

Utah County Birders Newsletter

December 2013

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DECEMBER MEETING:

Thursday, December 12th, 2013 - 7:00 PM

Thursday December 12, 7pm at the Orem Public Library (location could possibly change - stay tuned!) Time to get ready for the Christmas Bird Count! Dennis Shirley will lead a bird quiz, hand out assignments, and help prepare us for the Christmas Bird Count. If you would like to participate in the Provo count, but can't make it to the meeting, please contact Dennis Shirley at colimawarbler@yahoo.com / 801-423-1108 or Bryan Shirley at bt_shirley@hotmail.com / 801-722-9346. The Provo Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, December 21st. The Payson Bird count will be held on January 4th. Birders of all skill levels are invited to participate in both counts!

Meet at 7:00 PM at the Orem Public Library - 58 North State Street, Orem. We meet downstairs.

FIELD TRIPS:

This is Christmas Bird Count Month. Below is info on the 3 Utah County CBC. For info on the rest of the state's CBCs visit <http://www.utahbirds.org/cbc/cbc.html>

21 December, 2013 (Sat): Provo Christmas Bird Count - This year the Provo Christmas Bird Count will be held on Dec 21st. We will go over the areas and details at the Utah County Birders Meeting in December. For more info contact Bryan Shirley - bt_shirley@hotmail.com - 801-722-9346

1 January, 2014 (Wed): Jordan River Christmas Bird Count - Leaders: Jeanne Le Ber and Ray Smith - meet at 7am at Johanna's Kitchen, 9725 South State Street, Sandy (801-566-1762). Assignments will be distributed and groups will start birding at 8am. Team reports and count tally will begin at 6pm at the Sizzler on 9000 S. & State St. To sign up, or for more information, call Jeanne or Ray at (801-532-7384).

4 January, 2014 (Sat): Payson Christmas Bird Count - The Payson count will be on Jan 4. Great way to start the new year! For more info contact Bryan Shirley - bt_shirley@hotmail.com - 801-722-9346

We are actively recruiting people to lead local half-day field trips, any time, any place. If you would like to lead a field trip or if you have any ideas for this year's field trips, please contact Bryan Shirley at - bt_shirley@hotmail.com

November Captain's Log: December 2013

by Keeli Marvel

I can't believe it's been a year already since I accepted the position as president of the UCB! Time flies when you're having fun, I guess. As we head into this busy holiday month I hope everyone has a chance to take some time out from the holiday hustle and bustle and get out and see some birds, and hopefully, to participate in a Christmas Bird Count (or two).

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has been a favorite December article topic for many of the past UCB presidents, but I wanted to follow in their footsteps with a little background review on the CBC for those who have recently joined our ranks. This year will be the 114th annual CBC, making it the longest running citizen science survey in the world. There are over 2300 count circles and roughly 63,000 individual birders in North America and a few locations around the world that will conduct counts between December 14 and January 5th. Each count circle covers a 15 mile diameter circle, and all birds observed inside that circle within a 24 hour count period are recorded as well as any novel species observed during the count week.

The gathered data is submitted to the Audubon Society and, according to their website, "allow researchers to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years." So not only are we out there having a good time chasing down birds, we're also contributing to a massive body of information that is helping scientists better understand and conserve bird populations. Consider it a Christmas gift to the birds in return for all birding enjoyment they provide for us!

The Provo Christmas Bird Count was initiated in 1973, and I believe this year will be its 40th year as an active count circle. This year will be my 7th or 8th year participating in the Provo Christmas Bird Count. Last year I also joined the Payson count for the first time and it was fun finding birds in a new area. I look forward to the CBC every year because of the excitement of the challenge it brings. Some of my most memorable species on the Christmas bird count include a Northern Goshawk at Riverside Country Club, Mountain Bluebirds near the Lindon Marina, A Wilson's Snipe and Common Mergansers on the Provo River, and Lewis' Woodpeckers and Turkeys at the mouth of Santaquin Canyon .

There are currently 30 different count circles held on various dates during the count period in Utah and they all need counters, so if you have a chance this year, find a count circle and join in! There is no need to be an expert birder! Most people will welcome the company and an extra set of eyes, whatever your skill level. If you can't make it out this year, but you live in a count circle, grab your binos and a chair by the window and report your backyard birds to your local count circle!

I hope that you all have a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year! Stay tuned for announcements regarding our 2014 birding challenge!

Happy Holidays!

Keeli Marvel

Bird of the Month

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

by Douglas Mead



NAAH. IT'S ONLY A HOUSE SPARROW

Often regarded by birders in the same derogatory category as European Starlings and Rock Pigeons, *Passer domesticus*, is much more than just common and ubiquitous. Their existence among humans for centuries and their constant presence wherever there are homes and buildings actually contribute to their being overlooked and taken for granted.

Found throughout most of Asia, Europe, North Africa and the Western Hemisphere, *Passer domesticus* is likely more abundant on Earth than humans, and notwithstanding it is frequently resented for its tendency to hijack native birds from nest boxes, this unique little bird is worthy of more respect and understanding.

