

Utah County Birders Newsletter

January 2014

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JANUARY MEETING:

Thursday, January 9th, 2014 - 7:00 PM

Dinner at Golden Corral. We have reserved a back room and will be presenting the 2014 birding challenge. Pay at the door when you arrive. Golden Corral - 225 W University Pkwy, Orem.

FIELD TRIPS:

11 January, 2014 (Sat): Utah County Winter Waterfowl Field Trip - 8am- early afternoon. Meet at the Sam's Club parking lot in East Bay (Provo) at 8am. We will hit several locations around the south end of the county to see some winter ducks and to start our county list for the 2014 birding challenge.

18 January, 2014 (Sat): Salt Lake County - We are going to start working on the 2014 UCB Challenge and knock off Salt Lake County. We will be chasing gulls and other goodies. Meet at 7:30 at the Orem Center St park and Ride (let Bryan know if you want us to stop at the Pioneer Crossing park and ride too). We will be back in early afternoon.

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

Captain's Log

by Keeli Marvel

I can't believe a year has come and gone already! Where did the time go?! I didn't get out birding nearly as much this year as I'd liked to have, but hopefully I will make up for it in 2014 with the help of our 2014 birding challenge.

A few highlights from 2013:

My best Utah bird of the year was the Parasitic Jaeger spotted in October during the Big Sit at the Provo Airport dike. My second best Utah bird of the year was the Least Tern that showed up at the little pond in the middle of Lehi. In February I was surprised and pleased to see several Bohemian Waxwings mixed in with a flock of Cedar Waxwings in my neighbor's tree – that possibly takes the cake as far as yard birds go.

In July while visiting family in Washington State I got a lifer Red-breasted Sapsucker and Chestnut-backed Chickadees.

In August I got to attend the American Ornithologists' Union conference in Chicago, which was an amazing experience. It was a real treat to spend a week surrounded by the country's best bird biologists and to see all the amazing research that is going on in the field of ornithology. A quick birding trip across state lines to Indiana at the end of the conference produced a few lifers: Henslow's Sparrow, Dickcissel, Sedge Wren, and great looks at an American Bittern.

In September I led a group of Utah County Birders on a long weekend trip to Monterey, CA. Some highlights from that trip for me were lifer Tricolored Blackbirds, Red-shouldered Hawk, Wrentit, and Black Oystercatcher. I also got several lifer pelagic species on our trip with Shearwater Journeys my favorite of which were the Tufted Puffins.

My goals for 2014:

This year our birding challenge is fairly simple in design: to achieve the top tier you must see 29 birds in each of the 29 counties in Utah (in addition to attending a certain number of meetings/field trips). I'm really excited about this challenge, and my goal is to help all who want to achieve any of the levels in the birding challenge this year by getting out, seeing more of our beautiful state, and getting some good birding in! We will be planning some trips around the state this year to help achieve our birding challenge, and I hope to see you all out there! If there are any trips in particular you want to see happen, we can always use volunteer trip leaders and ideas for field trips – just let us know!

I wish you all the best very for the New Year to come! Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel, President – Utah County Birders

Utah County Birders 2014 Birding Challenge

Our challenge is fairly simple by design this year and includes three separate levels of achievement:

Gold: 29 species in each of the 29 counties and attend 9 meetings or field trips

Silver: 29 species in 19 counties and attend 6 meetings or field trips

Bronze: 29 species in 9 counties and attend 3 meetings or field trips

The 29 species seen in each county can be repeats of those seen in other counties. We will be leading trips throughout the year to help birders get out to various counties and see some birds! At the end of 2014, everyone will report their challenge achievements and we will have awards given out at our annual dinner in January 2015

Good luck and happy birding!

Bird of the Month Western Meadowlark

Sturnella neglecta

by Alton Thygerson

[Rerun article from May 2007]

Meadowlarks are members of the blackbird family.

Meadowlark is the state bird of:

Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, and Wyoming

In 1844, John James Audubon commented on the “curious notes” uttered by meadowlarks along the upper Missouri River in today’s North Dakota. He observed that although the species was known to members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, no one had taken the “least notice” of these birds since. Therefore, Audubon named the western meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*.

Field Marks:

- Chunky songbird with a short tail -- shaped like a Starling
- Throat, chest, and belly yellow
- Black “V” across chest
- Back brown and streaked
- White outer tail feathers – shows patch of white on each side when it flies
- Several quick wing flaps alternate with short glides.

