



Utah County Birders: February 2019 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, February 2019

by Keeli Marvel

Trip to Florida

Greetings fellow birders! Welcome to the second month of 2019! This year is zooming by fast.

So I have some minor success to report. I spent a week in Florida at the beginning of the year. I had grand plans to add lifers to my list left and right, but as per usual, life had its own plans, and I got the flu mid trip and ended up only getting 2 of my targets. On the bright side, if you are going to get the flu while traveling, I recommend somewhere warm with a beach you can feel like death on instead of the cold hazy dreariness that was Utah that week. Hah. But for real, I flew into Fort Myers, FL a day early and started out the next morning with a game plan.

My first stop of the day was a success. I visited Pelican Sports Complex in Cape Coral where invasive and nonnative **Monk Parakeets** had built huge stick nests in the baseball field lights. Monk Parakeets are known for building huge colonial nests on man-made powers structures, and occasionally causing power outages or electrical fires because of their choice of nesting locations. They seemed to be settled right in there. After some impatient waiting and a few passes through the adjoining neighborhoods, the parakeets finally showed up, popping in and out of their huge nests and making a raucous with their calls.



My next stop... also a success, and a Threatened/Endangered Species Lifer as well! The **Florida Scrub-jay** is a close relative of our Woodhouse's (formerly Western) Scrub-jay and is one of only 15 species endemic to the United State (meaning it's found nowhere else). In fact, it is endemic to the state of Florida and is found only in Florida oak scrub habitat. The largest populations occur inland where there is the largest concentration of its' preferred habitat, however, I was lucky enough to get to see a banded breeding pair that lives in a rural area north of Fort Myers in the Cape Coral area.

My final stop of the morning was in search of Snail Kites at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve. There's a really nice boardwalk that winds around the cypress preserve through flooded and swampy areas. I dipped on the Snail Kite (in fact, I dipped on it all week, and not for lack of trying!), but I enjoyed the 1.5 mile walk around the boardwalk and saw lots of other cool species such as **Anhinga**, **Wood Stork**, **Northern Parula**, **Palm Warbler**, **Tricolored Heron**, and **Red-shouldered Hawk**. One of the ponds has platforms out in the middle of the pond where you can often see alligators sunning themselves

(saw one and he was quite the impressive dude, too). I also spotted a Copperhead Snake curled up on the ground near the boardwalk. Luckily I was several feet above him and he did not seem inclined to worry about me in the slightest.

Following my morning of birding adventure I decided to go after a little mammal lifering and headed out to the coast where I rented a paddleboard and did a little paddling around the estuary at Lover's Key State Park. **Manatees** often swim inland into the rivers and estuaries during the cold winter months to take advantage of the warm shallow waters. I'd heard reports they were being reported at Lover's Key and I was not disappointed. I got to paddle quietly a few feet away from a small group of manatees that were slowly meandering around the estuary and it was amazing. I highly recommend the experience. Not sure anything could top that, but I finished the day with a walk down the beach at Lover's Key where there were **Ring-billed** and **Laughing Gulls**, **Sanderlings**, one or two **Lesser Black-backed** and **Herring Gulls**, and **Willetts** wandering around dodging beach goers.

The rest of the week in Florida I spent in training but my training location was about a 10 min drive from another birding hotspot, Harn's Marsh, which I visited a few more time before and after training in the short daylight hours I could grab. Harn's Marsh was a roosting site for hundreds of **Black and Turkey Vultures**, and a resident **Osprey** that I got to watch catching fish. It was also a great place for **Limpkins**, **Great Egrets**, **Cattle Egrets**, **Reddish Egrets**, **Tri-colored Herons**, **Mottled Ducks**, and **Boat-tailed Grackles**.

