



# Utah County Birders: March 2019 Newsletter

## UCB Captain's Log, March 2019

by Keeli Marvel

### **Songs and Sounds of Birds**

The diversity of sounds birds are able to produce is amazing – just as amazing as the ways they produce them. Birds make sounds for a number of reasons. The number one reason is to attract a mate and defend a territory, but other reasons include individual identification, communication of a threat like the presence of a predator, or other communication such as the location of food, or the desire to be fed. Bird vocalizations can take several different forms including songs, calls, call notes, and chip notes. Some species even have regional dialects (like accents).

Some species have a distinct call or song that rarely varies, while other species, like the Northern Mockingbird, mimic other birds

and build up a repertoire of various calls. My favorite example of this is the lyrebird that is found in Australia. If you pull up the YouTube video website and search for lyrebird there is a video clip narrated by Sir David Attenborough of a lyrebird mimicking the most remarkable sounds. They can mimic just about everything, and

the one in the video mimics chainsaws, car alarms, and camera shutters. They build as diverse a repertoire of calls as possible for the same reason Northern Mockingbirds do – to attract a mate— and the one with the most diverse collection of calls may be the one that gets the girl. Some species in the parrot and corvid (ravens, crows, etc...) families are even able to mimic human speech.



**Wilson's Snipe**  
*by John Crawley*

Some bird species communicate with sounds that are not actually vocalizations. Woodpeckers use their beaks to drum on trees and a variety of other surfaces in their environment. Other species produce noise mechanically through the manipulation of air and feathers. An example of this is the noise Wilson's Snipe make. I remember the first time I heard this, I was driving around the end of Deer Creek and I stopped to scan a marsh and heard this sound I could only describe as a "wubba wubba wubba" sort of noise. I found out later it's called winnowing, and snipe use the noise to attract mates and defend territory. The sound is made by moving air very quickly over their specially modified outer tail feathers. Another example of unique bird noises many of you are familiar with is the sound the male greater sage-grouse make when they are on the lek, or communal breeding ground. The bubbly or blurby sound is made by the inflation of air sacs in the male's chest, and is used as a display to attract females. Another very different lekking bird group in South America, the manakins, make unique buzzy/snappy noises during their courtship display. This noise is made by a movement of their wings snapping against their legs very very quickly.

Bird calls can be very difficult to learn, however, learning to ID birds by their call can be very helpful in the field. Many resources exist to help birders learn to identify bird calls. Smart phone apps such as iBird provide a handy field guide complete with recordings of songs and calls. A free online resource called Xeno Canto (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/>) provides a database of recorded bird sounds complete with location information (good for comparing dialects). The best teacher though, in my opinion, is practice and experience.

As we move into spring in the next couple of months the birds are going to start getting more vocal as they migrate back to their breeding habitats and start establishing territories and advertising for mates. My advice is to get out there, see some birds, and see how many calls you can identify. You might be surprised! Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel, President – Utah County Birders

## **MARCH MEETING:**

**Thursday March 14th, 2019 at 7:00 PM** - at the Monte L. Bean Museum. [Map to Museum](#)

UCB Club Meeting- Come and share thoughts with the board and other members for future field trip and monthly meeting ideas, big birding trip ideas, and provide input on adopting a shoreline section of Utah Lake.

---

## **FIELD TRIPS:**

### **March 2, 2019 - Waterfowl and Raptors!!!**

Meet at the Payson Walmart at 9am NE corner. We look for waterfowl and Raptors! What a combination! We will start at Spring Lake, then go to Salem Pond, Salem Marshes and North Salem Marshes. We will then head to the Benjamin area looking for Raptors on our way to Lincoln Beach!

### **March 23, 2019 - Greater Sage Grouse-Emma Park Road**

Meet at 6 am at the Chevron just off of Powerhouse road at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon. It is a early trip but well worth it!

