

Utah County Birders Newsletter

October 2015



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OCTOBER MEETING:

Thursday, October 8th, 2015 - 7:00 pm

UCB Monthly Meeting - **Jeff Cooper** will give a presentation on why he blogs. Jeff is a skilled photographer and a great bird blogger.

Meet at 7:00 pm at the Monte L. Bean Museum. 645 East 1430 North, Provo, UT <http://mlbean.byu.edu/>

FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday, October 10th, 2015. Provo Airport Dike Big Sit - 6:00 am to Sunset. - We will sit out at the Southwest Corner of the Provo Airport Dike and watch birds from 6:00 am to sunset. Keeli Marvel will lead the sit. Come join us anytime and stay as long as you like. This will be our 14th year participating in the big sit. <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit.php> Provo Airport Dike Map - <http://www.utahbirds.org/counties/utahco/provoairport.html>

Saturday, October 17th. Museum of Natural History - 9am-noon. We will be going to the Museum of Natural History in Salt Lake to see the Birds of Paradise exhibit and tour the rest of the museum. Meet at the American Fork Main Street park and ride on the northwest side of the freeway on Pioneer Crossing. We will carpool up to the museum. If anyone feels like eating lunch afterwards we could eat at the museum cafe. The entry fee for the museum is \$13 for adults, \$11 for seniors, and if we get a large enough group we can get the group rate which is \$2 cheaper.

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

Utah County Birders Captain's Log: October 2015

by Keeli Marvel

I promised a report on birding in South Dakota last month, and here it is. Unfortunately, the birding was challenging and the opportunities were less than I'd hoped, as they often are when not traveling specific for the purpose of birding. My parents and husband and I took off for the Black Hills area of South Dakota last Thursday. Rapid City, SD is right on the northeastern edge of the Black Hills. It's not a huge city, and less than a mile north of our hotel the roads quickly become graded gravel surrounded by rolling prairie.

On Friday morning I got up and headed out to do a little birding before everyone else was up. I headed north and west of Rapid City to a hot spot that had popped up on Ebird – Sevey Lake on Elk Creek Road. When I finally found it, it was more of a puddle than a lake. Birding was slow, but I saw a Prairie Falcon swoop at and miss a Lark Sparrow, and then chase unsuccessfully after some Gadwall that were in the pond. I also saw several Vesper Sparrows which I tried unsuccessfully to turn into Lark Buntings. Before the Prairie Falcon flushed all the birds from the pond I saw a Lesser Yellowlegs, a sandpiper I didn't get to ID before it flew, a handful of Killdeer, and a Sora sneaking through some reeds along the side of the road.

Later that day we headed to Keystone, which is just outside Mt. Rushmore. We rode a historic train from Keystone to Hill City, and along the ride saw tons of wild turkeys, a few turkey vultures, and a couple of raptors that were too far away for me to ID. The lighting ceremony at Mt. Rushmore that we attended that evening was pretty cool. I highly recommend sticking around in the evening for it if anyone is headed that way. They played a video telling the stories of the presidents' accomplishments that inspired Borglum, the sculptor of Mt. Rushmore to make them his subject. After the video, the audience was invited to stand and sing the national anthem while they lit up the heads on Mt. Rushmore, and then all of the veterans and current military service members were invited to the stage to help retire the flag.

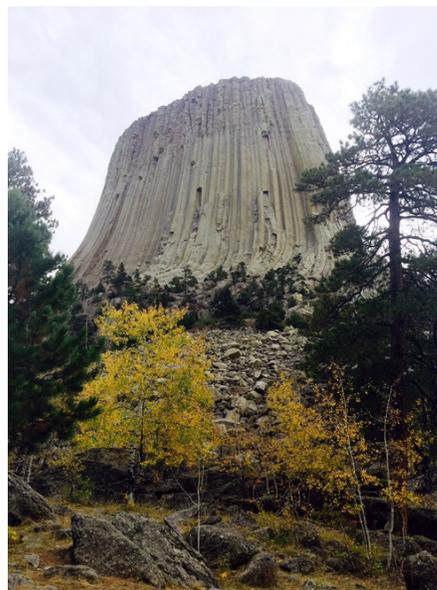
Saturday morning I headed out early again before everyone else was up for the day. This time I drove north from my hotel a couple miles until there was more prairie than homes. I was really hoping to see a Lark Bunting, and I tried really hard to turn a few Vesper Sparrows into one, but without any luck. I did, however, pick up a pair of lifer Clay-colored Sparrows. I also saw a few other birds out there including White-crowned Sparrows, Brewer's Blackbirds, and a couple of Kestrels. Later that morning we headed south to Wind Cave National Park. The cave itself is a little less impressive in terms of diversity of cave formations compared to others I've been to (Timpanogos Cave Included), but it was pretty cool to learn how much of the cave system they think has yet to be discovered (hundreds of miles). By the time we were finished with the tour, it was lunch time so we stopped at a picnic area just down the road from the visitor center. There I picked up some American Robins, a Hairy Woodpecker, a Spotted Towhee, and a migrating Tennessee Warbler, my second and only other lifer for the trip. From there we headed east to our second National Park for the day: Badlands National Park.

