

# Utah County Birders Newsletter

April 2016



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## APRIL MEETING:

**Thursday, April 14th, 2016 - 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm.**

For this month's meeting, Dennis Shirley has volunteered to lead an evening field trip around the county to find 10 target species. Meet at the Provo East Bay Sam's Club at 6pm.

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## FIELD TRIPS:

**Thursday, April 14, 2016:** Evening Field Trip/Meeting. For this month's meeting, Dennis Shirley has volunteered to lead an evening field trip around the county to find 10 target species. Meet at the Provo East Bay Sam's Club at 6pm.

**Saturday, April 16, 2016:** 7am-early afternoon. **Tooele county and the Tintic Mountains.** Meet in the southwest corner (near the Chase bank) of the Saratoga springs Walmart on Redwood Road in Saratoga Springs. We will visit some west Utah county and Tooele county hotspots including Ophir and the Tintic Mountains.

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](mailto:bt_shirley@hotmail.com)

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## Captain's Log: April 2016

by Keeli Marvel

I spent last week down in St. George for the Utah Chapter of the Wildlife Society Meetings. The meetings are a chance for all the wildlife professionals, educators, and students to get together, present current research and management projects that are being conducted, hold coordination meetings, and share information. The first morning of the meetings I went out early to do some birding with a couple of biologists at Tonaquint Park. It was cold and windy, but the park was alive with birds, and we picked up a Costa's Hummingbird, several Great Egrets on the pond, a Black Phoebe, and a few other usual species like Abert's Towhee. I spent the rest of the week stuck in meetings, but planned to go out again when my sister came down that weekend.

On Saturday morning we headed out early for what turned out to be a seriously EPIC day of birding. There are few days in our lives when the stars fall in line, the gods smile down on us, and we find all of our target birds. Saturday was one of those days.

The weather had been sunny, but blustery for the few previous days as the front that dumped snow in the northern part of the state brought windy conditions for southern Utah. Saturday dawned windy and a little cool as well, but determined to get our birds, we headed out for Utah Hill to find our first target bird: the Black-chinned Sparrow. We parked at the turnoff and walked up the hill, and were rewarded with the faint but recognizable bouncy-ball call of a Black-chinned Sparrow. Check!

Our next goal was to see the Common Black Hawks at Gunlock Reservoir, however, we got sidetracked on the way and stopped at a little side canyon just south of the reservoir. I wandered across the road to take in the view of the valley and was rewarded with a Canyon Wren



**Gunlock Reservoir**  
photo by Keeli Marvel



**Taking a picture of a Canyon Wren.**  
photo by Keeli Marvel

calling its echoing call across the valley. Even better, it was calling from a ledge just off and below the road so my sister got great views for her lifer Canyon Wren. Back on the east side of the road we wandered up the little slot canyon a couple hundred feet and were rewarded with a Rock Wren, a Costa's Hummingbird, a pair of Say's Phoebes, and some White-crowned Sparrows.

We pulled in briefly to the Gunlock State Park entrance to check out some Turkey Vultures and when I rolled my window down we could hear a Cactus Wren calling from the top of a Cholla. That made three wren species within a 20 minute window! The gods were smiling down on us indeed. Up past the north end of the reservoir, we pulled a little ways up the dirt road that forks to the left and immediately spotted a bunch of birds to the west circling and mobbing. We pulled over and discovered a whole bunch of Common Ravens chasing after one of the nesting pair of Common Black Hawk. We also spotted a smaller, lighter bird, but I was never able to get a fix on it. John Crawley-a fellow Utah County Birder who also happened to be birding the area-pulled up beside us to let us know the other black hawk was perched on the south end of the grove of trees. Back out along the main road we pulled into the dirt area next to the road and got brief looks before that bird flew deeper into the trees. Now I've tried to find these birds before, but I've never managed to be in the right place at the right time. So this was a lifer for me (a Utah lifer and a LIFER lifer as well), which is an accomplishment worth doing a little dance to celebrate. At that point we were 5 for 5 and we still felt like we had the whole day ahead of us. It was pure magic!

A quick scope from a pull off on the way back past Gunlock produced a smattering of duck species on the lake and some gulls and Long-billed Curlew along the east shoreline. From there we headed into St. George for a wander around the Red Cliffs reserve for a few minutes and to grab some lunch.

After lunch, we drove back out through Santa Clara to the Anasazi Trailhead for a quick hike up to the petroglyphs where we picked up a Black-throated Sparrow (another target species nabbed), a Sage Thrasher, and a flock of Gambel's Quail. After our nice hike we drove back into St. George and found the White-winged Dove on the corner of 100 west and 500 north right on top of the tree with the broken off top exactly where Carol reported it! If you go looking for it and it isn't immediately obvious, I would listen for their calls, as they sound fairly different than the Eurasian collared doves we also saw around that neighborhood.