My last day in Florida I made a quick trip down to the Everglades and took a boat tour of the 10,000 Islands Area which takes you out through the mangrove islands. I saw probably a couple dozen **Anhinga** on the road down to Everglades City along the canals that line the road. No one else showed up for the first boat tour of the morning, so I had



a personal tour to myself which was a lot of fun. I didn't see any new species, but there were several nesting pairs of **Osprey** setting up shop and sitting on nests and lots of **Laughing Gulls**, **Royal Terns** and **Double-crested Cormorants**. Sandy beaches along the coast are also a great place to find **Wilson's Plover** and other small peeps. Unfortunately we couldn't get close enough to the islands in the large tour boat to ID the huge flocks of peeps we saw, but it was still cool seeing the habitat. Strangely enough there are also small populations of raccoons that had swam out and set up camp on several of the mangrove islands, and we saw a few of those (including a mother with two adorable babies trailing behind her) foraging in the tide pools along the edges of a few of the islands as well. You can pack your camping gear into kayaks or canoes and paddle out to a few of the islands and camp, and apparently campers on some of the islands have had trouble with the raccoons getting into their food and fresh water supplies and have had to come up with innovative solutions to keep them out of their supplies. I was sad I didn't have more time to explore the Everglades on this trip - the visitor center was closed because of the government shut down, and I had to jet straight back to Fort Myers for an afternoon flight. I drove past the Florida Panther reserve on my way back north and it was exciting to see signs that warned of caution in Panther crossing zones. On this trip, like many others, I left with an appreciation for the area and a wish to return to experience more of it at some point in the future. I ended the trip with 2 lifers, putting my total life list at 591 species (I've really gotta get south of the border!).

Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel

FEBRUARY MEETING:

Wednesday, 13 Feb 2019, 7:00 PM - at the Monte L. Bean Museum.

Our guest speaker will be **Steve Van Winkle**. He recently took a trip to Africa to do some touring, hiking, and humanitarian work, and he saw some pretty cool things while he was there. He'll report on some of the birds he saw and what he did on that trip.

Up-coming Field Trips:

2 Feb 2019 - **Gull Identification Clinic**, presented by Cameron Cox at the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Wildlife Education Center. (by Farmington Bay) We will meet at the Pioneer Crossing park & ride at 9am. Click on this link to register. You need to register but it is FREE!

23 Feb 2019 - **Delta Snow Goose Festival**: Trip Leader: Suzi Holt Meet at the Payson Walmart NE corner at 7:30 am we will return in the afternoon sometime around 2:30 pm. It is a sight to behold!!!

Bird of the Month:

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

by Mabelle Johnson

This bird is a beautiful, common bird here in Utah. We should be seeing them arrive from Mexico

during April and May. The typical habitat includes riparian woodlands, mature pine and pine-oak forest, pinyon-juniper, and deciduous groves, so pretty much throughout the state. You may even see them at your feeder as they are also drawn to sugar-water and backyard feeding stations. (They like large seeds.)

Pete Dunne describes their appearance as: "A medium-sized, massive-headed, gargantuan-billed songbird." What I like most about this bird is the color, I love the orange and black combination of the adult male. (Same colors, different combination of Spotted Towhee and Bullock's Oriole.)

Females and immature males are pretty easy to ID as well since they are like a 'shadow rendering' of the breeding male pattern, just a bit lighter, browner and streakier.

"The scientific names, *Pheucticus melanocephalus*, are both well-suited. Its species name, *melanocephalus*, means "black-headed". And its genus name, *Pheucticus*, refers either to the Greek *pheucticus* for "shy" or *phycicus* meaning 'painted with cosmetics,' fitting for a showy bird that forages in dense foliage."



Male Black-headed Grosbeak

by Cliff Miles ©Cliff Miles

They are slow deliberate feeders, checking above and below their perch for insects or fruit. An interesting note is that in winter in Mexico they feed on Monarch butterflies. The grosbeaks are one of the butterflies few predators. Toxins in the monarch make them poisonous to most birds, but Black-headed Grosbeaks and a few others can eat them. They feed on monarchs in roughly 8-day cycles, apparently to give themselves time to eliminate the toxins.