I didn't see any notable birds in Badlands, but there was a herd of Bighorn Sheep not far from the north entrance to the park grazing right off the side of the road. It was recommended to me that we visit Badlands either early or late in the day when the light was favorable, and I'm glad we took that recommendation. The colors were amazing and the views were incredible with the sun setting and the almost full moon rising over the formations in the park. Badlands National Park is definitely worth the visit if you like unique scenery.

Sunday was a driving day, and I spent most of it in the car traveling to North Dakota and back. On the way, however, we



Badlands National Park
photo by Keeli Marvel



Devil's Tower National Monument
photo by Keeli Marvel



Haystacks in South Dakota
photo by Keeli Marvel

stopped for a few minutes outside Sturgis at a little lake called Bear Butte Reservoir/State Park. I birded a brushy area along the north side of the lake and saw tons of sparrows including more White-crowned, Clay-colored, and Vesper Sparrows. I picked up a Yellow-breasted Chat and a small flock of Red-winged Blackbirds along the lake shore. On the lake there were Canada Geese and American Coots, and I saw at least two Franklin's Gulls cruising around in the air. Off in the distance I could hear a Blue Jay calling.

On the rest of the drive up I saw several hawks including Red-tailed Hawks, a couple of Ferruginous Hawks, and one Golden Eagle near some rocky hills outside one of the small one-horse towns we drove through. It's weird to drive across the prairie in that part of the country. I decided while driving through Skull Valley yesterday that most of our valleys here in Utah are bordered by mountains, and having them there makes me feel secure, like having giant walls around me. The prairie feels infinite in some places, like if you go too far, you'll fall right off the edge of the earth. At the same time, I really enjoyed the green rolling hills, with the grass waving in the wind. It was refreshing to see so much open space that looked green and productive, as opposed to our stark desert brush land and salt flats. I don't think I've ever seen as many White-tailed Deer or Pronghorn as we saw driving across Wyoming and between North and South Dakota.

On the drive home on Monday we stopped briefly at Devil's Tower in Wyoming. Devil's Tower is a National Monument that is a remnant of volcanic upwelling that was left behind when the surrounding land eroded away. It's a pretty neat place, and definitely worth a stop. A storm was rolling through while we were there, and it was raining lightly, but there were Townsend's Solitaires and Black-capped Chickadees calling and singing along the trail at the base of the tower.

We got home Monday night exhausted from all the driving, but having seen 2 lifers, visited 2 National Parks and 2 National Monuments, and having made some good memories.

Happy Autumn Equinox and Happy Birding!
Keeli Marvel

Bird of the Month

Green Heron

Butorides virescens
by Steve Carr

[Rerun article from June 2011]

The Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) is the smallest member of the heron family (Ardeidae) in North America, except for the tiny Least Bittern. It measures 18 inches long when fully stretched out, which it almost never is except when diving for prey. When usually observed, its neck is tightly pulled into the shoulders giving it a somewhat scrunched-up look, so that it is more nearly 13-14 inches long. Wingspan is 26 inches.

The greenish coloration is almost more of a blue-green on the wings, crown, and long filamentous plumes on the back. The face, nape, throat, and chest are a deep chocolate brown and the legs and feet are yellow. In its usual darkened habitat the bird appears almost black.

