pine, Fir, Spruce, Hemlock, and Larch species, with numerous understory wildflowers, including Thimbleberry, Queen's Cup, Wintergreen, Gentian, False Lily-of-the-Valley, Veronica, Tiarella, Twinflower, Rein Orchid, Lady Slipper Orchid (with pods only), and many others.

We were also treated here to our first example of Steve's uncanny ability to hear and identify birds that most of us would simply never notice. Despite the traffic noise of the interstate, just a short distance away through the forest, Steve quickly detected the tinkle of a group of Golden-crowned Kinglets high in the canopy, which ultimately dropped into view. We also saw Steller's Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red Crossbill, Mountain Chickadee, and a pair of Cordilleran Flycatcher parents attending an occupied nest. The nestlings were rightfully suspicious of us, but still posed for pictures.



It was then on to our final stop before Baker City, just a few miles down the road at the Spring Creek Campground on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. We had two targets here, the Great Gray Owl, and an unusual plant called Pinedrops (in the heath family), which gathers its nutrition via a symbiotic relationship with subterranean mycorrhizal fungi and coniferous trees, and as a result produces no chlorophyll (so completely lacks any green tissue). We found the Pinedrops, but not the owl. However, we did see Canada Jay, Chestnut-backed and Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Red-crossbill.

We rolled into Baker City by late afternoon, and settled into our rooms at the iconic Geiser Grand Hotel. Some of us ordered a drink in the hotel bar, and others relaxed upstairs before we did a quick review of our species list. Although the hotel and main dining room weren't crowded, the staff kindly provided a separate dining area for us, at a single banquet table. We'd had a long day, and after dinner most of the group retired early.

Tues., July 20 Elkhorn Ridge and Anthony Lake

Breakfast was an order-off-the-menu affair, and the staff was ready early. The plan today was to then head out, start birding, and have a picnic lunch in the mountains, to maximize our time on the Elkhorn Ridge.

However, the hotel was unable to help with sandwiches as we'd hoped, since they were very short-staffed. So Bob ventured out the night before, hoping to arrange for to-go lunches that we'd pick up as we headed out in the morning. That said, Baker City is not a large town, and the options were slim. First stop was Safeway, where the deli couldn't commit to an order for 13 sandwiches without approval from the manager. And she had left for the day. Can you call and ask her? No, we could never do that. Hmm, OK. On to Subway. Can you make us 13 sandwiches for tomorrow morning? What time, they ask. By 8:00 AM. Well, we'll probably be open then, but we don't know if we'll have any bread. You're a Subway, and you'll plan to open without knowing if you'll have any bread? The lady behind the counter shrugged.

So on to Plan D, which involved heading back to Safeway after breakfast, where Bob pushed a cart around while everyone foraged through the aisles, selecting their own choices for lunch and plopping them in the cart. Anxious how this would go over with the group, the guides were pleasantly surprised when everyone seemed to love it. In fact, so much so, that we did this several more times on the tour. People got to choose just what they wanted, and the picnic approach ensured we didn't waste time having lunch in cafés when we could be out in the field. It made perfect sense.

So with lunch fixings efficiently in hand, we drove west into the national forest towards the Elkhorn Ridge, the highest escarpment of the Blue Mountains. Steve took time to review the geology of the area with the group, and Bob provided a short overview of the natural vegetation. The lower slopes are largely covered by open Ponderosa Pine and Western Larch forests, but these give way to dense groves of Whitebark Pine, Subalpine Fir, and Engelmann Spruce higher up. Our goal for the day was to bird and botanize along meadow trails near picturesque Anthony Lake, at just under 8,000 feet.



Although plant communities at lower elevations had suffered a bit from the earlier heatwave, the subalpine zone in the Elkhorns was in fine shape. The meadows adjoining the lake were full of wildflowers, including species of Penstemon, Bistort, Monkshood, Lungwort, Shooting Star, Aster, Burnet, Cinquefoil, Lupine, Green False Hellebore, Paintbrush, St. John's Wort, Speedwell, Monkeyflower, Gentian, and Groundsel, many still in their prime. Among the flowers we located nesting White-crowned Sparrow, and in a nearby pine there was an active family of Lincoln's Sparrows. It was interesting seeing them on their breeding grounds so high up.