The song consists of rising and falling passages, resembling the American Robin's song, but more fluent and mellow. Call is a flat ik or eek. One description of the song says: "In western North America, the sweet song of the Black-headed Grosbeak caroling down from the treetops sounds like a tipsy robin welcoming spring". Another fact about these guys is that both the male and female are loud songsters. The female's song is generally a simplified version of the male song. Occasionally though, the female sings a full "male" song, possibly to deceive its mate about the presence of intruders and get him to spend more time at the nest, because the male BHGR shares nest duty in incubating eggs and feeding young. Like she's keeping him in line! ■

Field Trip -18 Jan 2019

Payson, Salem, Diamond Fork Canyon

Report and Photos by Suzi Holt

We started at the Payson Cemetery at 9:28 successfully finding 2 **Barn Owls** and 2 **Great-horned Owls!!**

From there we hit Salem Pond for the **Greater Scaup** pair. Check off number 3!

We then all piled into a few cars at the base of SF canyon and headed up to Diamond Fork, On the way we saw a **Golden Eagle**. At Diamond Fork we found **Mountain Bluebirds**, a **Bald Eagle**, **Ravens**, **Robins**, **Scrub jays**, **Townsend's Solitaires**, **Spotted Towhees**, a **Canyon Wren**, **Black-capped Chickadees** and 3 **Hermit Thrushes**.

I was getting a little discouraged the conditions were perfect for a **Pygmy Owl**. We had just begun to head down the canyon when I spotted the little bugger! We all got great looks and it was a lifer for Kaylene!.

We saw a couple deer and a bunch of **Wild Turkeys** and called it a day.. We hit all of our targets for the day!!! A few found one more Pygmy Owl a little farther down. A great day for sure!! Thanks to everyone who came! ■



Field Trip -1 Jan 2019

New Years Day Field Trip

by Josh Kreitzer

We could only muster three cars of people, but a vanguard of Utah County Birders still braved the single-digit chill to start off the New Year with a bang.

East Bay yielded a number of species, including **Cinnamon Teal** and **Rough-legged Hawk**; we even witnessed **Wood Ducks** perching in a Russian Olive tree. One even ate an olive!

A quick stop at Flowserve rewarded us with a male **Hooded Merganser** and a male **Belted Kingfisher**.

Karen Bennett-Young's **Anna's Hummingbird** delighted us all, as did a number of other firsts for the year in her neighborhood, including a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** flashing his ruby at us.

As we headed south to Woodland Hills, we passed a majestic and calm adult **Bald Eagle**, perched on top of a pole right next to the road.



Two **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were present at their (at least formerly) usual spot in Woodland Hills, giving us excellent, if distant, looks as they perched on top of telephone poles.

At Salem Pond we found **Common Goldeneyes**, **Buffleheads**, and a small group of **Lesser Scaup**.

Unfortunately, Santaquin Canyon, which was covered with deep snow and filled with snowmobilers, did not yield a single species of Zonotrichia sparrow. :(

A quick stop at Spring Lake yielded nothing extra, so we decided to try Payson Cemetery. At first, it was as quiet as death, though we found many, many owl pellets under promising trees. We did come across a small group of birds (**Mountain Chickadees** and **House Finches**, and I briefly glimpsed a **Townsend's Solitaire**), but we found no owls. By now, two of the cars had left. We remaining three birders persisted, but we found no owls. As we headed back to our car, a young blonde boy ran towards us, announcing that his birding party had found a **Barn Owl**. Sure enough, we were able to catch a nice view of that reclusive species high in a spruce tree.

All in all, it was a fantastic day, and though the temperature was below freezing, the beautiful sunshine and clear sky made for a wonderful birding adventure to begin the new year.

Here's to another wonderful year of birding!

Full species list:

43 species total, as follows: Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Barn Owl, Anna's Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Lewis's Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, Mountain Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, American Robin, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, House Finch, and House Sparrow.