



Utah County Birders: July 2019 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, July 2019

by Keeli Marvel

Hello birders! Welcome to July! With the cold wet spring we just had it sure feels like we just went straight from winter into summer, and here we are. I hope you all got out to see some birds this spring and enjoy the spring weather!

A couple weeks ago now Sam and I did our breeding bird survey route out at Fish Springs NWR. The count starts at one of the Pony Express markers east of the refuge and runs 25 miles into and around the refuge. We usually see a pretty good range of species on the count, and we got a decent number this year as well. The water levels are really high this year so the mudflats weren't as extensive, so our shorebird numbers were down. We did find two SNOWY PLOVER and a surprise

PEREGRINE FALCON perched on the road. Other highlights include tons of SAVANNAH SPARROWS, several BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS, CASPIAN and FORSTER'S TERNS, a heard only AMERICAN BITTERN, a COMMON POORWILL and several COMMON NIGHTHAWKS, a SHORT-EARED OWL in between points at the beginning of the route, tons of COMMON YELLOWTHROATS, and a WILSON'S PHALAROPE, LONG-BILLED CURLEW, and a trifecta of sparrows: BREWER'S SPARROW, BLACK-THROATED, and LARK SPARROWS.

Overall it was a good count with decent numbers.

The absolute highlight of the trip, though, was a lifer for Sam and a state bird for me that we spotted on the drive out there and then again the next day in the same place on the way back through Dugway. We left straight from our office on and drove out one of our west gates to cut the travel time out to

Fish Springs. As we were driving out toward the gate a male LARK BUNTING flew across the road! Then again the next day we spotted it in almost the exact same spot keeping company with the local HORNED LARKS. It was quite possibly the easiest lifer Sam has ever gotten and we were stoked.

Hope you all are enjoying the summer and I look forward to seeing you out Birding! We will have our end of summer potluck in August, so save that evening and come join us for food and socializing!

Happy Birding!

Keeli



Lark Bunting
by Paul Higgins

JULY MEETING:

Thursday, July 11th: FIELD TRIP JULY 11, 2019 9:30 pm

So for our monthly meeting we will meet at Payson Canyon Kiwanis Park (Beer can flats). We will try for Owls!

FIELD TRIPS:

July 20th at 7:00 am - Diamond Fork Canyon

Meet at the Chevron on Powerhouse Rd at the mouth of SF canyon at 7:00 am. Bring a lunch!

7 Peregrine Falcon *(Falco peregrinus)* by Alton Thygerson

When I hear or see the word Peregrine, Clayton White's name is often instantly recalled. We were once in the same Latter-day Saint ward and shared the same employer but seldom bumped into one another on campus. For the fascinating story about Clayton's career heavily involving Peregrines, obtain a copy of his book, *Peregrine Quest*.



Peregrine Falcon
by Kent Keller ©Kent R. Keller

Once called the "Duck Hawk," Peregrines are widely distributed from the tundra to the tropics, from wetlands to deserts, and from the flat plains to mountain ledges. About the only places they are not found is the Amazon Basin, the Sahara Desert, and most of the steppes of central and eastern Asia and Antarctica. It's one of the most widely distributed birds in the world.

Many people associate the Peregrine with wilderness areas. None of the falcon species build their own nests. Instead they use cliff ledges or stick nests constructed by other raptors or corvids. Man-made structures, such as nest boxes, bridges, and building ledges and crevices, are also

used. When nesting in the middle of big cities, they are conspicuous and easy to see.

While serving as a Church Security Department officer on Temple Square a few years ago (incidentally, our Dennis Shirley did the same type of service), a nest box with a camera was set up on an upper floor ledge of the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. Its intent was to allow

people to follow the hatching and fledging of newborn Peregrines on-line. Another service missionary officer from California was so enamored with their growing up that he may have watched them as much as he was watching for illegal and unusual human behavior on the security monitors – he even named the chicks and could point them out on the screen and call them by name.

... With the widespread use of chemicals (e.g., DDT) during the 1950s and 1960s that lowered reproduction, the Peregrine was greatly harmed. DDT reduced the amount of calcium in the eggshells and with thinner shells, fewer falcon eggs survived to hatch. In several parts of the world, such as the eastern United States, this species became extinct. Thankfully, by 1970 the Peregrine was federally protected in the United States, and the chemical culprits (e.g., DDT) were banned in North America by 1972. Since then, Peregrines have made a strong recovery.

The name Peregrine means “wanderer,” and northern-nesting peregrines are a long-distance migratory species. Most spend only a few months over the northern third of their North American breeding range, but some populations remain sedentary.