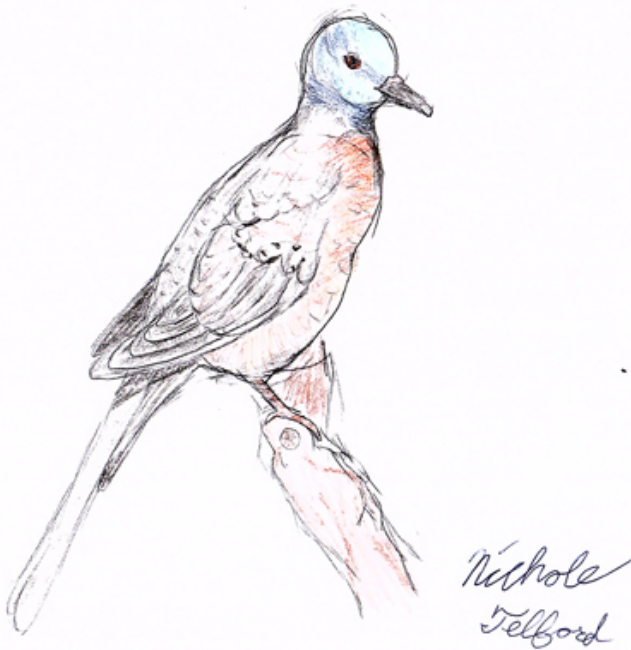
## Bird of the Month:

### **Passenger Pigeon** (*Ectopistes migratorius*)

by Nichole Telford

What do dinosaurs, dodos, and passenger pigeons have in common? They are all now extinct, never to live again. The passenger pigeon is a bird that was driven to extinction in the 1900s. Consequently, I have never seen it, but I have read sources written by those who had. Charles Whitman, a keeper of captive passenger pigeons, described them as being actors. They would readily attack birds that tried to steal their nests, but if they fought back the pigeons would shy away, even if the bird was half their size. Audubon saw the passenger pigeons when they passed him in a large flock that lasted for three days. Richard Fluke was a friend of Martha, the last passenger pigeon. He was also probably one of the last people alive who saw passenger pigeons. The passenger pigeon was killed by humans hunting them too much.

The passenger pigeon sort of looked like a large mourning dove in shape. Males had blueish heads and red breasts. Females were gray all over. Squabs, passenger pigeon babies, were fat from feeding off of pigeon milk, produced by both the mother and



*Drawing by the author*

the father. Squabs would be so fat that if they fell out of their nests (which were just masses of twigs and sticks) they would just sit on the ground and their parents would have to feed them there. Squabs, males, and females were all good to eat, so they were hunted by Indians and white men.

Above it is mentioned that humans hunted passenger pigeons to extinction. Now, understand that passenger pigeons were by no means rare. In fact, they probably had the biggest population of birds in North America, around 5 billion birds. Now, passenger pigeons went from 5 billion to none in about 50 years, so it was a big deal. Indians hunted passenger pigeons before European settlers arrived, but it was just like the herds of bison in the plains. Indians hunted them, but wouldn't have ever hunted them so much they could be close to extinction. Passenger pigeons were tasty and populous. That combination made them sought after and easy to kill. I found recipes that called for six pigeons. That means six or more being killed every day when they felt like having pigeon for dinner.

There were even competitions with prizes to see how many passenger pigeons you could kill. Many people got dozens of pigeons, and others got around 50. Add that up and you get hundreds of pigeons killed for the sake of sport. I don't know how often these contests were held, but I would imagine that at least a couple thousand pigeons were killed each year just from these contests. Of course, several more thousands of pigeons taken away for food, and many more were shipped across railroads to different states. Some numbers I

got from a book by Clive Ponting are, "During 1874 Oceana County in Michigan sent over 1,000,000 birds to the markets in the east and two years later was sending 400,000 a week at the height of the season and a total of 1,600,000 in the year." 1.5 million birds from one county in Michigan, just *one*. No wonder this species went extinct.

In 1900, hunting was no longer profitable. There weren't enough passenger pigeons to bother with, as flocks had gone from millions to only a few dozen. Many people, realizing the scarcity of the birds, tried keeping captive flocks. Those small flocks died out from avian tuberculosis and other things. But Charles Whitman had sent one small female to the Cincinnati Zoo. That female's name was Martha. She sat on a perch for people to stare at her, throw sand at her in hopes of making her fly. Her passenger pigeon companions, including a male named George, died, leaving her all alone. Martha lived for a long time, trembling with palsy, never laying a fertile egg, until September 1st, 1914. No one knows exactly how she died, but they found her on the floor of her cage, still and silent. The passenger pigeon would never fly again.

