



Utah County Birders:

November 2018 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, November 2018

by Keeli Marvel

Birding in Europe Part Two: Germany and the Netherlands

Has a month gone by already? I can't believe how fast it went!

Last month I told you about birding in Ireland. This month I'll finish off my trip report with Germany and the Netherlands.

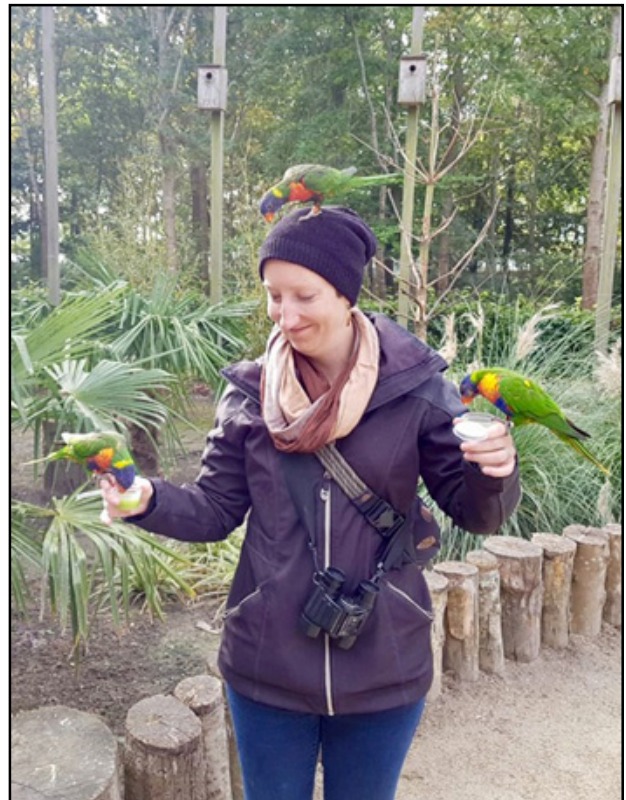
After spending a week in Ireland, my mom and I parted ways and I headed to the Netherlands to meet up with my old friend Cami and her family who live in North Holland. They go to Stuttgart, Germany every year for the Oktoberfest festival and had invited me along for the ride. The entire next day was spent driving to Stuttgart from the Netherlands. While driving 100mph on the Autobahn doesn't exactly lend itself to birding, I did see lots of raptors, most of which were likely **Common Buzzards**, a species similar to our Red-tailed Hawks.

Stuttgart is a large city full of people so the birds were few and far between, but I did see and hear several **Great Tits** in the trees around town. They seem to be very adapted to city life.

After a couple of days in Stuttgart we hit the road and headed to Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a beautiful walled town that looks like a quaint little Christmas Village. There's a walking path along the wall that is great for birding, a large park just outside the wall, and the town is surrounded by beautiful forested hillsides.

While wandering around town, we paused for a few minutes in a little park near the church called Frankenhöhe Nature Park and I picked up a lifer **Black Redstart** as well as more **Blue Tits**, **Great Tits** and a **Common Chaffinch**. I could hear some birds singing loudly from a rooftop around dusk that evening, and I later confirmed those to also be more Black Redstarts. **Jackdaws** were also common in Rothenburg and large flocks of them roosted on the church and along the rooftops of the city within the wall.

On our drive back through Germany, Belgium, and into the Netherlands I didn't have much opportunity to stop and bird, however, I did manage to spot a lifer **Black Kite**. Kites in Europe are large raptors which have a very characteristic shape. They have long slender wings and a unique forked tail that helped me instantly recognize the one I saw soaring as a member of the Kite family.



My last few days in the Netherlands were a real treat for birding. My friend Cami lined me up with a local birder named Truus who generously offered to pick me up in her car and take me birding. We spend an entire day and the evening of the next day birding around North Holland and around the west coast of the Netherlands. Our first stop was a place called Twisk, an open grassy area with walking paths along canals with little raised hills that looked out over a pond with mudflats and an island that was perfect for wading birds. At Twisk I picked up adorable lifer **Bearded Reedlings** in the reeds along the pond, by far my most favorite bird of the trip. I also picked up lifer **Barnacle Geese, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Snipe, and Meadow Pipits**. There were other birders at Twisk chasing a rare bird alert - a Pectoral Sandpiper had been spotted there and birders were flocking in to see it. As Truus already had it on her list, and I had plenty of opportunity to see them here at home, we continued on our birding adventure.