With the exception of one “drop-by” from a Northern Flicker and one from a pair of Says Phoebes, in the past 3 years House Finches and House Sparrows have been the only partakers at my feeders at my 3rd-story condo in Saratoga Springs. Twenty feet up is nothing special for these guys; house sparrows have been seen feeding on the 80th floor of the Empire State Building and they have been spotted breeding nearly 2,000 feet underground in a mine in Yorkshire, England.

I think the group that calls on me every day live and nest in a Chokecherry tree and some bushes across the parking lot. But they certainly didn't originate there. When Europeans first arrived in the Americas they found none of the species to which they had become accustomed back home: no pigeons, no sparrows, not even any Norway rats. In the late 1800s, a variety of young visionaries, chief among them Nicholas Pike, imagined that what was missing were the birds that live with humans. Pike, about whom little is known, introduced about 16 birds into Brooklyn, N.Y. They rose from his hands and took off and prospered. Every single house sparrow in North America may be descended from those birds including my and your “neighbors.”

To me, this is no ordinary “lbj.” Their common occurrence and easily-identifiable characteristics belie their unique vocalizations and behaviors which space prevents me from detailing. Suffice to say, I have had many opportunities to observe them, and I anxiously await their next visit to my ‘house.’

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Eric Huish - erichuish@gmail.com

Visit - <http://www.utahbirds.org/ucb/BirdofMonth.html> for past ‘Birds of the Month’.

Field Trip Report

Loon UCB Field Trip - 23 November 2013

by Keeli Marvel

Yvonne Carter, Kendall Watkins, and I were the hardy few who met on a cold, windy November morning. After some debate we decided to throw out the original plan of hitting the mountain reservoirs (too cold and windy!) and instead headed for Lake Park and Lee Kay Ponds in SLC. At the Lake Park pond south of Target we got to see the Pacific Loon that had been hanging around for a few days. In the same pond it was keeping company with both Red-breasted and Hooded Mergansers. Couldn't ask for better looks! We combed through several hundred Canada Geese throughout Lake Park, but couldn't come up with any Snow or Greater-white fronted geese.

At Lee Kay, Kendall was quick to pick out several Thayer's and Mew Gulls in the thousands of gulls on the water. Other highlights included one lone American White Pelican, four Greater Yellowlegs, and several duck species including Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, Bufflehead, Gadwall, and Green-winged Teal.

On a whim we stopped to check out the Goldeneye situation on the Jordan River at Redwood Trailhead Park. This location has been a pretty reliable winter source for Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes the past few years. Well, our stop paid off and we got the most exciting surprise – a female Long-Tailed Duck! Kendall picked it out of the crowd of goldeneyes on the river. Other highlights on the Jordan River included at least 60 Common and 15 Barrow's Goldeneye, several Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser.

In spite of our change of plan and some windy weather, we got some great birds!

Backyard Bird of the Month

November 2013

Lyle Bingham - Payson

Steller's Jay - Early this month my neighbor told me about blue birds with black heads. I saw one at my feeder about mid-month and again today while walking the dog. We have both Western Scrub-Jays and Steller's Jays in the Hollow at the mouth of Payson canyon.

Jack Binch - Sandy

Anna's Hummingbird.

Steve Carr - Holladay

Spotted Towhee - Male and female popping up from time to time at the feeders.

Yvonne Carter - Highland

The Juncos are back and Northern Flickers busy in the backyard.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

Two raptors for the month, **Cooper's Hawk** and **Merlin.**

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

American Crow - I stepped out into the front yard on Thanksgiving Day for some fresh air and some peace and quite. Two crows flew over squawking at each other.

Keeli Marvel - American Fork

My backyard bird of the month is **Cedar Waxwing**. They eat the berries off my neighbor's tree. Hoping the Bohemian's show up with the Cedar Waxwings soon!

Milt Moody - Provo

A **Hermit Thrush** showed up in my yard again, as one usually does every year. As you would expect from a hermit, they show up here or there in thicker recesses of the yard but never at the "public" feeders.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

Steller's Jay - I've been trying to make one into it's paler Eastern cousin.

Alton Thygeron - Provo

Surprised to have two **Steller's Jays** visit. I have only seen them in my backyard once before.

Report your favorite backyard bird each month to Eric Huish at 801-360-8777 or erichuish@gmail.com

The Utah County Birders Newsletter is now online only.

We've decided to stop the regular paper mail version of the UCB Newsletter. This will save our club on Printing, Postage and Paper. If you would like an email notice each month when the Newsletter is posted online please send an email to Eric Huish at erichuish@gmail.com or subscribe to the ucynet mailing list. To subscribe to ucynet just send an e-mail to ucynet-subscribe@utahbirds.org

We are willing to print the online version of the newsletter and mail it out to anyone who still wants a paper copy or who doesn't have internet access. If you know of anyone who enjoys the UCB Newsletter but doesn't have internet access please let Eric Huish or Keeli Marvel know and we will make sure they get a copy.