Only one good thing comes from this, and that is the laws passed because of their extinction. First, the Lacey Act. It protects endemic birds and wildlife, creating punishments for killing like the sort the passenger pigeons faced. From the Lacey Act there came the Bird Migratory Species Act. This law protects migratory species' plumage, their nests, and them in general. Finally, people were just more aware of the harm they could do to the environment. It is because of that awareness that the California Condor for example, is alive today. When people realized they were dying off from lead poisoning, they actively did something about it, raising the population to a better number. We ourselves can learn from the passenger pigeon too. The passenger pigeon is gone, and it will never come back (unless we find a way to do genetic engineering like in Jurassic Park). However, we can protect the bird species we know in order to stop a tragedy like the passenger pigeon's extinction from ever happening again. ■

## Field Trip - 23 Feb 2019

### Delta Snow Goose Festival

*Report by Suzi Holt*

*Photos by Suzi Holt & Amanda Tinoco*



Fifteen birders left Payson around 7:30 am and headed west to Delta. We passed a few Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, a Golden Eagle, lots of Common Ravens, Woodhouse's Scrub Jays and Horned Larks on the way down. We arrived about 9:15 am at Gunnison Bend Reservoir and it was frozen! The DNR told us to head to 50, then 5000 then go right on 500 to 3000. On our way East on 500 we saw a huge flock flying to the South. We watched them circle about and land in the field. They were so close! We saw them without a scope this year from the warmth of the car. We counted at least 8 Ross's Geese and it was fun to have them close enough to compare

with the Snow Geese. We estimated around 5000 Snow Geese! Such a beautiful sight! Everyone needs to experience this at least once.

We took quite a few photos and then decided to wait for them to fly again. About one minute later something triggered them to fly and half of them took to the skies. What a sight and what a sound! We were so happy!

We decided to head back to Mosida to try for the Longspurs. The snow had melted a lot and we only saw about 15 **Horned Larks**. We did have a few bonus birds, **Rough-legged Hawks**, **Red-tailed Hawks**, a beautiful **Ferruginous Hawk** and a couple **Great-horned Owls**. We stopped at Warm Springs for Jeremy Telford's birthday cake and Snow Geese Balloons! Thanks to all who came! ■

## Field Trip -2 Feb 2019

### Gull Identification Clinic

*Report and Photos by Suzi Holt*

Yesterday we heeded the invitation from [Billy Fenimore](#) and a group of us made our way up to the George S and Delores Dore' Eccles Wildlife Education Center in Farmington Bay for a Gull Identification Clinic/field trip. We were welcomed by [Billy](#) and other volunteers and saw many dear birding friends. It did not disappoint! It was amazing!!! I could have sat there for another 2 hour rerun by [Cameron Cox](#)!!! He made gulling look so fun and so easy...I was pumped to get out in the field to give it a try. I learned a lot but most important was "Structure and Size". And to also recognize the gulls as you would a friend not just try to identify them. It will take practice! I am so grateful for experts and their willingness to share and that is what [Billy Fenimore](#) and the Education Center is all about. I would highly recommend taking your families. Get up there, the resource is phenomenal!

After the presentation we all headed out in a huge group to practice. I was grateful for the opportunity to practice and to share in the enthusiasm of so many as we watched 100's of "seagulls" GULLS, small ones from Ring-billed to Iceland's (Thayer's) and California to the big Herring and Lesser Black-backed gulls. They were poking at 6-10 pound sushi (CARP)!

I loved watching them fly and practiced looking for the mirror, the gony spot on the bill and the backwards 7 wing tip, the pot-bellied or the slim and sleek, the rounded or bulky squared off head, the clean white or the ones that were just a "ness".. What a fun experience!!! Thanks to so many from Nikon to Swarovski scopes ready and willing to share. Thank you! Thank You! Thank You!

Here are a few of my so so good shots, but yes I could recognize a few of them! ■



Herring Gull (top) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (bottom)?