In a marshy area called Dijkwielen along the coast near Den Oever I picked up a heard-only lifer **Water Rail**, and then further west along the coast we climbed up the dike wall and scoped out the shoreline and I picked up a lifer **Spotted Redshank** amongst hundreds of **Eurasian Curlews, godwits, Common Redshanks, Eurasian Oystercatchers, Common Shelduck, European Golden-plover, and Dunlin**. In Den Oever we had a fantastic fresh seafood lunch and a nice afternoon walk along a dike along the harbor.

The following evening we went back out to the coast at high tide to try and round up a few more species. Our first stop was at a wildlife refuge area called Balgzandpolder where we peered through bird blinds at a lake surrounded by geese and wading birds. I picked up a lifer **Common Greenshank** and got great looks at several more **Common Snipe** feeding amongst the **Northern Lapwings**, gulls, geese, and ducks. I also added **Eurasian Kestrel** to my life list. I'd seen them before while driving through the Netherlands and Germany, but never managed to get one recorded into eBird. A couple miles further up the coast we pulled up to a dock right on the ocean, and I added a pair of lifer **Common Eiders**, ocean ducks that usually don't come in that close to shore, but which were likely brought in by the high tide. They which were keeping company with Black-headed and Great Black-backed Gulls. As the sun was setting on my last evening in the Netherlands, we made one more stop along the coast near a town called Westerland where we sifted through hundreds of **Eurasian Curlew, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover (which they call Grey or Silver Plover)**, and the occasional **Common Ringed-Plover** to find one last lifer, a **Black-tailed Godwit**, bringing my total lifer count for the trip to 30 species!

Thanks for sticking with me through the travelogue. As we head into the holiday season I hope you all have a fabulous Thanksgiving! In the blink of an eye November will be gone and it'll be December, and you know what that means?! Christmas Bird Count Time!

Hope to see you all out and about!

Happy Birding!
Keeli Marvel

NOVEMBER MEETING:

Thursday, November 8, 2018, 7:00 PM at the Bean Museum on BYU Campus

Show and Tell. We don't have a guest speaker this month, but let's plan on meeting at 7 for a little show and tell. If you have pictures or bird stories you'd like to share, bird IDs you'd like some help with, info about birding trip plans, etc... let's get together and share them.

Bird of the Month:

Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus*

by Lyle Bingham

What was the last bird you saw in a parking lot? Yes, in this country we see gulls, but what about the other birds? Let's name our common regional parking lot cleanup crew: Crows, Ravens, European Starlings, Magpies, English Sparrows and Grackles.

This month, I would like to introduce you to the latter, the grackle. Specifically the Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus*. It is a medium-sized, highly social passerine, or perching bird, native to Central and South America. These Icterids, like other birds of opportunity, have moved north following the availability of food.

I first saw a flock of great tailed grackles on a birding trip to Box Elder County. We stopped at the Walmart parking lot in Brigham City. Dick Hurren took a cup of cat food and tossed it out in front of our parked cars, then we watched as the grackles flew in to clean up the free food. We joked at the time that grackles seem to "show up" at new Walmart stores.

So how do we know what we are seeing? Three of eight grackle species are native in the US, the Boat-tailed Grackle and the Common Grackle are found mostly east of the Rockies. The Mexican or Great-tailed Grackles have become the most common in the west. However, both the Great tailed and common Grackles can be seen, at times, in Utah state and county. Jonathan Adlerfer in the National Geographic Complete Birds of North America describes three great-tailed grackle subspecies, *prosopidicola* (Texas-east), *monsoni* (Arizona-Texas) and the smaller *nelsoni* (Arizona-California). All are said to be moving north.

You can tell the difference between grackles in size and color: Grackles are between a robin and a crow. They are about the same length as American crows, but they are much lighter. Common Grackles have long tails, but shorter than their great-tailed cousins. Their colors are also more varied. Female common grackles don't vary that much from their male counterparts. However male Great-tailed Grackles are iridescent black with yellow piercing eyes, black bills and legs. Females are dark brown above, paler below, with a buff-colored throat and a stripe above the eye. Juveniles have the female's dark brown plumage, with streaked underparts and a dark eye. Great-tailed Grackles can be seen with other blackbirds pecking for food on lawns, fields, and at marsh edges, vying for trash in urban settings, or crowding in trees and on telephone lines in noisy roosts. However, they rise above the others in their intelligence. Grackles adapt their behavior with experience and habitat.

Did I say they are smart? Grackles can solve Aesop's Fable tests - a problem involving a tube that is partially filled with water with a piece of food floating out of reach. The problem is solved by dropping objects, like stones, into the water to raise the level and bring the food within reach.