A quick stop at Spring Park and Seegmiller Marsh produced our only dip of the day. No Crissal Thrashers were to be had. But after such a successful day we could hardly complain. Instead, we saw a pair of Black Phoebes at the pond, which was almost a consolation prize. The pond was full to the brim and water was flowing across the trail on the northeast corner of the pond and filling up all the low areas between the pond and the marsh, so if you head over there, be aware that you might not be able to walk around the north side.

As a last ditch effort at the end of the day, we took the long way back to Hurricane around the east end of Sand Hollow Reservoir and picked up our last target species of the trip – a Greater Roadrunner basking in the glory of the setting sun on the desert sand. We were doing our roadrunner dance. It was indeed an epic day of epic target bird getting. I've never had as good of luck as we did that day, and I probably won't ever again.

Happy Birding!  
Keeli Marvel

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## Bird of the Month

### Sharp-tailed Grouse

*Tympanuchus phasianellus*  
by Suzi Holt

On March 18th, Amanda, Joellen, and I, got up early and left the house at 3:30 am to head for Layton. We met Billy Fenimore our awesome tour guide and owner of “Wild About Birds” at 5:00 am. We picked up Dickson Smith an awesome photographer in Brigham city and headed North to the Utah/Idaho border.

We arrived at the lek a little before 6:00 am. It was a cold, 17° and the moon was trying to peek out through a mostly cloudy sky. Upon arrival, Billy and Amanda saw two grouse on the lek. It was still dark so we sat in the almost silence and patiently waited.

As the minutes ticked by the grouse began to vocalize in their odd hoots and started rattling their tails. We made some amateur recordings of this phenomenon in the dark.

As time rolled by, sounds of what Billy called a “wind up toy” joined the hoots. Then began the stomping of feet. This is something you have to experience because one cannot fully explain this thrilling sound. By 6:15 am you could see more displaying males as dawn was breaking. But there still wasn't enough light to get a decent photo. So we quietly enjoyed the show. By 6:30 am they really got going. Billy counted 17 males on the lek.

What a sight! On the left a dancing duo was beginning, on the right another. Out the window, no less than 1015 feet, another dance began. But wait, there are two out the front windshield. I sat there in surround sound heaven with a smile from ear to ear trying to avoid screaming out, because if you have gone birding with me, you know that I can get pretty excited and scare off any birds within half a mile. But I controlled my excitement, enthralled in the dancing of these sharp-tailed grouse or “wind up toys” just outside the truck window. By 7:30 am with the light and potential raptors flying about looking for a morning snack, the males fly off the lek to hide among the sagebrush and await another showdown at dawn.

The Sharp-tailed Grouse according to the Cornell lab of Ornithology-All about Birds:

A chicken-like bird of open prairies and parklands, the Sharp-tailed Grouse uses a wider variety of habitats than its close relatives the prairie-chickens.

#### Cool Facts

- Male Sharp-tailed Grouse display to attract females on communal dancing grounds, called leks. The male provides no parental care. A female may visit a lek up to 10 or more times, and she may sample two different leks.

These Sharp-tailed grouse are often found on upper grassland areas. They forage for small shoots of grass as they dance about displaying for the females. The females choose a suitable male according to his “dancing skills”. These females make their nests on the ground under the brush, well hidden from the Ravens. Even if you are not a morning riser, make sure to wake up and take this opportunity. It is well worth the missed ZZZZZZ's.



**Sharp-Tailed Grouse**  
photo by Suzi Holt



**Sharp-tailed Grouse**  
photo by Suzi Holt

## Backyard Bird of the Month

March 2016

Jack Binch - Sandy

Aw yes, I have one for last month. First ever at home (that I have seen) **Brown Creeper**.

Yvonne Carter - Highland

More than usual numbers of **Lesser Goldfinches** among the usual. plus a Hairy Woodpecker, Western Scrub Jays, Pine Siskins.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

It was like a chance meeting with an old friend when I heard the dawn song of a **Say's Phoebe** while working in the yard early one morning at the beginning of March.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

**Cassin's Finch** - The males are very bright this time of year.

Milt Moody - Provo

Saw a **Townsend's Solitaire** sipping at my bird bath -- probably a break from a tree top perch somewhere.

Bruce Robinson - West Jordan

**Long-billed Curlew**, OK it flew overhead. 2nd favorite was a brown creeper, IN my yard

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

**Sandhill Crane** - Had a pair circling high over house on 15 March. Could only hear at first, but later saw way up.

Kay Stone - Lehi

We had a **Spotted Towhee** in our yard in March.

Alton Thygerson - Provo

**Brown Creeper** - Slowly making its way up a large Silver Maple tree.

Report your favorite backyard bird each month to Eric Huish at 801-360-8777 or [erichuish@gmail.com](mailto:erichuish@gmail.com)



**Brown Creeper in Jack Binch's yard.**  
photo by Jack Binch

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### 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](mailto: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.