



Utah County Birders: October 2019 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, October 2019

Text and photos by Keeli Marvel

Hi there birders! I'm excited to have something to report to you this month. I spent a long weekend visiting a friend and her new baby at Vandenberg Air Force Base in southcentral California a couple of weekends ago and picked up another lifer. Birding wasn't obviously the primary purpose of the trip, meeting the new little one and catching up with an old friend was, but the baby was super chill and my friend such a great host I still ended up getting in some great birding opportunities.

The first morning we got up and had breakfast on the patio of their house on Vandenberg where we had the company of several resident **ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRDS**. We went for a walk that evening around a natural trail/walking path through a wooded area by the gym on base and I picked up **WRENTITS, OAK TITMICE, WESTERN BLUEBIRDS, JUNCOS, BLACK PHOEBES, a GREAT HORNED OWL, CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAY, ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLERS,** a surprise **TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** and several heard only woodpeckers (mostly **DOWNY** and **HAIRY**). My target bird was a Nuttall's Woodpecker, which I'm pretty sure I heard that night, but wasn't able to get a look at.



View of the coast with the Channel Is. way off in the distance

The next morning we set out to explore Vandenberg and I got to see the launch pads where SpaceX and other companies launch rockets into space. We drove out to the coast and I saw lots of **PELAGIC CORMORANTS, a HEERMAN'S GULL** and lots of **WESTERN GULLS,** and... of all things... a **WANDERING TATTLER!** Which, had I not just seen on the causeway in UT, I'm sure I would have had a harder time identifying. There were a ton of raptors and turkey vultures cruising around the base, and we got some pretty awesome views of them on the wing at eye level when we drove up to one of the peaks on base to take in the view.

My second to last morning there I checked eBird and decided on a hunch to take a quick walk to a line of trees near the neighborhood my friend lives in. My hunch paid off and I got my lifer! A male **NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER** flew right into a tree next to me and sat on a branch giving me great views for my lifer! They're pretty similar to ladderback woodpeckers, but

there's not really a range overlap, which makes it nice to identify them. He was in good company with the **AMERICAN CROWS, CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAYS, WESTERN BLUEBIRDS, OAK TITMICE**, and **BLACK PHOEBE** and was my 596th lifer bird.

That afternoon we rounded my trip off with a walk on Wall Beach on where I found **SANDERLINGS** and several **SNOWY PLOVERS**, including a banded one - one of the T&E-listed coastal population. The coastal population of Snowy Plover has experienced serious declines caused by the loss of nesting habitat due to coastal development, predation by cats, and other anthropogenic causes. Because of those declines, the coastal population (but not the ones in the interior of the US like the ones here in Utah) was listed on the Endangered Species list as Threatened which has allowed managing agencies and landowners to fund conservation measures to help the population recover. Vandenberg actually closes beaches during nesting season to help ensure that the birds have the space and safety they need to make it successfully through nesting season. This and other conservation actions are helping the Snowy Plover population make a comeback.

As I mentioned before, the Nuttall's Woodpecker was bird #596 on my life list. Next up: I'm hoping for Black-backed and White-headed Woodpeckers on an upcoming trip to Yosemite and Reno. Not sure what bird #600 will be, but I'm hoping for something good, and I'll be sure to tell you all about it when I get there! Thanks for continuing on this Birding journey with me!

Happy Birding!

Keeli Marvel

OCTOBER MEETING:

Thursday, Oct 10, 2019, 7 PM at the Monte L Bean Museum in Provo, UT

Woodpeckers of North America. We've learned about owls, now we are going to learn about woodpeckers! Come join us for an informative evening learning about the different woodpecker species that occur in North America and the unique roles they play in the bird world.

FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday, Oct 12, 2019, All Day

The Big Sit! We will start at 6am, on the Southwest corner of the Provo Airport Dike. Come join us for another year of UCB participation in the Big Sit, an international non competitive bird count sponsored by Bird Watcher's Digest. We will have a count circle established on the Southwest corner of the Provo airport dike. The goal is to spot as many species from inside our count circle as possible. (Birds must be seen by a participant standing in the circle, but the bird does not have to be in the circle.) Everyone is welcome, stop by for a little or a long while and help us count birds! For more info on The Big Sit: <https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigisit/about.php>

Saturday, October 26th 8 am – TBA

Common Raven *(Corvus corax)*

by Kristin Telford

Since this October is the 170th anniversary of Edgar Allen Poe's death, I thought it was appropriate to talk about "The Raven." Yes, in Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem, this bird symbolizes death and loss, it's true that a group of ravens is known as an "unkindness", and in literature and movies, the raven is often depicted as a messenger of bad things to come. However, there is so much more to this creature than a spooky bird that fits in with Halloween.

In the poem, "The Raven," the title character is heard to tap on the narrator's door or window. Ravens have strong thick bills so this would be no problem for this bird to make a loud enough noise to wake the narrator from a doze.

Since ravens are both predators and scavengers, they can use their bills for a variety of purposes. They use both their bills and their intelligence to raid other birds' nests with one raven distracting the parent on the nest, luring it away, while another raven comes to take the eggs.

Ravens have been known to follow wolves around to get leftovers after a kill. Omnivorous, they will also root through trash to find something to eat.

Ravens will use their bills for defense as well as offense and can learn to use tools. When getting too close to their nest, some researchers found ravens who pried rocks from the ground and flung them at the researchers. Perhaps in Edgar Allen Poe's poem, the raven used a stick or a rock to tap at the door.

