

Utah County Birders Newsletter

May 2014

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MAY MEETING:

Thursday, May 8th, 2014 - 7:00 PM

Evening Field Trip - Powell Lake

In place of our Meeting this month we will go birding! Meet at the Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride at 7:00 pm (west side of I-15 off the Pioneer Crossing/American Fork Main Street exit). We will have a quick meeting and then carpool to Powell Lake for a quick look around for spring migrants.

FIELD TRIPS:

8 May, 2014 (Thur): Powell Lake - Evening Field Trip - **7:00 PM** - Leader Keeli Marvel - In place of our Meeting this month we will go birding! Meet at the Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride at 7:00 pm (west side of I-15 off the Pioneer Crossing/American Fork Main Street exit). We will have a quick meeting and then carpool to Powell Lake for a quick look around for spring migrants.

*The Great Salt Lake Bird Festival is May 15-19th. More information on the festival events and activities schedule can be found at <http://www.greatsaltlakebirdfest.com/>. Keeli will be leading a field trip for the festival on May 16th. Check the festival website for more information.

*Keeli may schedule an impromptu local field trip on May 31st, so stay tuned! We're also planning to do another overnight trip in June to either Grand and San Juan counties, or to pick up Garfield, Wayne, and Piute counties.

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

What do birds eat?

The better question would probably be what don't they eat? Bird diets vary in about every way imaginable and what they eat dictates just about every aspect of their lives. This includes where they live, when they live there, when and where they migrate, even how colorful their plumage is.

Birds can be separated into two categories depending on their diets. Generalist feeders use various means of getting their food or eat a variety of food items. Specialists are birds that use a single method or strategy or eat a single type of prey item. Some birds eat seeds, fruit or plants, some eat insects or crustaceans, some eat other birds, some eat fish or mammals, and some birds (the generalists) can vary their diets by season or food availability to eat a combination of these things. Many bird species or families such as skimmers, toucans, flamingos and crossbills have specially modified bills that have evolved to exploit a very specific type of food item.

Birds have a highly efficient and unique digestive system that includes a storage tank called a crop where food can be stored temporarily, and a super stretchy esophagus that allows many species to swallow large prey items whole. Because food often gets ingested whole, birds are also unique in having a special chamber in their stomach that helps grind up food, often with the use of sandy grit which the birds will actually ingest. This chamber is called the gizzard, and it performs the function that our own molars perform in grinding up the food (because birds don't have molars!)

Many bird species have very specialized diets. Phainopepla (which many of you are familiar with if you've ever visited Lytle) are mistletoe specialists and the majority of their diet consists of mistletoe berries. The huge populations of Eared Grebes that migrate through Utah are saline lake specialists and most of them spend their time here at the Great Salt Lake feeding entirely on brine shrimp and brine flies at the Great Salt Lake. Large migrating populations of Eared Grebes can be found on other saline lakes as well, such as the Salton Sea in California.

Birds in the flamingo family are saline lake specialists as well, and get their pink coloring from alpha and beta carotinoid pigments from their filter-feeding diets. The brighter their plumage, the healthier and more well fed the birds are, and the more desirable they are as mates to other members of their species. In the bird world it's not who you are, but often how much you eat (or can provide for her to eat) that gets the girl.

The Secretarybird of Sub-Saharan Africa is one of my favorite birds because of its unique method of finding and capturing its food. If you'll imagine a raptor similar to a Crested Caracara with the supremely long legs of a crane (they can get up to 4 ft tall!) you might get a good visual picture. Secretarybirds find their food by stalking through fields and stomping on vegetation to drive out prey. Often when prey emerges (snakes and small mammals), they stomp on the prey to disable it enough to gobble it up. Sometimes their prey includes very poisonous snakes like adders and cobras. I would stomp on them too if that's what I had to eat! STOMP STOMP STOMP.

I really could go on forever about the interesting things and ways birds eat, but I'll leave you with one more of my favorite examples. The Hoatzin bird of South America is the only known species of bird that has evolved a digestive system that is more like a cow's than a bird's. Cows have a four part stomach that includes a special pre-stomach called the rumen. Cows process their food multiple times by eating it, fermenting it in their rumen, regurgitating it and chewing it again (you might have heard this referred to as chewing their cud), and then swallowing and completing the digestive process. This allows them to break down and absorb nutrients from the cellulose in plants that is typically hard to digest. Hoatzin birds eat large amounts of leaf matter which requires the same process of foregut (in their case crop) fermentation to break down. They are often observed loafing around chewing their cud while the incredibly long digestion process takes place. You can imagine the smell of all that fermenting plant matter; that explains why they are often referred to as Stink Birds. Yum!

Well this wraps up my brief coverage of what birds eat. Thanks for joining me. Tune in next month (same bird time and same bird place) for more informative (and hopefully entertaining) facts about birds.

Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel

Sources consulted for this article included The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior by David Allen Sibley, my notes from a class at BYU called World Bird Families, and Wikipedia.



Photo by John Crawley

Bird of the Month

Say's Phoebe

Sayornis saya

by Douglas Mead

My First Utah Friends

Coming to Utah four and a half years ago, for what I thought was only a brief time, was, to say the least, a difficult transition. For the previous 6 months I had been living in Fiji and was just beginning to enjoy retirement, the laissez faire mentality of the Fijian people and the constant 85 degree climate. Not to mention the fantastic scenery, isolated beaches and lagoons and phenomenal birding opportunities.

Notwithstanding I was glad I could contribute to my son's educational goals and coincidentally spend more time

close to him, I suddenly found myself at the other end of the climatic, cultural and life-style spectrum in Utah with only a cursory knowledge of the state and no friends. I more or less languished in our Utah County condo until one day in mid-April of 2011 when I heard an unfamiliar bird calling mournfully from just outside my bedroom window. Going out to investigate, I discovered a male Say's Phoebe perched on a sign post who then posed very cooperatively for a photo. Within seconds, I had made my first "friend" in Utah.

A few days later I observed him with his mate, and for the next two months they were just outside my window nest-building and raising their family. Though I never actually saw the nest, I assumed it was somewhere within a large pile of concrete and old lumber in a vacant field behind the condominium because that's where they generally were perched. Each day I would go down stairs and hide near the trees in the back and watch them faithfully going about their prescribed parental duties, and when they came close enough, I would talk with them one-on-one. One or the other of them seemed to follow me out to the garage each day and sit atop the roof and call. I fantasized that they had become as attached to me as I was to them. But, in reality, I'm sure they were just tolerant of my presence. Around the middle of July in 2011 through 2013 they would disappear. Through research into the species I learned that Say's Phoebes typically migrate north from their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America beginning in late March and return south in early fall. Knowing that they can travel as far north as Alaska and the Yukon, I have felt very privileged that this pair had chosen the field behind my condo as their summer residence. Where they went after raising their family is a mystery as they likely didn't return to their winter home until a couple of months later.

As I write this my heart is a bit heavy because the male has been here for the past two weeks. I hear him calling incessantly each morning. To my ear his call is sad and pitiful because the female has not appeared and we both are longing for her return. He perched on my deck railing a couple of days ago—a first in the three years we've know each other—and peered through the window as if seeking my help in locating her. I felt helpless that I could not intervene in his behalf. If she doesn't come back soon I hope—and yet fear-- he will move on and seek another mate. The species is monogamous, but I cannot determine if they stay together during migration or if their travels just coincide. At any rate, I have enjoyed our "friendship" over the past three years, and wish him, and her, god speed.



photo by Douglas Mead

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Mabelle - mabelle13johnson@yahoo.com

Field Trip Report

Tooele County - 5 April 2014

by Bryan Shirley

This morning 3 of us had a good morning in Tooele County. We started off in 5 mile pass with several singing Sagebrush Sparrows and Sage Thrashers. At Fitzgerald WMA we added about 30 species quickly - all of the common waterfowl was there, including about 40 RB Mergansers. There were a few migrant arrivals too like Avocets and Tree Swallows. Our next stop was Clover Springs Campground. Overall it was not very birdy, but we did see a couple of Belted Kingfishers, a small group of Bushtits and a Juniper Titmouse. Rush Lake is packed with several thousand ducks, but most were too far to see well. Our last stop was at the Mill Ponds in Stansbury. Not a lot of ducks there now, but there was a DC Cormorant and a bunch of raucous GT Grackles. Our final list for the morning was 51 species.

Field Trip Report

Box Elder and Cache Counties - 12 April 2014

by Keeli Marvel

3 Utah Birders met last Saturday to bird Box Elder and Cache counties. Our first stop was the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge visitor's center. It wasn't open yet, but we birded the ponds around the visitor center and picked up most of our county species for Box Elder county. A quick drive a couple of miles west toward refuge picked up the rest of our 29 species for the challenge for Box Elder county. Highlights included FOY swallows, FOY Swainson's Hawk, and several Long-billed Curlews in the fields along the road.

From there we drove through Brigham City and up Sardine Canyon. We picked up a few species at the summit, and then through Logan valley and into Logan, to the Logan River Wetlands just west of the Logan Landfill. This place was just full of birds. Highlights here were 10 species of ducks, a FOY Franklin's Gull, FOY Cattle Egrets, and FOY Black-necked Stilts. We also met up with Alton Thygerson at this point to show off the Cattle Egrets we were excited about finding.

On our way back to Utah County, we stopped to pick up a few Davis county species for a couple birders in our group who still needed birds in that county. Odgen bay was pretty messy with limited access, and the wind had picked up at that point, so we didn't quite get 29 species before it was time to head back.

Complete lists of species seen below. Happy Birding!