We then walked the perimeter of Anthony Lake, and also ventured out to a couple of smaller, nearby lakes (one covered with beautiful lily pads), picking up Pacific Wren, Canada Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Hermit Thrush, Red Crossbill, Chipping Sparrow, a few Pacific Treefrogs, and some amazing fungi (including a huge and somewhat otherworldly-looking *Amanita* mushroom). Steve also focused in on a vocalizing American Three-toed Woodpecker, which despite not being seen well, was an exceptionally nice rarity for the trip.

During our drive back down to Baker City in the afternoon, we spotted Common Nighthawk, Swainson's Hawk, and Western Meadowlark in the farm fields. We ended the day a bit early, allowing the group to relax before the species list and our dinner at Barley Brown's, a local brewpub with a great salad selection. We spent minimal time in the vans today, and had a very nice time in the mountains. You couldn't ask for much more.



Wed., July 21 Elkhorn Wildlife Management Area | Baker Valley

After breakfast at the Geiser Grand, and another quick stop at Safeway, we were off to the foothills of the Blue Mountains in Union County, to visit the little-known Elkhorn Wildlife Management Area (EWMA), operated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

We took a leisurely drive through the Baker Valley on the way, tallying a number of species, including Western Kingbird, Violet-green Swallow, Black-billed Magpie, Northern Harrier, Western Wood-Pewee, Bullock's Oriole, Belted Kingfisher, American Goldfinch, Western Bluebird, Black-headed Grosbeak, Cliff Swallow, and Yellow Warbler. We also stopped the vans once for a closer view of a Western Terrestrial Garter Snake, before shooing it off the blacktop.

Although Baker City had been suffering a bit from an elevated smoke level (from a wildfire 80 miles to the north), both the temperature and air quality at the EWMA were lovely. The nature trail we traveled on was remarkably underused, and was routed through a riparian corridor of enormous Black Cottonwoods, Douglas Fir, Alders, Western Larch, Willows, and several other tree species.

The understory featured a wide array of native plants (there was very little disturbance here by livestock), with Snowberry, Serviceberry, Chokecherry, Mock Orange, Elderberry, and other shrubs in abundance. Lupines were

common in open areas along the trail. We also saw a Mountain Cottontail, the burrows of many Northern Pocket Gophers, and a White-tailed Deer made a brief appearance.

We had only just started our trek, when those walking ahead with Steve flushed a gamebird from underfoot—a Ruffed Grouse! Not everyone saw it, but it was a great start. When peering through canopy gaps we also had quick views of Vaux's Swifts, the smaller, western counterpart to the Chimney Swift from east of the Rockies. Both Anna's and Rufous Hummingbirds were spotted, the latter soon to be migrating south towards Mexico. A Cassin's Vireo was vocalizing, and most of us had good looks. White-breasted Nuthatches were common, and we also had glimpses of Swainson's Thrush, another woodland species getting ready for its migration south.

A puzzling bird pointed out by Steve turned out, after some consideration, to be a probable first year Lazuli Bunting, largely beige and gray with no hint of the blue coloration characterizing adults. Often a species of open areas, this young bird was being secretive and hiding among the foliage.



The maturity of the forest was evidenced by the number of aging trees and snags, and not unsurprisingly, the area was home to many woodpeckers. We had four species here. A family of Red-naped Sapsuckers were especially confiding, and we all had good looks. We also heard and later saw Northern Flicker, as well as both Downey and Hairy Woodpeckers, giving us the chance to contrast these two rather similar species. There were also a number of Mourning Doves and Tree Swallows overhead.

We enjoyed our picnic lunch near the vans, and after a quick side trip to a nearby eBird hotspot, where the birding was admittedly somewhat slow (it was early afternoon by that time), we were ready to head back. But not before we enjoyed a few handfuls of wild huckleberries, which were just ripening along the road. We returned to Baker City in time to freshen up before dinner, with some of the group visiting a nearby craft distillery to evaluate their offerings! Our last dinner in Baker City was once again at the Geiser Grand. We looked forward to departing in the morning for the Wallowa Mountains, and some new scenery.

