



Utah County Birders:

May 2018 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, May 2018:

Hola Birders! This one's going to be a long one, so sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride. I am currently drafting this while on my flight back from San Antonio, TX where I just spent a week attending Natural Resources and Endangered Species Training at the Army Environmental Command at Fort Sam Houston. First, important business up front, I got four lifers on this trip! I'll tell you which ones shortly. I had a laundry list of birds to see, and as is pretty standard I dipped on quite a few of them. I did, however get the really important ones, and I saw a bunch of the other cool TX birds in the process.

I flew in on Sunday morning and headed directly out to Government Canyon State Natural Area in the afternoon for a hike with my program manager. We wandered around the Front Country trails until almost dusk. While there we picked up some fun birds including **Painted Bunting, White-eyed Vireo, Vermillion Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Northern Cardinal, Crested Caracara, and Black-crested Titmouse. Great-tailed Grackles and White-winged Doves** are literally everywhere in that part of TX and if you bird for any length of time there they soon turn into window birds (ones you start ignoring and looking through to see the other birds).

We were in training all day during the week, but on our lunch breaks in the courtyard of our building at Fort Sam, I sat and watched **Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts**, and several swallow species zipping around, and it seemed like there was always a Great Egret or Cattle Egrets flying over. Where to and from I would be curious to find out.

After our training ended on Friday I dragged my program manager and a new friend/colleague from the training out to Corpus Christi. Our first stop was the Rose Hill Memorial Park (cemetery) where a sort of mini warbler migration fallout was in progress. In about half an hour of warm mid-afternoon sleepy time birding I saw **Blackburnian, Black-and-White, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Hooded, Kentucky, and Magnolia Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Wood Thrush, Acadian Flycatcher (lifer #1), Baltimore And Orchard Orioles** and a few other species. Shout out to the awesome San Antonio Audubon birder who was there and keyed me in on the warbler flock! Wish I'd remembered his name...

From there we went out to Mustang Island State Park and a walk down the beach produced **Laughing Gulls, Sandwich, Common, Caspian, Royal, and Least Terns, Ruddy Turnstone, and Black Skimmers**. I was really hoping for some Gull-billed Terns, but it wasn't in the cards no matter how hard I stared at the Sandwich Terns with my binos (they've got cool white tips on their beaks, did you know that?)

Driving back into Corpus Christi we also picked up Reddish Egrets and Tri-colored Herons and a magnificently pink **Roseate Spoonbill** foraging in the shallow marshes along the Intracoastal Waterway.

My last morning in TX I wandered further afield once again into the beautiful TX Hill Country to Kerr Wildlife Management Area in search of the holy grail of birds: **Golden-cheeked Warblers** (GCWA). They are listed as an Endangered Species for the main reason that the entire breeding habitat of their entire species is located inside a couple hundred mile chunk of the Edwards Plateau in TX hill country. As is the case for many endangered species, over the years development, grazing, and other land uses has fragmented a large portion of their habitat. One of the cool things I learned about in training this week is that some of the GCWA range falls within a few of the military installations in the area between San Antonio and Austin and the military works hard to protect that habitat but also to ensure that that protection doesn't impact their ability to continue implementation of the military missions of those installations. There's a really cool program where the military offsets impacts on installations by investing through partnerships and land trusts in tracts of land off post that are conserved to protect some of the most critical breeding habitat in perpetuity. I believe Government Canyon is one of those areas that the military was instrumental in helping set aside for preservation.

I checked in at the main entrance to Kerr WMA, picked up a birding map, and headed about back out and 3/4 mi down to a gate in their Spring Trap area where you park and walk in through a high fence gate. Now, I'd already realized something this trip. I don't recognize the vast majority of birding calls in TX, so I'm not gonna lie, it was HARD. I'd studied up on the GCWA call so I could recognize it and I heard one call off in the distance a couple times but struggled to locate it. Lucky for me I ran into some other friendly birders who also started helping me pick out a few of the other calls, and after a few minutes of walking up the Spring Trap dirt road, one GCWA flew over! Lifer #2! I also picked up some other cool birds there - **Hutton's Vireo** (lifer #3), **Clay-colored, Rufous-crowned**, and **Field Sparrows**, larger than life **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** (it's true everything's bigger in TX), and **Red-Shouldered Hawk**. Also, I should probably mention the piles of Vultures, both Black and Turkey that inhabitant the hill country. They are EVERYWHERE, soaring overhead or perched on big utility towers and power poles.

Alright, so last but not least, I drove back up to the main entrance to Kerr WMA and drove up the main road about 3/4 of a mile where I picked up lifer #4, **Black-capped Vireo**, an Endangered Species success story! Once I started learning their call it seemed like I could hear them everywhere. As of last week it had been determined that their population has been recovered to a point where they no longer required as rigorous protection and they were delisted/down listed. So that's exciting news! They've got a very energetic buzzy vireo type call that reminds me of Lark Sparrow or a Bewick's Wren. On my way out at the entrance kiosk I also picked up **Bell's Vireo**, **Eastern Phoebe**, **Vermillion Flycatcher**, and **Chimney Swifts**.

Whew! You made it! Thanks for sticking with me on my journey. Hurray for spring migration! More species returned to Utah this week, so get out and see them! I'm headed south to Cedar City for a week of breeding bird survey training so I'll report back next month on how that goes.

Adios and Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel

APRIL MEETING:

Thursday, May 10, 2018, 7pm at the Monte L. Bean Museum in Provo, UT.

