



Utah County Birders: January 2020 Newsletter

President's Message - *January 2020*

by Mabelle Johnson

Hello Birders, my name is Mabelle Johnson and I will be the Utah County Birders club president for 2020! Did you know that Keeli Marvel was our president for 7 years?? She was fabulous, in fact the consensus was to just have her keep on going! Keeli has a passion for birding that has been inspiring to our group. She traveled a lot and wrote about her sightings in her monthly articles. She lined up interesting monthly meetings for us, and was there for most of the field trips and bird counts too! Thank you Keeli, you are awesome, and lucky for us, Keeli will stay on board as the program coordinator!

Now a little bit about me, I was born and raised in Orem. (Mike and I moved to Provo 3 years ago.) I attended Orem High School where I met my husband Mike, and got my start in birding through a class called Unified Studies with Al Davis and Cheryl Lewis as the teachers. In that daily 3 hour block class we learned everything from Humanities, Old English, poetry and water color, to geography, fly fishing and cross-country skiing. We did a unit on bird ID and it really interested me. I got a Golden Field guide and read it like a novel, couldn't put it down. I did a lot of birding in the late 70's and most of the 80's, then I had to adult and work full time and be a mom. Mike and I have 4 kids, all boys except for 3, and 5 grandkids, all girls. We do a lot of camping and 4-wheeling together. Mike is not a birder, in the Unified Studies class, he got hooked on fly-fishing and trees and plants. When we go camping he goes fishing and I go birding.



I would say my 'hook bird' is the Western Meadowlark, that song! I love the vibrant yellow and the melodious song. My favorite birds are Owls. Mysterious, secretive, spectacular! Like anyone who collects 'things', I have a lot of owl 'things' at my house, figurines, pictures, drawings, books, pellets. It's not weird, not obsessive, not at all. My grandkids call me Grandma Hootie, or just Hootie. It's great.

I'm not what you would call 'well traveled' as a birder. I really enjoyed the challenge year when we had to visit all 29 counties in Utah for Gold. I love Utah birding, we have a great variety here. Other than that I've only birded in Wyoming, California and Florida. I get to go on an Alaskan cruise this summer, and Texas and Panama or Costa Rica are on my bucket list. Also, I'm not a 'great' birder either. I know

some stuff, and I enjoy it a lot, but as far as being a 'go-to', I'm not that, I'm still learning, but I love the process of seeing and identifying birds and I learn a lot from all of you!

I work at the BYU Student Health Center as the business office supervisor. I officially joined the UCB group in 2012. I'm looking forward to a great challenge year, the 2020 challenge will be really fun, it should get us all out and about throughout the state! Invite your friends and family out on field trips and to our monthly meetings, and take them to your favorite birding spots. Join our Facebook page and sign up for the newsletter email. Get out there, get involved! And especially - have fun!

Good Birding everyone, see you out there!

Thanks,
Machelle

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January Meeting:

Thursday, January 9th, 2020, at 7pm

UCB Dinner at **Golden Corral** (225 W University Pkwy) in Orem. We will have a back room reserved for our group and will **introduce the new board** and the **2020 challenge**. Pay on your own and join us for dinner!

Up-coming Field Trips:

January 1, from 8 am to 12 pm
New Year's Day Field Trip

Meet at the Salem Pond parking lot at 8 am.

Let's start the **2020 CHALLENGE** year off with at least 20 SPECIES or more on the first day of 2020!!!

(This is item #1 on the 2020 Challenge List)

January 4th, All day
Payson Christmas Bird Count

The Payson CBC will be Saturday Jan 4th. Meet at 7:30 am at the Payson McDonalds for assignments. Contact Bryan Shirley for more information.

801-722-9346

Bird of the Month:

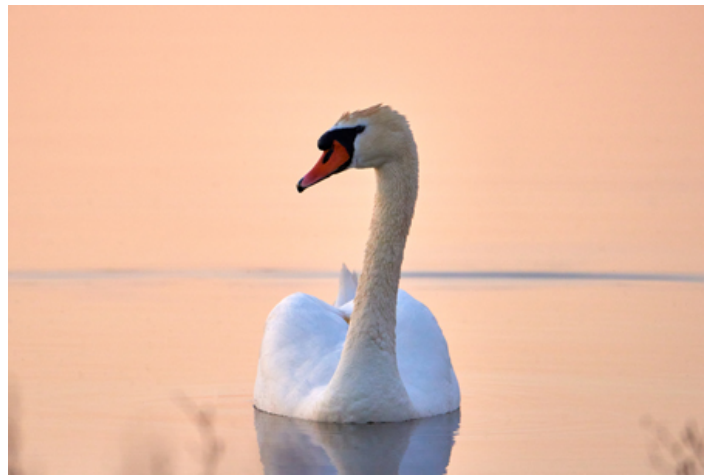
Mute Swan *(Cygnus olor)*

by Asher and Jesse Lee

As we drive past the small pond along the old highway, Asher sits up in his seat and scans the rows of cattails. Winter is closing in, and he is religiously searching for his large feathered friend who he has aptly nicknamed ‘Snowy’. This has become a daily ritual. We are anxious to know if he will be forced to leave for warmer waters or if he will maintain the keep of his small kingdom once the ice takes over.