Thurs., July 22 Enroute to the Wallowa Mountains | Rhinehart Canyon

After breakfast at the Geiser Grand, we loaded the vans and headed north to the Wallawas. But as many birders know, local water treatment plants and their accompanying ponds are often good places for a quick look.

So our initial destination, just outside Baker City, was Coral Ditch (the derivation of the name is unknown), a series of man-made sewage ponds managed by the city. Hardly pristine habitat, the site nonetheless provided a few additions to our species list, including large numbers of Bank Swallow, Tree Swallow, Double-crested Cormorant, Northern Shoveler, Pied-billed Grebe, and Redhead.

Our next stop was north into Wallowa County, where we planned some time at Rhinehart Canyon along the Grande Ronde River, a well-known eBird hotspot. We drove in along a heavily vegetated, abandoned section of state highway, that dead-ended near a cliff by the river.

Our target birds here were Gray Catbird and Eastern Kingbird, both common east of the Rockies, but rarities this far west, especially in Oregon. We saw our first catbird before even leaving the vans, and ended up with six. Singing loudly during our visit, they are very much an anomaly among the Oregon avifauna. Eastern Kingbirds were also present, flycatching from the tops of shrubs and along fences, and we had much better looks here than we had earlier at the McNary Refuge near Pasco.

The riverbanks and nearby cliffs were covered in vegetation, including species of Willow, Alder, Golden Currant, Wild Rose, and Clematis, and were great habitat for Yellow-breasted Chat, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Willow Flycatcher, Bewick's Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Cedar Waxwing, Song Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee. Steve also heard, high above the cliff in the Ponderosa Pine, the call of Pygmy Nuthatch. On the cliffs were both Rock and Canyon Wrens, and American Goldfinch flitted back and forth across the river. Although we were only here for a short time, it was possibly the most productive 90 minutes of the tour.

An American Dipper was seen further on, during our quick lunch stop at the confluence of the Minam and Wallowa Rivers. But our visit here was short, since our goal was to reach Wallowa Lake by mid-afternoon and settle into our lakeside accommodations, with time to relax before dinner.

The historic Wallowa Lake Lodge is a popular destination for Oregonians willing to make the drive (it's a full 8 hours east of Portland), owing to its national park atmosphere and the stunning beauty of its surroundings. While Oregon is blessed with countless outstanding natural areas, many feel that Wallowa Lake and Crater Lake are in a class by themselves. And while the better-known Crater Lake can at times be overwhelmed with visitors, Wallowa Lake, far from airports with significant commercial service, flies under the radar. Our group had a wide range of opinions and observations about our daily itinerary (always helpful for a first time tour), but if there was one absolute consensus among us, it was that the Wallowa Lake area was the highlight of the trip.

Nestled at the south end of Wallowa Lake, the multi-acre lodge property is engulfed by mature coniferous forest, including species of Pine, Larch, Hemlock, Grand Fir, and Douglas Fir. At the back of the lodge is a long, continuous verandah, with tables and easy chairs, with open views. A small, yet well-stocked bar is just inside



the lobby (with a door to the verandah), making for a perfect spot to relax with a beverage after a day of birding or hiking. The group soon made their way here, before we moved on to the dining room for a Scandinavian-themed dinner. Then for most of us, it was off to our snug rooms to rest up ahead of tomorrow's hikes.

Fri., July 23 Wallowa Lake and Mount Howard

For many of us the day started with coffee on the verandah, watching Vaux's Swifts, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Cedar Waxwings and other species under clear morning skies, the distant wildfire smoke to the north still not reaching this far south. Today we were once again headed for high elevations, but not before a filling breakfast and an early walk into Wallowa Lake State Park, which adjoins the lodge property to the west.

The evening before, Steve had spotted what appeared to be an active Lewis's Woodpecker nest near the lake, while searching for a previously reported roost of resident Bald Eagles, and the group was anxious to relocate it. The morning was cool and crisp, and we took our time heading down towards the shore, winding our way along the Wallowa River through towering Black Cottonwoods and the aforementioned mixed coniferous forest,



where American Red Squirrel were common. The understory featured several species of native Currant and Gooseberry, low-growing Willows, Dwarf Birch, and Snowberry, as well as species of Aster, Penstemon, Monkeyflower, Coneflower, Gentian, Fleabane, Willowherb, Veronica, and Evening-Primrose.