The habitat usually consists of the edges of swamps and marshes, among cattails, bulrushes, and other marsh reeds, and along slowly moving streams in darkened forests. They usually are seen alone or with one or two others, perched quietly on a stream bank or submerged log intently watching for errant fish or frogs or invertebrate animals to swim by. On the other hand, I have seen them in a dry field full of old sunflower stalks, hundreds of yards from the nearest water, feeding on crickets and other grasshopper-like insects. If disturbed, they may act like bitterns in freezing next to some vegetation, or they may suddenly take flight with a loud squawk. When flying, they take on the appearance of a crow – fairly rapid, deep wingbeats, compared to the larger herons and egrets. They also readily fly in and land on trees and bushes up to 15-20 feet tall. They nest in a variety of locations, including willow thickets, open marsh, and wooded areas from 5 to 35 feet high.



photo of a full-sized wood carving of a Green Heron, carved by Steve Carr

Three to five pale greenish-blue eggs are laid and both parents do the incubating for about 20-21 days. Chicks are altricial and begin to fly at three weeks.

Green Herons are among very few North American birds known to use tools to forage. It has been observed to drop a feather, small leaf, or a tiny twig onto the water, so that when a fish swims up to investigate this possible food source for itself, it becomes prey for the heron.

In the 1940's, the bird was known as Anthony's Green Heron or Eastern Green Heron, as well as Green-backed Heron. In fact, Volume 1 of Handbook of the Birds of the World, published in 1992, p. 417, still lists it as Green-backed Heron, where it is still lumped with what is now known as the Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*). Then, in about 1995, after being split from the Green Heron, the Striated Heron is the common small heron of the eastern hemisphere and South America.

Range maps for this species are a little disconcerting. They all show the large breeding range east of the Rocky Mountains up to southern Ontario and barely into Manitoba. Also shown is the western range up the west of the Cascade Mountains to Vancouver, BC. Permanent range includes the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas and down into Mexico, all of Central America, and the Caribbean area. Most of California and the Baja Peninsula are also covered. One map shows the permanent range up along the entire Atlantic seaboard, another shows nothing there. One map shows several breeding areas in New Mexico, Arizona, and southern Utah. Another shows almost nothing in Arizona and New Mexico, but a permanent range up along the Colorado River into the St. George, Utah, area. There are at least two to three pairs in the St. George valley around several golf courses, the Tonaquint Nature Center, and along the Virgin River. According to the Utah Bird Checklist, the Green Heron has been seen in the following 13 counties: Beaver, Davis, Emery, Grand, Juab, Millard, Morgan, Rich, Salt Lake, Uintah, Utah, Washington, and Wayne. I have personally seen them in Washington, Davis, and Salt Lake counties. Surprisingly, the bird has been seen in such far away places as the Azores Islands off Africa, Great Britain, Greenland, and Hawaii.

Bird Guide, Part 1, Water and Game Birds, and Birds of Prey, Chester A. Reed, Worcester, Mass., 1908.

Birds of North America, A Golden Field Guide, Chandler Robbins, et al., Golden Press, 1966.

Complete Birds of North America, National Geographic Society, Washington, DC, 2006, p.119. A Field Guide to the Birds (Eastern and Western editions), Roger Tory Peterson, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1934, 1941.

Field Guide to the Birds of North America, National Geographic Society, Washington, DC, 1999. Handbook of the Birds of the World, Lynx Edicions 1992, Volume 1, pp. 417-418.

Lives of North American Birds, Kenn Kaufman, Roger Tory Peterson Institute, 1996, p. 58.

The Sibley Guide to Birds, Sibley, David A., National Audubon Society, 2000. (Also available in the Sibley Guide to Western Birds.)

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

Field Trip Report

River Lane - September 12, 2015

by Mabelle Johnson

We met early on Saturday Sept 12 to bird River Lane. There wasn't a lot of activity in the fields as we headed West, just some Sandhill Cranes and White-faced Ibis's, and Canada Geese flying overhead. We did stop to check out a dark raptor in a big tree. We thought it was a Peregrine Falcon, but that was kinda weird. Turns out we were right. A Peregrine Falcon in a big tree in the fields heading West to River Lane. Cool. Once we turned on to River Lane we saw more bird activity. There were several American Kestrels chasing each other around, including one that was abnormally dark. We thought it might possibly be a Merlin, but it was just a Kestrel, probably looked dark due to light or something. A Belted Kingfisher did a rattling fly-by on his way to the pond behind the house on the West side and there was a family of Ring-necked Pheasants along the fence line.

Our first stop on the dirt road was pretty quiet. We went down a trail heading North, but it was pretty quiet. Back on the main dirt road walked down the road to a spot that was teeming with flitting little birds. There were so many, we were calling out birds right and left! We had warblers, gnatcatchers, goldfinches and sparrows in the trees and Common

Nighthawks overhead as well as perched on branches. Once we had our fill at that spot we went on out to the beach and got good looks at several American Avocets, Gulls, Terns and 5 Sanderlings.