Differences between Eastern and Western Meadowlarks:

Westerns prefer drier grasslands and the Eastern chooses more moist locations. Only the Western is found west of the

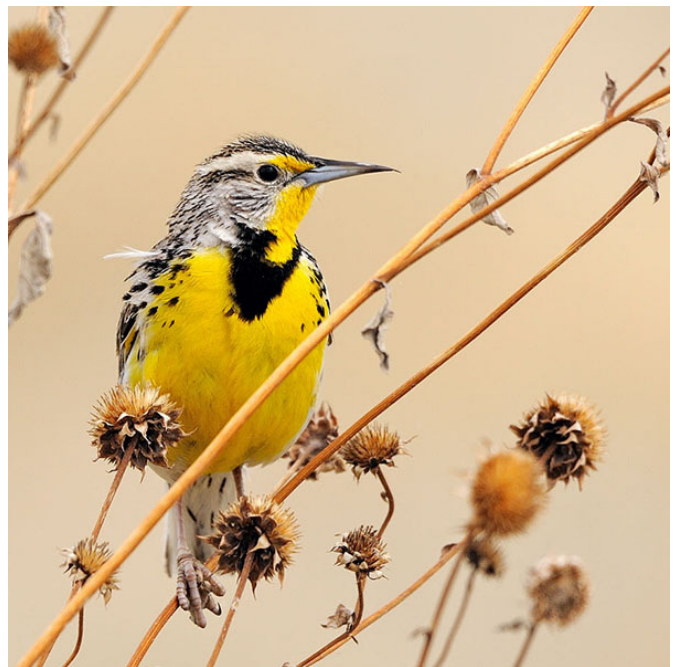


photo by John Crawley

Great Plains. East of the Great Plains, the Eastern predominates although the Western has extended its summer range into the Great Lakes region and the Ohio Valley.

The two species are very difficult to tell apart. A key difference is the extent of yellow on the feathers below the eye. In the Western, the yellow feathers extend behind the lower jaw, while in the Eastern the yellow feathers top on the throat below the lower line of the lower jaw.

The songs of the two are very different. The Eastern has a simple, clear, slurred whistle while the Western's song is complex, garbled and abrupt. Some describe it as a distinctive flute-like yodel. It's a memorable song, produced by the males, performed to attract females, and is a proclamation to other males that the territory is occupied.

Habitat: Grasslands, pasture, and cultivated fields. Found across western and central North America to northern Mexico.

Migration: They are permanent residents throughout much of their range. Northern birds migrate to the southern parts of the range.

Utah County Locations: Fields east of Skipper Bay Trail (north of Utah Lake State Park), county's pasture and agricultural areas which are more readily accessible in the southern part of the county.

Behavior: The male arrives at the breeding ground a couple of weeks before the female. It likes to perch on fences, poles and wires to claim and guard its territory. A male's home range is about six or seven acres. If another male invades his territory, he may get into a fight with the intruder. Fighting meadowlarks lock their feet together and peck at each other.

When the male finds a female that he wants to mate with, he points his bill in the air, puffs out his yellow throat and flaps his wings above his head. If that doesn't get the female's attention, he hops up and down.

Feeding and Diet: Forages almost entirely on ground, gathering grain, seed, and insects. Feeds mostly on insects during the summer, grain in winter and early spring, and weed seeds in the fall.

Reproduction: Males often are simultaneously mated to two or more females. Females build a domed nest that is placed on the ground. An average of five eggs are laid late April-early August. Incubation is 13-14 days; fledging at about 10-12 days. Single brooded, but females reneest if their first effort was unsuccessful.

Conservation Status: Not threatened. Widespread and common, but numbers declining in many areas. Agricultural practices affect breeding, destruction of nests by equipment and trampling of nests by livestock.

Interesting Facts:

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology gives these interesting facts:

- The nest is partially covered by a grass roof. It may be completely open, or it may have a complete roof and an entrance tunnel several feet long.
- Rarely do the Western and Eastern hybridize. Captive breeding experiments found that hybrid meadowlarks were fertile, but produced few eggs that hatched.
- When Western and Easterns nest in the same area, the Western male will defend his territory against all male meadowlarks of either species.
- The Western uses a "chase" display during pair formation, with the male chasing the female. The female usually starts the display, and she determines the speed of the chase. If a male has two mates, both females may participate in the display at one time.

References: Alderfer, J. (2006). *Complete Birds of North America*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.