Falconry

The peregrine has been highly sought as a falconry bird for more than 3,000 years. It’s one of the easier falcons to train. They are occasionally used to scare away birds at airports to reduce the risk of bird-plane strikes. Captive breeding methods has led to peregrines being commercially available for falconry use.

“Stooping”

The Peregrine is well known for holding the wings against the body as it free-falls. Measurements using airspeed indicators attached to birds and have recorded their and other bird flight speeds.

The peregrine falcon reaches faster speeds than any other animal on the planet when performing the stoop, which involves soaring to a great height and then diving steeply at speeds over 200 mph, hitting one wing of its prey so as not to harm itself on impact.

The below table shows the four fastest birds. The Peregrine surpasses all other birds. Go the source cited below the table for additional fast birds.

Species	Average horizontal speed	Maximum horizontal speed	Average diving speed	Maximum airspeed
Peregrine falcon	40–56 mph	68 mph	200 mph	242 mph
Golden eagle	28–32 mph	80 mph	150 mph	200 mph
Grey-headed albatross		78.9 mph		
Gyrfalcon	50–68 mph	90 mph	116–130 mph	130 mph

Source: Wikipedia “List of Birds by Flight Speed”

The average age in the wild is up to 19 years 9 months. Fledglings at cliffs may be killed by other raptors, especially Great Horned Owls and Golden Eagles. Urban fledglings may have collisions with automobiles, windows, and other human-made objects.

Identification

Adult Peregrine Falcon

- Size of a crow but longer looking.
- Black head from crown to below the eyes with “sideburns” makes the bird look like it’s wearing a helmet.
- Very large head, wide shoulders (looks like an elongated teardrop)
- Upperparts bluish-gray (becoming more blackish on head).
- Underparts are whitish below with blackish horizontal barring on belly and checkered underwings.

Flight Description:

- Long, narrow, pointed wings
- Soars on flat wings
- Steady in flight at all times
- Powerful, fluid, whip-like, “rolling” wing beats

Similar Species

These Utah falcon species can be confused with a Peregrine:

- *Merlin*: Smaller; heavily streaked underparts; black tail with wide whitish bands; pale face
- *Prairie Falcon*: Paler overall; light brown (sandy) upperparts; whitish underparts streaked with heavy brown spots; whitish face; brown barred tail; black “armpits.”
- *Gyr Falcon*: extremely rare in Utah; it’s much larger than a Peregrine.

All Falcons have wing beats that are usually steady and uninterrupted. Buteos, accipiters, and Harriers flap in a series and then glide.

Jerry Liguori says that when soaring, the Peregrine’s silhouette resembles that of a “cocked bow and arrow.”

Sources:

- Clark, William S. and Brian K. Wheeler, *Hawks of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company) 2001.
- Dunne, Pete, *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company) 2006.
- *Everything You Want to Know About the Peregrine Falcon*, Cornell Lab eNews (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology).
- Liguori, Jerry and Brian Sullivan, *Raptor ID app* (Salt Lake City: HawkWatch International).
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- White, Clayton M., *Peregrine Quest* (Ranchester, Wyoming: Western Sporting) 2006.

June Meeting Field Trip - Warm Springs WMA - 13 June 2019

Report and Photos by Suzi Holt

For our June meeting we decided to do a field trip. Twenty-four birders met with a threatening summer thunder storm looming over Warm Springs WMA.

The American Bittern was a no show, I am sure he didn't like the rain drops! We felt lucky to see a few **Common Yellowthroats, Barn Swallows, Yellow Warblers, American Robins, Western Kingbirds, a Northern Harrier, Red-winged Blackbirds**, a couple fly by's of **Common Nighthawks** a **Northern Harrier** and a **Great Blue Heron**.

I heard a metallic unfamiliar call, so Keeli and Terri came over to help and it was a beautiful FOY **Eastern Kingbird** for many. We called out my **Virginia Rail** friends, They were talkative but no shows. At the end of the road we scanned the fields for a Short-eared Owl but I think they were hunkering down from the storm as well.

We drove down to the "Goshen Ocean" (East Goshen Pond) and saw **Gadwall** and **Cinnamon Teal** with little ones, **Northern Pintail, American Avocets**, some good looks at **Wilson's Phalaropes, Canada Geese** with goslings, **Black-necked Stilts, Killdeer**, more **Common Nighthawks, California Gulls** and lots and lots of crazy **Willet's!** We had a few new comers and I hope they felt welcome!

Good times and good birds despite the weather!



Eastern Kingbird