When the narrator of the poem opened the window, in came a raven to perch above his chamber door. Ravens are the largest of the "perching birds" of the order Passeriformes and are of the order Corvidae. Passerines are also known as "songbirds," though I don't think much of the raven's rough croaky "singing," as compared to other passerines such as the Western meadowlark.

There was a time I thought ravens just made low-pitched "Caw" sounds but from my own experience, I've been surprised at the different sounds they can make. Once, while driving along the causeway to Antelope Island, we stopped to take pictures of a Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) who sounded like it was barking like a dog.



Common Raven
by Jeremy and Kristin Telford

Ravens can mimic other sounds even to the point of imitating human speech so it's no surprise that as the raven perched above the chamber door in Edgar Allen Poe's poem, it quoted, "Nevermore."

As we go in to this Halloween season, as you travel through Utah County, when you see these scruffy-chinned, large black birds (much larger than a crow), I hope you think more of them than, "There's just another raven." Take some time to observe them. Look for signs of their intelligence. Watch them fly. Do you see them doing acrobatic tricks in the air? Listen to the various sounds they make. Remember these amazing birds because they may remember you.

-Kristin Telford

Nebo Bench Field Trip- 14 Sep 2019

by Suzi Holt

6:00 am came early and it was cold this morning! Five of us met at the Nebo Bench Trailhead a little before 8:00. It was still in the shade and a little nippy. We saw most of the regulars that come in for a bath and morning drink, such as the **Mountain Chickadees, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Dark-eyed Juncos, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskin, Western Tanagers** and **White-crowned Sparrows**. We also saw a **Red-tailed Hawk, Brown Creeper, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Northern Flicker, Cassin's Finch** and **Common Ravens**. We heard a **Downy Woodpecker** and a pack of hound dogs that had treed a bear down in the ravine...nope we didn't get to see a bear :(we were tempted to abandon the birds and go for a hike though

We spent about two hours there then stopped at the Mt. Nebo lookout. We had a flock of **Clark's Nutcrackers** fly by and watched a couple hikers ascend the second highest peak.

On the way down we stopped at Rock Springs and saw a **Townsend's Solitaire, Wilson's Warbler**, a couple **MacGillivray's Warblers**, plus a few more **White-crowned Sparrows**, a **Turkey Vulture** and **Pine Siskins**.

By Jone's Ranch we saw a tree with **Turkey Vultures** and a **Osprey** with his catch.

It was a fun day and nice to enjoy the beauty of the mountains.



Western Tanager

River Lane / Sandy Beach Field Trip 12 Sep 2019

by Suzi Holt

Thirteen Birders met at River Lane. We quickly found a flock of **Black-capped Chickadees** and started birding on along the dirt road.

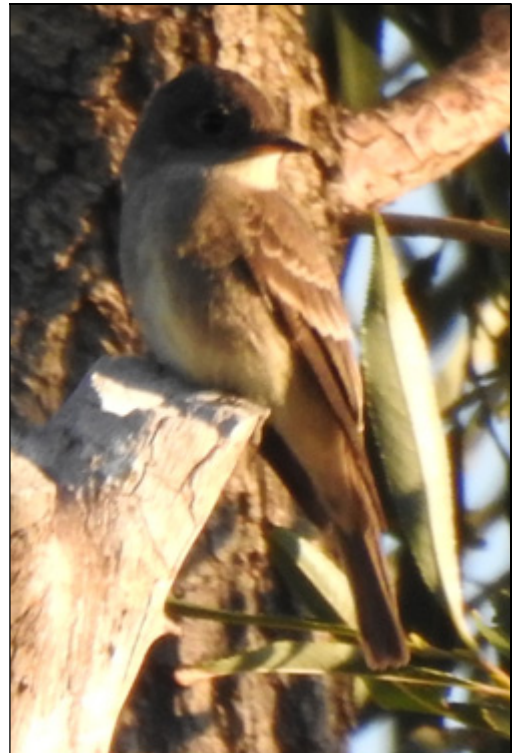
First off we spotted 26 **Common Nighthawks** flying up high above the trees! Quite a sight! The mosquitos and other bugs were out in force as well. After dousing ourselves in bug spray, we started checking for flitting in the trees. The birds were up high in the canopy and it was

tough to see. Some saw the Black-capped chickadees, others saw a **Nashville Warbler**, some a **Plumbeous Vireo**. We all saw **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Western Wood Pewees**, **American Robin's** and a few **Western Tanagers**. We also heard a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**.

Down the road we stopped and walked towards Sandy Beach. The water is still really high and there isn't any beach. We did see **American White Pelicans**, **Mallards**, **Ring-billed Gulls** and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. On the way back down River Lane we heard the unmistakable call of a **Red-tailed Hawk**. Some saw a **Great-horned Owl** towards the end of the dirt road.

We stopped along River Lane where you can cut over to Swede Lane and saw a few **Vesper Sparrows** along the dirt road and on the fence between the sunflowers. There were a few **Mourning Doves**, over a hundred White-faced Ibis flying by along with two **Sandhill Cranes**. A few more **Common Nighthawks** flew over really low!. We also heard a **Ring-necked Pheasant** and a **Western Meadowlark**.

To top it off we watched the big Harvest Moon make it's way up behind Maple Mountain. And the sunset was beautiful as well! Thanks for joining us!



Western Wood-Pewee
by Sharon Anderson