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

Provo Christmas Bird Count Report - 21 December 2013

by Bryan Shirley

Snow hampered visibility and made for tough birding at times, but still were about average for our count numbers. We had 30 people participate. Thanks again to Milt for hosting the compiling party at his house again this year. Here are the species recorded and a few notes about the count:

1. Canada Goose	30. Northern Goshawk	62. Black-capped Chickadee
2. Cackling Goose (first time recorded on the count)	31. Red-tailed Hawk	63. Red-breasted Nuthatch
3. Wood Duck (new high with 29 reported)	32. Rough-legged Hawk	64. Bewick's Wren
4. Gadwall	33. Golden Eagle	65. Marsh Wren
5. American Wigeon	34. American Kestrel	66. American Dipper
6. Mallard	35. Merlin	67. Golden-crowned Kinglet
7. Cinnamon Teal (4)	36. Peregrin Falcon	68. Ruby-crowned Kinglet
8. Northern Shoveler	37. Virginia Rail	69. Townsend's Solitaire
9. Northern Pintail	38. American Coot	70. Hermit Thrush
10. Green-winged Teal	39. Sandhill Crane (New high with 175 recorded!)	71. American Robin
11. Canvasback	40. Killdeer	72. European Starling
12. Redhead	41. Least Sandpiper	73. American Pipit
13. Ring-necked Duck	42. Wilson's Snipe	74. Cedar Waxwing
14. Lesser Scaup	43. Ring-billed Gull	75. Yellow-rumped Warbler
15. Bufflehead	44. Herring Gull (Count Week)	76. Spotted Towhee
16. Common Goldeneye	45. Rock Pigeon	77. American Tree Sparrow
17. Common Merganser (Count Week)	46. Eurasian Collared Dove (920 – still increasing every year)	78. Song Sparrow
18. Ruddy Duck	47. Mourning Dove	79. Lincoln Sparrow
19. Chukar	48. Barn Owl	80. Harris's Sparrow
20. Ring-necked Pheasant (all time low with only 14)	49. Great Horned Owl	81. White-crowned Sparrow
21. California Quail	50. Western Screech Owl	82. Dark-eyed Junco
22. Pied-billed Grebe	51. Northern Pygmy Owl	83. Red-winged Blackbird
23. American White Pelican (same bird as the last 4 years?)	52. Belted Kingfisher	84. Western Meadowlark
24. Great Blue Heron	53. Downy Woodpecker	85. Yellow-headed Blackbird
25. Black-crowned Night Heron	54. Hairy Woodpecker	86. Brewer's Blackbird
26. Bald Eagle	55. Northern Flicker	87. Great-tailed Grackle
27. Northern Harrier	56. Stellar's Jay	88. Brown-headed Cowbird
28. Sharp-shinned Hawk	57. Western Scrub Jay	89. Cassin's Finch
29. Cooper's Hawk	58. Black-billed Magpie	90. House Finch
	59. American Crow	91. Pine Siskin
	60. Common Raven	92. Lesser Goldfinch
	61. Horned Lark	93. American Goldfinch
		94. House Sparrow

Payson Christmas Bird Count Report - 4 January 2014

by Bryan Shirley

Our count started off with snow in the morning, but it had mostly quit by the time we hit our areas and then it was beautiful for the rest of the day. We had just under 20 participants. This is the 4th year of the count here. Last year we had 82 species, but this year it appears that we will be well below that (I am still waiting on the results from 2 areas). Overall passerine numbers were low - both in species and individuals. It looks like we will end up with about 75 species. We did have 4 species that we have never recorded before:

Blue Jay in Santaquin
Bufflehead
Clark's Nutcracker
Cassin's Finch

Thanks to everybody that participated in the Payson & Provo counts and hope to see you all again next year!

Backyard Bird of the Month

December 2013

Steve Carr - Holladay

California Quail - Had a covey 3 days in a row, which is somewhat unusual.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

Western Screech-Owl - sunning itself at the nest box entrance.

Milt Moody - Provo

I've had a "charm" of **Lesser Goldfinches** coming to my thistle feeder with some breeding plumaged males.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

Seven mature Tom **Turkey** - down from 11 Jakes (juveniles) last year.

Alton Thygerson - Provo

Steller's Jay - An infrequent visitor.

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/mostly.

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 ucenet mailing list. To subscribe to ucenet just send an e-mail to ucenet-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.