Here is the complete list for River Lane and Sandy Beach:

Sandhill Crane	Northern Flicker
White-faced Ibis	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-billed Magpie	Orange-crowned Warbler
American Kestrel	Virginia's Warbler
Swainson's Hawk	Yellow Warbler
Canada Geese	Chipping Sparrow
Killdeer	Song Sparrow
Peregrine Falcon	White-crowned Sparrow
House Finch	Black-capped Chickadee
House Sparrow	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Western Meadowlark	American Goldfinch
American Robin	Gray Catbird
Belted Kingfisher	Mourning Dove
Red-winged Blackbird	Eurasian-collared Dove
Barn Swallow	Caspian Tern
Bank Swallow	American Avocet
Tree Swallow	Ring-billed Gull
Ring-necked Pheasant	California Gull
Common Night Hawk	Franklin's Gull
Northern Harrier	Sanderling
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Red-tailed Hawk
	Turkey Vulture

Field Trip Report

Antelope Island - September 26, 2015

by Mabelle Johnson

On Sept 26 a few of us went to Antelope Island. The water has receded dramatically. It was practically dry to the first bridge. We had decided that we were going straight to the ranch first, no stopping on the Causeway until we were on our way out. A Chestnut-sided warbler had been reported at the ranch for a few days as well as a few other great birds, but we didn't see any of them, we couldn't find the Great-horned Owl that resides in the grove either. It was a bit disappointing, but hey, a bad day birding is still better than a good day (fill in the blank with your choice, my choice is 'at work').

Here is a complete list of Antelope Island:

Meadowlark	Eurasian Collared Dove	Franklin's Gull
Barn Swallow	Great-Horned Owl (at the Bison Corrals)	Gadwall
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Mourning Dove	American Coot
Song Sparrow	Rock Wren	Mallard
Yellow-rumped Warbler	American Coot	Clark's Grebe
White-crowned Sparrow	American Avocet	Killdeer
Orange-crowned Warbler	Long-billed Curlew	Western Grebe
Red-naped Sapsucker	Willet	Ruddy Duck
Wilson's Warbler	Northern Shoveler	American Wigeon
Hermit Thrush	California Gull	Northern Shoveler
Dark-eyed Junco	Common Raven	Barn Swallow
Spotted Towhee	Franklin's Gull	Double-crested Cormorant
Cedar Waxwing		Ring-necked Pheasant
Killdeer	We also went to Farmington Bay:	Great-blue Heron
Ring-necked Pheasant	White-faced Ibis	Eared Grebe
Horned Lark	Pied-billed Grebe	Greater Yellowlegs
Sage Thrasher	Canada Geese	Red-winged Blackbird
Black-billed Magpie	American Kestrel	Lesser Yellowlegs
	Snowy Egret	Least Sandpiper
		Black-crowned Night Heron

Backyard Bird of the Month

September 2015

Jack Binch - Sandy

On the 29th I was trying to ID a hummingbird and a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** landed on my platform feeder. Only the third one I have seen at home.

Yvonne Carter - Highland

First time in my yard! a **Mountain Chickadee** and still had until the other day a few hummingbirds, still a lot of Western Scrub Jays.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

I heard a **Barn Owl** screaming from the darkness while talking to a neighbor on my front porch the other night. That was a nice birding moment that, like most, went completely unnoticed by my friend who did not have an ear tuned to the sounds of our birds.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

Orange-crowned Warblers - Two together hung out in the yard for a few day. One was missing its tail.

Milt Moody - Provo

Some mountain birds are starting to arrive in my Provo yard. A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** came to my bird bath for a drink and a **Pine Siskin** came to my thistle feeder.

Leena Rogers - Provo

We had a surprise visit from a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. It took a quick dip in our shady birdbath. What a treat!

Dennis Shirley - Shemya Island, Alaska

Since my big backyard till the 21st of Sept. was still Shemya Island, my best bird was a **MARSH SANDPIPER**, a Code #5 ABA bird. It was a new record for the island and only the 4th or 5th time for North America. It's still good to be back!!

Alton Thygerson - Provo

Band-tailed Pigeons - Infrequent, unpredictable visitors, sometimes accompanying Eurasian Collared-Doves.

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.

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.