

Utah County Birders Newsletter

February 2018

Contents

[February Meeting](#)
[Upcoming Field Trips](#)
[Captain's Log](#)
[Bird of the Month](#)
[Field Trip Report](#)



FEBRUARY MEETING

Thursday, February 8th, 2018 Monte L. Bean Museum

Birding by Ear. Jim Biser gave a presentation on tricks and tips for learning bird calls.

FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday, Feb. 10th, 2018: Alta Feeders

The group met at the SW corner of Pioneer Crossing park/ride in American Fork at 7:30 am. The plan was to get those rosy finches!

Saturday, Feb. 24, 2018: Delta Snow Goose Festival.

Meet at 7:30 am at the NE corner of Payson Walmart. Dress warm and bring a lunch. It is a sight worth seeing!

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 Suzi Holt at - suzerqholt@gmail.com

Utah County Birders Captain's Log: February 2018

by Keeli Marvel

Almost four weeks into our challenge! I don't know about you, but it's driving me crazy that I have to work and that I can't just go chase all these rarities we've got right now. Checking in – how are you guys doing on species/points? I think I'm at 87 species and 125 points for the year so far. Not a bad start. I missed the Blue Jay yesterday, but that's what I get for not going to see it first thing in the morning. I finally saw the Northern Parula last Friday. Sounds like it's still around, too, even after the snowstorm last weekend. It's a good time to get out and see some

birds! This month I'll finish up with the last day of our epic TX birding trip.

Our last day in TX was a free day and the RGVB Festival was over, so we came up with a game plan of places we wanted to visit or revisit before we had to go home. We started our morning off at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. Santa Ana is right on the Mexican/US border and is a beautiful place full of miles of birding trails, canopy towers, and pristine forested habitat along the Rio Grande River. It has been the source of some controversy as of late because our current administration wants to impact the refuge in a huge way by constructing a border wall right through it, which would be a shame given the 400+ bird species and endangered cat species such as the ocelot and jaguarundi that would be impacted by the construction of a border wall. We're hopeful it can be preserved, but it was high on our list of places to see in case there's a future where it no longer exists.

Santa Ana has both a trail and shuttle system to get you around the refuge, and we chose to strike out on the trails. Word of warning if you do go – it had been raining on and off all week and the mud was epic and piled up on our boots fast, making us feel like we were walking on mud stilts, which also made for some mildly entertaining mud flinging. We hiked out toward the Rio Grande, hoping for a Hook-billed Kite which is occasionally seen there, and picked up great looks at Harris' Hawks, Altamira Orioles, an Olive Sparrow (which are notoriously skulky this time of year), Great Kiskadees, Long-billed Thrasher, Plain Chachalacas, Inca Doves, and several other species we'd seen earlier in the week. As we approached the farthest reaches of the refuge it started to rain lightly. Soon the light rain turned into a steady rain and we were soaked through. At that point we were probably a mile out from the visitor center, so there was nothing we could do but make the long wet slog back. We stopped and climbed an observation tower, but couldn't see much through the rain. It was still a fun visit, but had the weather cooperated we might have been able to find a few of our other target species such as the Hook-billed Kite and a Rose-throated Becard that had been reported days previous.



Mud stilts and steady rain at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge

After our soggy morning, we headed back to the hotel to dry out, changed into beach gear, and drove out for the second half of our day on South Padre Island and the coast. Our first stop was back at the Aplomado Falcon spot at the Laguna Atacosa parking area along Highway 100. The falcons weren't on their nest platform, but we set up the scope and soon located one perched on a wind turbine guy wire a loooooong ways out. Another perched bird turned out to be a White-tailed Hawk and as we were checking it out, Sam spotted another Aplomado Falcon diving in to buzz it. This spot was also a good place to pick up Eastern and Western Meadowlarks.



From there, we jetted out to South Padre, and back to the Convention Center for some quality time checking out the mud flats and the water feature and trees around the Convention Center. On the mud flats just north of the Convention Center we saw more Piping Plover (still one of the cutest endangered species), Royal Terns, Black Skimmers, Semi-palmated Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Dunlin, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Reddish Egret, and Tricolored Herons fishing along the shoreline in the shallows, and a few other species. At the Convention Center we picked up several species of warblers, including a confusing Magnolia Warbler that had us paging through our field guides and scratching our heads. We also Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow-rumped, and a Wilson's Warbler, and a flashy male American Redstart who kept flaring out his tail for us to admire. A Dickcissel also had us scratching our head for a minute and me running through some of the weirder sparrows until Sam figured it out. Long-billed Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers were also present at the convention center.