Snowy is an adult mute swan, who is easily recognized by his long neck, black feet, and bright orange bill. He has been a regular in this location for the past few years, but we are not really sure if he is a pet or if he just happened upon this particular pond and declared it as his domain.

According to allaboutbirds.org, Mute Swans in North America have descended from swans that were imported from Europe from the mid 1800s through early 1900s to adorn large estates, city parks, and zoos. Since this time, escapees have established breeding populations in many areas across the United States.



In many cultures, these large beautiful birds symbolize romance and fidelity. The mute swan gained fame as the lead in Hans Christian Anderson’s ‘The Ugly Duckling’. In this short story, a homely young cygnet was not accepted by the other barnyard fowl until he matured into a majestic swan. Interestingly enough, the swan’s woes of unacceptance didn’t end with the fairy tale. Mute swans are seen by many as a troublesome invasive species that destroy fragile wetland and aquatic habitat while chasing out other birds and animals. The mute swan’s feeding habits can devastate grass beds and disrupt important habitat for fish, shellfish and macroinvertebrates. To feed, Mute Swans stick their heads underwater and tear at plant life while searching for insects, fish, frogs, and aquatic vegetation. Adults can eat up to eight pounds of plant matter a day and can uproot an additional 20 pounds while feeding.

In places like the Chesapeake Bay, they have crowded out other birds, most notably Black Skimmers and Least Terns. Conservation organizations, including the Audubon Society, have shown support in controlling Mute Swan populations, while animal welfare groups and other organizations like ‘Save our Mute Swans’ fiercely defend the birds.

On another front, debates occur between birders as to whether or not mute swans sightings are valid for listing purposes. We won’t attempt to settle this argument, but will share a couple of thoughts to consider:

1. The Mute Swan is not listed among the 465 species approved by the Utah Birds Committee (through January 2019), but is present under the Non-Established Introduced Species Auxiliary list.
2. Providing sighting information to organizations like ebird.org may prove to be helpful as the data can be used to monitor bird counts and population distribution.
3. For serious listers or those needing more ammunition for debate, take a minute to read the Winging It Article *What Counts? And Why? Says Who?*

Our family has enjoyed watching Snowy float gracefully around his small domain. Perhaps this is because we have not attempted to introduce ourselves. Mute Swans are known to be territorial and very aggressive towards both humans and animals, and have even been reported to have broken arms or legs of those that have ventured too close. Though not quite as noisy as other swans such as the Tundra or Trumpeter, they will hiss, snort, and yap to communicate to friend or foe. Occasionally, an angry Mute Swan will make a shrill trumpeting sound and charge with their wings raised, busking in a threatening display. Adult Mute Swans can weigh over 35 pounds, and are one of the largest flying birds in the world. In fact, one cob (male swan) weighed in after death at over 50 pounds, but researchers were not able to confirm if the large swan was able to reach lift off before he passed.

As the snow falls down upon the pond, we wonder what will become of Snowy, and are reminded of the tale told by Hans Christian Anderson which echoes the worth of a seemingly homely, mute cygnet.

References:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mute_Swan/overview

<http://listing.aba.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Skrentny-What-Counts-and-Why-Winging-It-Dec-2013.pdf>

<https://www.sej.org/publications/national-us/when-mute-swans-become-a-menace-what-should-be-done>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute_swan

<http://www.utahbirds.org/RecCom/AuxiliaryList.htm>

Field Trip Reports:

Provo Bird Count - 14 Dec 2019

by Bryan Shirley

This year was the 120th year of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and the 48th year in Provo. We were plagued by bad weather and few birds. We missed species that we get almost every year like Ruddy Duck, Great Horned Owl, and Stellar's Jay. We got one species never before reported on our count - a Black Phoebe on the Skipper Bay Trail. We also had 4 Great Egrets and 1 Harris's Sparrow. Our total species for the day was 83, our lowest since the 1980s. Thanks to everybody who participated!

Bryan