Another way to identify a Great-tailed Grackle is with location. They are found in rural and developed areas of the Midwest and West, foraging in fields, feedlots, golf courses, cemeteries, parks,



Great-tailed Grackle --West Syracuse
by Paul Higgins @Paul Higgins

neighborhood lawns and, as we see here, big box store parking lots where food is dropped or discarded. Trees and vegetation edging water provide roosting and breeding sites where they declare their territory with song.

Great-tailed grackles have an unusually large repertoire of vocalizations that are used year-round. Males use a wider variety, while females engage mostly in "chatter". However there are reports of females performing the "territorial song." Because they are loud, and great numbers can leave great deposits of manure, great-tailed grackles are often considered pests

We can hear two of Kevin Colver's recordings curated at the University of Utah Western Soundscape Library at the Marriott Library: [Recording #1](#) and [Redcording #2](#)

Great-tailed grackles communally roost in trees or wetland reeds at night and during the breeding season they nest in territories. Territorial (Alpha) males are heavier and have longer tails than non-territorial males. This helps them defend their territory within which many females place their nests and raise young. Thus, territorial males are associated with having more offspring, while residential males live in the larger colony but do not defend a territory or have mates.

Next time you are in a big-box parking lot, waiting for fellow birders to show up, look at the cleanup birds, listen to their calls and look at their size. Even though the parking lot would likely not be the most exciting place for a big year, you will be able to recognize males and female Great-tailed Grackles foraging below the trees and anywhere someone has dropped food.

References & Additional Reading:

Webb, Merrill, Great-tailed Grackle, UtahBirds.org

The Great Tailed Grackle, AllAboutBirds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Great-Tailed Grackle, National Geographic

Sibley, David Allen, Great-tailed Grackle, Sibley Field Guild to Birds of Western North America, p. 443, 2003

Jaramillo, Alvaro, Blackbirds, Orioles, and Allies, The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior, p. 547-551, 2001

Alderfer, Jonathan, Great-tailed Grackle, Complete Birds of North America, p. 617, 1st ed, 2006, The Nat.Geo. Society, (2nd ed.)

Field Trip Reports:

Big Sit! Provo Airport dike

Field trip on October 13th... in a circle 17 feet in diameter.

Thanks to everyone who came out for The Big Sit at the Provo Airport Dike. We ended up with 60 total species

(one more than earlier reported as we realized we did, in fact, get an American Robin). This was one of our highest counts! We had 18 participants throughout the day, and it was fun to sit and visit and bird! The count circle was occupied continuously from 7:05am to 7:14pm. The most surprising species were probably the four different species of swallows which were still hanging around. Best birds were the FOF **Merlin** and the late in the season terns and **Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls**. Thanks to Suzi for taking the afternoon shift and finishing the count off strong!



Photo by Amanda Holt ©Amanda Holt (Oct 2018)

Happy Birding!
Keeli Marvel

Eccles Wildlife Education Center

Saturday Oct 27, 2018

by Suzi Holt

WOW what a awesome new facility!!! We got the personal tour with [Billy](#) today!!! Thanks so much! We had a great time and saw a lot of fun stuff. if you get the chance go! Take the kids, take the grandparents it is awesome! The weather was great and we had a nice bird walk around the wetlands. We saw Both Male and Female **Northern Harriers**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, Male and Female **American Kestrels**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, **Western Meadowlark**, **American Coot**, **Mallards**, **Killdeer**, **House Finch**, **American Robin**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, a last of year **Sage Thrasher**, **Lincoln**, **Song** and **White-crowned Sparrows**, **American Goldfinch**, **Marsh Wren**, heard a couple **Virginia Rail**, **Wilson's Snipes**, **Gadwall**, **Black-billed Magpie**, **Northern Flicker**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **Western Grebe**, **European Starlings**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Red-winged** and **Brewer's Blackbirds**. A total of 31 species!!! A great morning. Thanks again Billy!!!

A few of us continued on to Antelope Island and the Causeway to look for the Surf Scoters. We found a huge group of **American Avocets**, even bigger rafts of ducks and grebes. We couldn't find the Surf Scoters at the bridge but did see a few Scaup. We stopped closer to the marina to check out some

ducks and found **Northern Shovelers** and a few **Mallards** and were a little closer to check out a raft of ducks. It was a huge raft of **Ruddy ducks**. And as I went down the line I ran into some huge black ducks. So we got the scope on them and sure enough it was the **Surf Scoters**!!! Yippe! We drove down closer to them and everyone got great looks then they flew towards the bridge. On the north side of the bridge we found 4 and one on the North side. They all joined together on the North side and we got great looks! We also saw **American Pipits**, and a few more **Eared Grebe**. From there we went in search of a Chukar...no luck, but we did find a **Loggerhead Shrike** and a couple **Ravens**. It was a great day!