Steve was true to his word, and soon the group was getting nice scope views of the Lewis's Woodpecker family as it bustled around its nest site high on an exposed snag. It's a gorgeous and often gregarious species, quite unique among North American woodpeckers. Other birds that appeared during our morning walk included Bald Eagle, Osprey, American Dipper, Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher, Brown-headed Cowbird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Sandpiper, Red-naped Sapsucker, Violet-green Swallow, and Pine Siskin. Western Fence Lizards were also spotted, sunning themselves on the woody debris where the Wallowa River entered the lake.

Next up was our trip—via tram—to the summit of nearby Mount Howard in the high Wallows, with an elevation of 8,255 feet. It was a quick 10 minute walk to the tram station. Built by Swiss engineers in 1970, the tramway features a 3,700 foot ascent (taking 15 minutes), affording amazing views of the lake below. It's the steepest vertical lift of any four-person gondola system in North America. The enormous glacial moraines (dating to the Pleistocene) that border the 3½ mile long Wallowa Lake are best appreciated from an aerial perspective, and we had clear viewing as we rode to the top.



Mount Howard has an extensive, largely flat trail system on the summit, and the group soon split up to enjoy the subalpine wildflowers and high elevation bird species. It was cool and comfortable, and some of us even needed our fleeces! Steller's Jay, Canada Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Red Crossbill, and Pine Siskin were spotted among the stunted Whitebark Pine, Engelmann Spruce, and Subalpine Fir. Inquisitive Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels were seen at several point along the trail.

Other native plants of interest included mats of creeping Common Juniper and Mountain Gooseberry, along with many colorful wildflowers such as Flax, Sandwort, Penstemon, Scarlet Gilia, Paintbrush, False Dandelion, Aster, Cinquefoil, Arnica, Saxifrage, Stonecrop, Lousewort, Buckwheat, Catchfly, Mountain-heather, and Lupine, among numerous others. Many of these low-growing, high elevation species are aptly described as "belly plants," since you often get your best look at them when lying on your stomach!

The clear skies during our visit to Mount Howard ensured the vistas were breathtaking, with Washington's Palouse Prairie, Idaho's Seven Devils Wilderness Area, and Oregon's Blue Mountains all visible to the north. And turning south, we had stunning, much closer views of the many peaks and ridgelines comprising the Wallowa Mountains and Eagle Cap Wilderness Area, including Sacajawea Peak, at 9,838 feet the highest point in the range. Time went by quickly, and we were soon enjoying lunch at the small, outdoor grill near the summit tram station. Columbian Ground Squirrels had taken up residence here, and although indisputably cute, they were frequently underfoot as they foraged for French fries and stray croutons under the tables.



We left for the lodge not long after lunch, once again allowing for some mid-afternoon down time after our early morning start. A few of us chose to walk a short trail near the state park, and saw some interesting plants, including the unique Rattlesnake Orchid in full bloom. Others relaxed in their rooms. By late afternoon, many of us had again convened on the verandah behind the lodge, while some met up in the lobby for our daily species list review. Dinner was served in the dining room as before, with our tables situated by picture windows looking out towards the lake. We had a full and productive day!

Sat., July 24 Enterprise Wildlife Management Area | Enroute to Walla Walla

Breakfast was a leisurely affair this morning, as the staff weren't quite ready for early guests. But we were checked out and on our way by 9:00 AM. All of us were happy with our stay at Wallowa Lake, yet disappointed to be leaving after only two nights, and agreed that the area definitely merited a more in-depth visit.

Our road trip to Walla Walla, Washington, our next overnight destination, would only take two hours give or take, so we planned to stop first, after a short drive north, at a local wildlife area near Enterprise. With a population of about 2,000, Enterprise is the most populated town in Wallowa County. The Enterprise Wildlife Management Area (EWMA) is adjacent to a state-run fish hatchery, and we spent a couple hours walking some



surprisingly nice hatchery trails here, shaded by Cottonwoods and Willows. We heard Virginia Rail, and Steve located a shy Great Horned Owl that defied all attempts to be photographed.

