



Utah County Birders:

March 2018 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, March 2018:

I was really hoping I would have awesome news about getting a lifer snowy owl, but alas, I spent the better part of an afternoon driving around rural Colorado southwest of Ft. Collins not finding a snowy owl. I found lots of other raptors - a surprising number actually - but no owl. And so here I sit, reporting a lack of snowy owl in my life. What a grim tale.

Since we are on the topics of grim things, I want to talk about something a little grimmer. On the field trip last weekend Mabelle and I found a Golden Eagle that had been hit by a car. Road strikes are an unfortunate and increasingly common cause of raptor mortality, and likely a result of birds attracted to and feeding on other road kill on the roads. Little is known currently about the rates at which road strikes occur, however, Hawk Watch, a nonprofit science-based conservation organization has been collecting data regarding road kill raptors (specifically owls and eagles). If you happen to see one, take pictures, record the location (a GPS coordinate if you've got it) and email it in to Hawk Watch's conservation science department. I did all of that with the eagle Mabelle and I found, in addition to dragging it off the road to prevent any other carrion feeders from also being hit. It's not a pleasant topic to deal with but this kind of data may help us better understand and address causes of population decline in raptor species and help further conservation efforts- something I think we can all get behind.

As most of you know, Golden Eagles are federally protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA). Much of what I do at work deals with implementation of this act and deconfliction with military activities. The gist of BGEPA is that Eagles are protected from any disturbance that affects them going about living their lives. Their nests are protected year round, and even after death, all parts of a dead eagle are protected. You cannot have in your possession at any time any part of an eagle, its' nest, or eggs, without a federal permit specifically giving you permission to do so. There is a national repository where dead eagles can be sent where Native American tribes have access to them for traditional tribal uses. However, the possession and sending and every part of that process is heavily regulated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (the regulatory authority over the BGEPA).

As you may also remember, migratory birds (which includes everything else that's not an eagle, (migratory or not), except European Starlings, House Sparrows, and Rock Pigeons. All species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are protected in much of the same way as eagles in that all parts of migratory birds (feathers, eggs, etc...) are protected and you may not possess any part of a migratory bird without a permit from the USFWS. However, unlike eagles, the nests of migratory birds are not protected when they are not in use.

Last week one of our colleagues at work found a road strike dead golden eagle in good enough shape that we picked it up (officially sanctioned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office), and we will be coordinating with the state to ship it to the national repository hopefully for future tribal use.

I know this is a little bit more of a grim topic, but I hope it was informative. Next month, I promise I'll talk about something a little more cheerful!

With that, I hope you all are enjoying this brief return to winter that we've been having, and I wish you all safe and

Happy birding!

Keeli Marvel

March Meeting:

Thursday, March 8, 2018, 7pm at the Monte L. Bean Museum in Provo, UT.

Sam Braegger, Outreach Coordinator, Utah Lake Commission will be our guest speaker this month. What is the Utah Lake Commission? What are they doing with the State Park? How is the Utah Delta Restoration Project coming along? How can the UCB connect with Utah Lake and the Utah Lake Festival? Sam will answer all these questions and more! Come join us for an interesting and informative meeting.

March Field Trips:

Saturday March 10, 2018: Provo Canyon/South Fork/Sundance Field Trip. Let's go see the American Dipper and find a Northern Pygmy Owl! Meet at the 800 N. Orem Harmon's Parking lot by the gas pumps at 9am. Led by Suzi Holt

Saturday March 24, 2018: Emma Park Road/Scofield Greater Sage-grouse Field Trip. Meet at 6am in the SE corner of the Chevron parking lot at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon. Take the Hwy 6 Price exit on I-15, and drive to the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon. Come experience a Greater Sage-grouse lek.

Bird of the Month:

Last month there was a lot of excitement happening for birders in our area. Not only was there the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in the Payson Cemetery, but three species of owls! One of which was the Northern Saw-whet Owl. This brought out a lot of birders with good looks and views.

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is one of the small owl species which are usually found in mixed coniferous-deciduous woods. So our Payson Cemetery fit the terrain perfectly. 'A place everyone is dying to go' They co-habitat with Western Screech-Owls and Flammulated Owls, smaller than the Western but larger than the Flammulated. Even though they are smaller than the Western Screech-Owl and the Boreal Owl they have longer wings than the Boreal but a shorter tail. The Saw-whet is rounder, more petite and considered cuter than a screech owl. So cute as to 'put it in your pocket and take it home with you'.



The head of the Northern Saw-whet is somewhat heart-shaped and tuftless. With its chunky body and stub of a tail, the overall shape and size resembles an avocado. The facial disk is pale brown, with a white 'V' or white triangle stamped between the yellowish eyes on its forehead. The pale breast is boldly streaked with chestnut brown. And in the adult there are distinct white braces on the back and brown streaking below.

In flight, their wingspan is about 17 inches, flying generally low and direct and the wingbeats are quick and entirely below horizontal and silent as it approaches its prey. It hunts only at

Photo credit: Cliff Miles, Payson Cemetery

night, roosts by day which is usually when most observers see them. It usually roosts away from tree trunks and not more than 12 ft. above the ground. It also commonly uses the same perch night after night.

Its song are a repeated, low, whistled toots similar to the Northern Pygmy-Owl but with a regular rhythm.

Recently, there have been comments made regarding whether or not to let others know of the location of owls for conservation purposes. But with this recent episode with the owls in Payson Cemetery, I would like to share my observation. On a Saturday afternoon with several of our birders observing the Northern Saw-whet as it roosted in a tree, a family was leaving a funeral. And noticing our group looking up at the owl, the young boys with their grandparents walked over to observe this darling little owl. In the process, we talked to them about this bird and how we should stand back and admire and not disturb it. Hopefully, they learned a great lesson in the wonders of this earth and its creatures, which can only be learned by participating.

References: Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion, Sibley Field Guide and National Geographic Field Guide.

Yvonne Carter