Bear River MBR--Visitor Center

31 species (+1 other taxa)

Canada Goose 4
Gadwall 4
Mallard 4
Cinnamon Teal 8
Northern Shoveler 6
Green-winged Teal (American) 4
Bufflehead 2
Ring-necked Pheasant 1
Pied-billed Grebe 1
Double-crested Cormorant 3
American White Pelican 4
Great Blue Heron 1
White-faced Ibis 30
Swainson's Hawk 1
American Coot 10
Sandhill Crane 2
American Avocet 6
Killdeer 4
Long-billed Curlew 3
gull sp. 100
American Kestrel 1
Black-billed Magpie 3
Common Raven 4
Tree Swallow 30
Cliff Swallow 20
American Robin 5

European Starling 30
Song Sparrow 3
Red-winged Blackbird 20
Western Meadowlark 10
Yellow-headed Blackbird 20
House Sparrow 20

Dry Lake

6 species
Mallard 10
Cinnamon Teal 4
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1
Killdeer 2
Tree Swallow 2
Mountain Bluebird 1

Hwy 89 into Logan

10 species
Canada Goose 2
Ring-necked Pheasant 1
Red-tailed Hawk 1
California Gull 20
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 10
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2
Black-billed Magpie 4
Common Raven 5
American Robin 3
European Starling 10

Sue's Pond--Logan River Wetlands and Shorebird Playa

24 species (+1 other taxa)

Gadwall 10
Mallard 2
Cinnamon Teal 10
Northern Shoveler 2
Green-winged Teal (American) 2
Canvasback 1
Redhead 6
Ring-necked Duck 3
Bufflehead 2
Ruddy Duck 2
Pied-billed Grebe 1
Double-crested Cormorant 3
American White Pelican 3
Great Blue Heron 1
Cattle Egret 2
Turkey Vulture 1
Buteo sp. 1
American Coot 10
Black-necked Stilt 3
American Avocet 4
Franklin's Gull 1
California Gull 200
Tree Swallow 1
Red-winged Blackbird 1
Yellow-headed Blackbird 20

Field Trip Report

Morgan and Summit Counties - 21 April 2014

by Bryan Shirley

Just finished up our field trip to Morgan and Summit Counties. The Sage Grouse put on a pretty good show this morning. I counted at least 29 males displaying and 1 female as well. They were split into 2 groups - one right in and along the road and the other out in the field. There Vesper Sparrows singing at the grouse lek as well. East Canyon had a good number of Common Loons and a few Western and Common Grebes. There was a male Wood Duck right where the creek comes into East Canyon. Summit County didn't produce anything uncommon, but Echo had a ton of Common Loons and a good variety of waterfowl and other water birds near the inlet. We ended up with 57 species (plus a couple more I didn't see). Here is our list for the day:

Canada Goose	Turkey Vulture	Barn Swallow
Gadwall	Osprey	Nor Rough-winged Swallow
Mallard	Red-tailed Hawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-winged Teal (Echo)	Golden Eagle	Mountain Bluebird
Cinnamon Teal	American Kestrel	Am Robin
Northern Shoveler	American Coot	Eur Starling
Green-winged Teal	Sandhill Crane	Spotted Towhee
Redhead	Killdeer	Vesper Sparrow
Ring-necked Duck	Willet (FOY - Echo)	Song Sparrow
Lesser Scaup	Ring-billed Gull	Fox Sparrow (Ent to East Canyon)
Common Goldeneye	CA Gull	Resort in willows)
Common Merganser	Caspian Tern	White-cr Sparrow
Greater Sage Grouse	Rock Pigeon	Red-winged Blackbird
Common Loon	Morning Dove	Western Meadowlark
Western Grebe	Eur Collared Dove	Brewer's Blackbird
Clark's Grebe	Great Horned Owl	Cassin's Finch
Am White Pelican	Northern Flicker	House Finch
DC Cormorant	Black-billed Magpie	American Goldfinch
Great Blue Heron	Common Raven	
White-faced Ibis	Tree Swallow	

Backyard Bird of the Month

April 2014

Jack Binch - Sandy

Best bird last month was a male **Lazuli Bunting**.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

White-throated Sparrow - Saw it a few times under the feeders but mostly just heard it singing all the time that week.

Keeli Marvel - Saratoga Springs

White-crowned Sparrow - at feeder.

Milt Moody - Provo

Black-headed Grosbeak - a male visited my yard a couple of times and I've heard it singing.

Eric Peterson - American Fork

Great Horned Owl - It showed up on April 26. It sat in the tree for about 45 minutes until a pesky scrub-jay chased it off.

Bruce Robinson - West Jordan

Broad-tailed Hummingbird - First of the year, always welcome!!

Alton Thygerson - Provo

California Quail - 3 adult pairs coming into the yards feeder's the same time.



Great Horned Owl in Eric Peterson's backyard.
Photo by Eric Peterson

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