Our last stop for the day was more for pleasure than birding, but we finished off the day with a walk on the beach at the state park, Isla Blanca, at the southernmost end of South Padre. There were dolphins frolicking in Dolphin Cove, and Sanderlings, Laughing Gulls, and Brown Pelicans along the shoreline. We waded along the breakers, mimicking the sanderlings and running from the waves as the sun set over the dunes, and considered ourselves lucky for the experience. That night we celebrated the end of a fantastic trip with some quality Mexican food and packed up for our trip home. It seemed like Texas was sending us home in style as our drive back to San Antonio was full of Harris's Hawks and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.



That completes my trip report for South Texas. Tune in next month where I reveal whether or not I get a lifer Snowy Owl (the suspense is killing me!).

Happy Birding!

Bird of the Month

Common Raven
Corvus corax
By Kayla Echols

For most people, the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word “raven” is the famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe. It’s an excellent thing to read if you want to give yourself chills on a dark and stormy night. Because let’s be honest, who wouldn’t be a little creeped out if a huge all-black bird flew in your bedroom window in the middle of the night and then kept croaking “Nevermore!” at you?

But how do you know if that big black bird is a raven or a crow? For one thing, Common Ravens are surprisingly large—about the same length, head to tail, as a Turkey Vulture, with a wingspan of roughly 4 and a half feet. And it’s not just the overall bird that’s huge; so is its bill. One of my favorite sayings is “A crow is a bird that has a beak, but a raven is a beak that has a bird.” The voice can be a dead giveaway too. Compared to the harsh caw of a crow, a raven’s call sounds more croaky and froglike.

Ravens belong to the taxonomic family Corvidae, a group of birds that also includes jays, crows, magpies, and the Clark’s Nutcracker. Corvids as a group are the geniuses of the bird world; they have been known to use and make tools, learn by example, and solve complex problems. Crows and ravens can even recognize and remember the faces of individual people, and will hold grudges against people who have harassed or attacked them in the past. Corvids are also skilled mimics, and ravens raised in captivity often learn to mimic human words. I bet a raven who said “Nevermore!” would be a big hit at Halloween parties!

One very reliable place I’ve found for seeing ravens is Antelope Island State Park. I don’t think I’ve ever made a trip there without seeing or hearing at least one. During one visit in October 2017, I was treated to the sight of a pair of ravens playing with each other along the side of the causeway to the island. They kept hopping and flapping around each other, like they were sparring or play-fighting. They didn’t seem to mind that I was pointing a camera at them, but they took flight in earnest when a car zoomed by, and I managed to get one good photo as they lifted off.

Personally I think it’s a bit insulting that we call them “Common” Ravens; there is nothing



Photo by Kayla Echols

ordinary or “common” about these stately, intelligent birds, and I’m struck with awe every time I see one. What a wonderful thing it is to live in Utah, where there is so much of the wide-open space and mountainous forest that ravens love! My desire to leave this beautiful place can be summed up in one word: Nevermore!

References: The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America, www.allaboutbirds.org

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

Field Trip Reports

Salem Pond and Surrounding Areas, Jan. 20, 2018, by Suzi Holt

I woke up at 7am and checked the weather outside. We had 2 inches of snow and it was way windy so I postponed the field trip to noon.

I decided around 9 to brave the snow and met Kayla at the cemetery. We found the Barn Owl, then the Screech Owl, they were both covered in snow.



From there we went to Salem Pond. The Bald Eagle and the Snipe hunt was in the bag! We saw 2 Wilson's Snipe!

At that point I returned to the cemetery. The weather had calmed a bit and the roads were better so I decided to plan the trip for noon for anyone who wanted to join. The weather took a turn for

the worst again but Machelles, Amanda and Julianna braved the roads. Kristin was on her way but the storm turned her around.

Salem Pond was a blizzard! We relocated the Eagle and the snipe!

We went back to the cemetery. Snow was still falling. Met up with Billy Fenimore and Dan Sachse. The Screech had retreated inside his hole :-(for us but :-) for him, the Saw Whet blob ended up being a Barn Owl (long story), there were actually 2 Barn Owls! Dan found the Yellow-bellied sapsucker!

A few of us went back to Salem Pond. We saw a American Crow, a few Red-tailed Hawks and a Merlin, plus the previous mentioned species.

Billy, Dan and I cruised around Salem and Spanish Fork and then headed for home! Brrrrrr!