The large pond that comprised most of the actual EWMA site (just west of the hatchery) had habitat for shorebirds and waders, and we spotted Killdeer, Least Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, and Great Blue Heron. Overhead were Turkey Vultures and a lone Northern Harrier, as well as Bank, Barn, Cliff, and Violet-green Swallows. American Goldfinch, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Eastern Kingbird, Bewick's Wren, Cedar Waxwing, and House Finch were also present in the vegetation surrounding the open water.

By this time it was getting warm and we needed to get moving. The route to Walla Walla would take us across the northern edge of the Blue Mountains, through the Umatilla National Forest, which had been closed 10 days earlier (due to fire concerns) during Bob's scouting trip of the area. Thankfully, this was not the case today, and we were soon over the mountains and descending into the agricultural landscape (mostly wheat, potatoes, wine grapes, and, of course, Walla Walla sweet onions) that characterize the area. The heat we'd anticipated, but not really experienced so far, finally caught up with us here, with temperatures approaching 100° when we arrived.

We continued the tour's focus on historic lodgings when we checked into the Marcus Whitman, an impressive hotel complex in downtown Walla Walla, with upscale dining options and an intimate lounge. Tonight's dinner

was not planned as part of the tour, giving everyone the option to head out and enjoy a meal on their own. Walla Walla is, of course, a well-known destination for enophiles, and some of the group took advantage by visiting tasting rooms or dining at restaurants with local wine lists. The plan was to meet up in the morning for a final day of birding.

Sun., July 25 McNary Wildlife Refuge | Millet & Woodland Ponds | Dodd Rd.

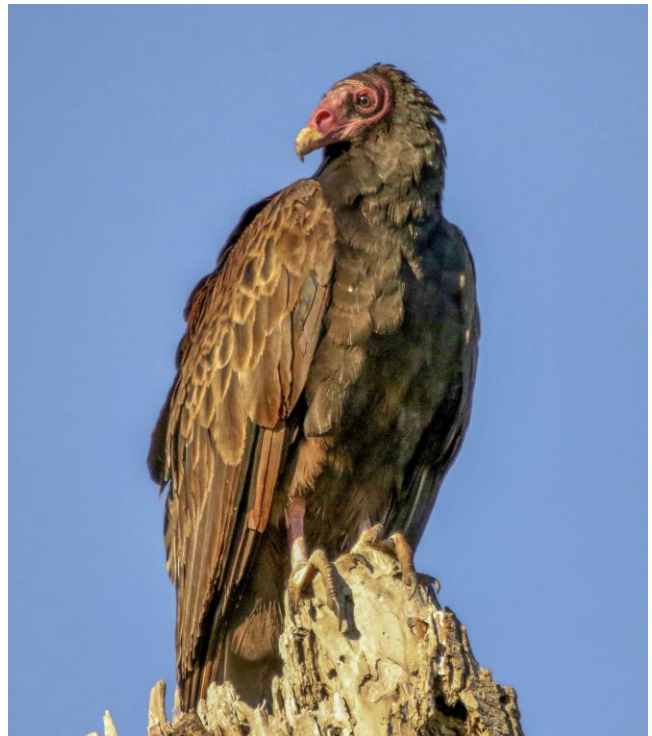
We enjoyed a buffet breakfast at the Marcus Whitman before leaving to join Mike Denny, a friend of Steve's and an accomplished birder, natural historian, and teacher who resides in Walla Walla. We drove west to the eastern fringe of the McNary National Wildlife Refuge, and walked with Mike through dry scrub to the Millet and Woodland Ponds, an eBird hotspot he was very familiar with. The heat of recent weeks had dried the ponds considerably, but we still managed to see a number of species, including Common Nighthawk, Black-billed Magpie, Eastern Kingbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Least Sandpiper, Common Nighthawk, Cliff Swallow, Anna's Hummingbird, and Brown-headed Cowbird. We also had a quick look at a Pygmy Short-horned Lizard before it slipped into a patch of Yellow Star-Thistle.