Birding in Australia, New Zealand, and French Polynesia, presented by Jesse Lee

Field Trips:

Saturday, May 5 - 8:00 am

SPANISH FORK TRAIL / PAYSON HOLLOW

Meet at the Canyon View Park (near the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon - 3300 E. Powerhouse road - west of Spanish Oaks Golf Course) in the west end of the parking lot near pavilion 3. We'll walk part of the trail and then go to Payson Hollow. (Lead by Lyle Bingham)

Monday May 14 - 7am to 3pm

UTAH COUNTY HOTSPOTS

Come a little early so we can leave at 7am sharp. We will go to Warm Springs WMA, Goshen, Goshen Canyon and Eureka!! A fun trip with hopes of a 100 species for the day! (Lead by Suzi Holt)

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

Bird of the Month:

by Jim Strong

Having grown up in the Black Hills of South Dakota this interesting bird is also known as a "Camp Robber" by local folks and tourists that enjoy mountain camping. Actually he is fun to watch as some folks are frightened by any bird that approaches their space. Sometimes they will help clean up your picnic table even when you do not want any help! They are frequently seen in the camp grounds of the High Uintas of Utah. If you have been birding in that area in late summer you have seen the Clark's Nutcracker. Just try to get a photo of one as he moves quickly around looking for bird goodies at your camp site.

The Clark's Nutcracker was named after Captain William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition back in the early 1800s. The Clark's Nutcracker is a jay sized bird but the shape of a crow (but smaller) with a short tail, long wings and a rounded, crestless head. The bill is long, straight, and sharp, perfect for opening pine cones. They are pale gray overall with black wings and white undertail coverts. The secondaries have white trailing edges, They have dark eyes, black legs, feet and bill.

It is not unusual for the Clark's Nutcracker to travel in flocks. Last August 2017, three of us drove up Mayfield Canyon and on about the 9,500 elevation we found more than 40 nutcrackers in half a mile. That incident made for some great bird photography. They were working the pines for nuts to enhance their winter storage plan. This bird can store as many as 90 seeds in a sublingual pouch behind the tongue. Various sources have huge discrepancies in the amount of seeds they harvest for storage so lets



Clark's Nutcracker

assume a number between 33,000 and 90,000 pine nuts. These nut caches are generally buried in the soil on exposed slopes and the birds often find their caches up to nine months later. Not being 100% efficient at finding all their seeds the balance will provide opportunities for new tree growth the following year.

Clark's Nutcracker are monogamous and form long-term pair bonds. Pairs stay together on their territories year round. They begin nesting in late winter, relying on the food they have cached to raise their young. The nests are built on the leeward side of trees for shelter from the wind. Both sexes incubate the eggs for 16 to 18 days and feed the young.

When there are predators around such as Red Tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagles and Great Horned Owls these nutcrackers will mob and taunt them. Maybe they are just getting even for past personal violations!!!

Information Summary:

Male and female are colored alike and the juvenile is similar to the adults

Nest: cup type built by both sexes and 1 brood per year.

Eggs: 2-5 pale green with brown markings

Incubation: 16 - 18 days

Fledging 18 - 20 days both sexes feed the young

Migration: Non migratory but will go to lower elevations for other food sources

Food: seeds, insects, berries, eggs and small mammals

Size: 12.5inches, wingspan 18 inches, weight 5.0 ounces

References:

Birds of North America (Western region) by Fred J. Alsop III

Field Guide to Birds (Western Region) Donald & Lillian Stokes

Birds of Utah, Field Guide by Stan Tekiela

Field Trip Reports:

River Lane / Sandy Beach / Benjamin Slough / Lincoln Beach – 14 Apr 2018
by Suzi Holt

We had fourteen birders today on our River Lane/Sandy Beach + Benjamin Slough and Lincoln Beach Field trip!!!!

On our way just before Swede Lane we saw **Bank, Cliff, Tree** and **Rough-winged Swallows** plus a few **Brewer's Blackbirds**. We then began our official trip down River Lane. We saw another group of swallows with **Rough-winged, Tree** and 2 **Violet-green Swallows**.

Down the road we came upon a huge flock of **Vesper Sparrows** eating along the roadside. Saw some **Barn Swallows** and **Brown-headed Cowbirds**-of course by the cows! Lyle had a close encounter with a **Tree Swallow**.

We then drove down to Sandy Beach. At the mouth of the river we saw a **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER, American Coot, Spotted Towhees, White-crowned, Song** and **Lincoln's Sparrows, Yellow-headed Blackbirds**.

We drove back up River Lane in search of the Golden-crowned sparrow...We saw tons of **Robins, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-capped Chickadees, a Red-breasted Nuthatch** [left], **Dark-eyed Juncos, a Flicker** and **Downy Woodpeckers**. We finally found a flock of **White-crowned sparrows** so we started searching for the **Golden-crowned sparrow**. Steve spotted it and got a good look, Yvonne and I got a brief flyaway look. No photos :-(. We then watched a **Merlin** snatch a Tree Swallow midair and eat it on a branch!



We decided from there to go to Lincoln Beach with a stop by Benjamin Slough. Some needed a **Black-necked Stilt** and I saw one so we turned around. I thought I saw a Spotted Sandpiper. But it wasn't bobbing its tail enough, upon closer inspection we had a **Solitary Sandpiper!!!** There were lots of **ducks, geese and pelicans** and a bunch of **Eared Grebes**.

At Lincoln Beach we saw more **Sandhill Cranes, American Avocets**, more Coots than we wanted to count, 9 **Ospreys** on the 5 towers across the bay, a few **Willetts**, lots more **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** and another **Say's Phoebe**. On the way back we saw a **Raven** and **Turkey Vultures!** A great day with 67 SPECIES!!!!