We then moved on to a stop along Dodd Road, specifically to try and locate a nesting site for Barn Owl. We quickly saw two juvenile birds and at least one adult, using a deep niche in a crumbling cliff face as a nest cavity. The scope provided a good view.

Our last birding site was at the nearby Iowa Dodd Beef/Tyson Ponds eBird hotspot, a rather seedy location punctuated with the bellows of hundreds (if not thousands) of crowded, ill-fated cattle inhabiting a nearby feed lot. In spite of the overwhelming bovine ambiance, and the fact it was getting hot, the stop was worthwhile and the birding was productive. The highlight was a quick look at a Tri-colored Blackbird, associating with a flock of Red-winged, which most of the group unfortunately missed. The pond itself held our first Cinnamon Teal, as well as Black-necked Stilt, Least Sandpiper, several Long-billed Dowitchers, a Wilson's Phalarope, Solitary Sandpiper, and Double-crested Cormorant, along with four swallow species in a mixed flock. We also had a large group (18) of American White Pelicans in formation, high overhead. And there seemed to be an inordinate number of Turkey Vultures—maybe it was the cows!

With temperatures soaring, and lunch time threatening to pass us by (a picnic wasn't feasible today), we followed Mike Denny back to Walla Walla where he introduced us to one of his favorite lunch spots, the El Sombrero Mexican restaurant, only a few blocks from our hotel. Although the place was packed, Mike and the restaurant host had us quickly seated, and we enjoyed tacos, enchiladas, and heaps of delicious guacamole. With lunch decidedly on the late side, we decided not to venture out further today (it was already 104° by this point), and we headed back to the hotel. But not before thanking Mike for a great day of birding and local lore, not to mention the El Sombrero!

This evening we enjoyed a farewell dinner in the Marcus Whitman dining room, and recounted the accomplishments of the tour. The group was a lot of fun and maintained their congeniality throughout the tour. And despite the threat of excessive heat and wildfire smoke, we managed a remarkably comfortable trip, all



things considered, with decent temps and reasonably good air quality (except for perhaps a day in Baker City, when we were mostly high in the mountains, anyway). The wildflowers were exceptional in several areas, and the birding was equally so, with several highlights. And the scenery was, as expected, unparalleled, particularly at Wallowa Lake and in the nearby mountains. It was a successful inaugural tour, to be sure. That said, we are already thinking about adjustments, and will likely plan future trips with an even greater emphasis on the Wallowa region.

Mon., July 26 Departures

After breakfast at the Marcus Whitman, we departed at around 8:00 AM for the Pasco Airport for our return flights. The group was dropped off at about 9:30, and Steve and Bob returned the vans before driving home. Looking forward to coming back!

Photo Credits:

Front Cover (clockwise from upper left): Coiled Lousewort (*Pedicularis contorta*), Robert Meinke (RM); Mountain Huckleberry (*Vaccinium membranaceum*), RM; Wallowa Mountain Tramway and Wallowa Lake, RM; Green False Hellebore (*Veratrum viride*), RM; Trail walking, Anthony Lake, Steve Shunk (SS); Eastern Kingbird, SS; Cliff Swallow, RM; Western Kingbird, RM; Cordilleran Flycatcher brood, RM. **Main Text:** Wild Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*), RM; Eagle Cap Wilderness, RM; Mountain Chickadee, RM; Trail walking, Spring Creek Campground, SS; Pinedrops (*Pterospora andromedea*), RM; Trail walking, Anthony Lake, SS; Red Crossbill, RM; Western Bluebird, RM; American Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria* var. *flavivolvata*), RM; Mountain Huckleberry fruit, RM; Mourning Dove, RM; Tree Swallow, RM; Yellow-breasted Chat, RM; Wallowa Lake Lodge, RM; Steve Shunk pointing to Lewis's Woodpeckers, RM; Western Coneflower (*Rudbeckia occidentalis*), RM; Wallowa Mountains and Eagle Cap Wilderness, TM; Summit Grill and Tram Station, Mount Howard, SS; White Burnet (*Sanguisorba* sp.), RM; Steve Shunk and Dee Gertler, photographing orchids, RM; Killdeer, RM; Turkey Vulture, RM.