



Utah County Birders Newsletter

November 2023

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NOVEMBER MEETING:

Thursday November 16th at 7pm at the Bean Museum and via Zoom

Melissa Stamp, Projects Leader with the Provo River Delta Restoration Project, is going to give us an update on the progress of the restoration project. They've made significant progress and it'll be cool to hear about it and about when we can expect to start accessing that area again.

After her presentation we will discuss plans for the Christmas Bird Counts and our upcoming 2024 Birding Challenge.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

We have an opening on the board for Publicity and Facebook Page manager. Tammy Northrup has done a fabulous job for the past several years but is ready to give this responsibility to someone else. Here is an outline of what is involved:

Utah County Birders Publicity and Facebook Page board member:

Facebook:

Post information about upcoming events on the UCB Facebook page.
Monitor the FB page for spam or posts that don't follow the guidelines.
Admit people who request to join the FB page.

Publicity:

Email the monthly newsletter.
Email other info as needed.
Help with events as needed.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS:

Thursday November 2nd 7am-2pm

Join us for a midweek trip! Meet at the Harmon's on 800 N in Orem. We will meet on the west side of the gas pumps. We will drive to Starvation Reservoir and look for waterfowl and loons, and hopefully add some other species around the area. We may stop at Strawberry Reservoir on the way back. We will be back to Harmon's by around 1:45 or so. Bring a lunch!

Saturday November 18th TURKEY TROT 8am – ALL DAY

Meet at the Harmon's parking lot to the west of the gas pumps at 8 am. From there we will trot to East Lawn Cemetery for our first gobblers. Then up to Southfork. Next stop will be Diamond Fork. After that we will head up Loafer Canyon, then trot to our favorite spot in Payson Canyon. Our last stop will be Santaquin Canyon!! We will have our yummy Peanut butter chocolate turkey cookies!!! This is an all-day field trip. If you can't go to all of it, call me and I will let you know where we're at and you can join us!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – November 2023

By Yvonne Carter

As I write this message, I'm looking at some fresh snow on the mountains. Yep! It's a change in the season and our change in routines in bird watching. But it is also a time to look at new activities in bird watching in the coming year. On the main site for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, they send out a main email during the month. This month they talked about bird festivals on their site, you can check out what is happening in the world of bird festivals. You open up the list for dates and locations.

I had two sons living in Florida when I started birding. My sons would tease me that I might be traveling there to see our grandchildren OR go birding! So, I discovered the "Space Coast Bird Festival" and participated in their field trips and spent time with the vendors. This bird festival is held in January, a perfect time for birding in Florida. This bird festival had excellent field trips, but what is even more awesome is the vendor experience. Their vendors filled an entire gym! Awesome! All optics makers were there, you could try out any scope brand and receive help and advice.

I know there is an excellent bird festival in San Diego, and St. George, besides other locations. So, look at the list and expand your plans.

Happy birding!
Yvonne

For Birding Suggestions for our "ODD" Year click [here](#)

BIRD OF THE MONTH:

Rough-legged Hawk

Buteo lagopus

by Keeli Marvel

Living and birding in Utah long enough, there's certain species of birds I've come to associate with the passing of certain seasons. In the spring, warblers, hummingbirds, and flycatchers like Western Kingbirds signal spring and summer are on their way, but it's the Turkey Vultures that really ring in the spring and the season of warmth and promise of growth and gardening and summer activities for me. In the winter, when those birds have gone again, the return of our winter ducks such as Common Goldeneye, the arrival of Dark-eyed Juncos in my yard, and the frenetic movement of huge flocks of Canada Geese over my neighborhood dusk and dawn everyday signal to me that the cold, short days are coming. One species I especially look forward to seeing in the winter is the Rough-legged Hawk.



Photo by Paul Higgins

I often think of Utah and its moderate climate as providing ideal summering/breeding grounds for many species that leave us once the weather turns cold to spend their winters in warmer tropical climates. Not so for Rough-legged Hawks. They breed way up in the harsh arctic circumpolar/circumboreal regions of the world and spend their winters down here with us.

Rough-legged Hawks, *Buteo lagopus*, are a part of a group of hawks referred to as Buteos, characterized by broad rounded wings, relatively short tails, and soaring flight. This group includes other species we find in Utah such as Red-tailed Hawks, Ferruginous Hawks, and Swainson's Hawks, as well as a couple of species more commonly found in other parts of the U.S. but less often in Utah, Broad-winged Hawks and Red-shouldered Hawks.



Photo by Kendall Brown

Identification of Rough-legged Hawks, like other buteos, can be tricky with their different color morphs, but is fun once you learn the field signs to look for. They are one of the larger buteos but appear delicate with their small bills and feet and because of their small foot size you can often see them perched on power lines and on the smallest twigs at the tops of trees where they look too heavy to be balanced. They are usually a bold pattern of dark browns/blacks, and white, and light morphs have lighter streaked heads, dark wrist patches, bold dark belly bands, white at the base of the tail, and one or more dark bands at the end of the tail. Juvenile Rough-legged Hawks have a pale eye which darkens as they age into adults. My impression of them when I see them is always that of a very mottled black and white bird as opposed to the warm browns and reds we see in some of our other buteos. Rough-legged Hawks are one of three species of hawks in the U.S. with feathers all the way down to their toes, an adaptation for living in cold climates.

They're also one of very few species that will hover or "kite" while hunting (American Kestrels are another species that will do this).

Their prey includes voles, mice, and other rodents, and a good place to see them is out away from towns in less populated areas perched on power poles or hunting in agricultural fields. I look forward to seeing them every winter, and often see them on my commute through Cedar Fort/Five Mile Pass/Tooele County rural areas during the winter months. I hope you enjoy seeing them as much as I do.

Resources: Cornell University's All About Birds Website, Hawkwatch Raptor Identification, Sibley Guide to Birds. Photo credits: Paul Higgins, and Kendall Brown, on Utahbirds.org

[\[See past Bird of the Month articles\]](#)

FIELD TRIP REPORTS:

The Big Sit Saturday October 14th Skipper Bay Trail

This year's Big Sit was held in a new location at the end of the trail on Skipper Bay. We switched locations because this year, Provo Airport would not give us permission to drive on the Provo Airport Dike to reach our usual spot. Our back-up spot was along the same end of Utah Lake, though!

KC arrived and set up for our Big Sit just as the sun was lightening the sky, around 7:30 a.m. Immediately upon pulling up, he heard and spotted a **Common Nighthawk** flying away. On the way in he could hear White-crowned Sparrows, chickadees, and other birds that he was waiting to see in the circle at the end of Skipper Bay.

The first birds of the day in the circle were **Gadwall, Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Pied-billed grebe, and Western Grebe**. Esther arrived shortly after, and we added to our list: **Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Greater Yellowlegs, Caspian Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, American Goldfinch, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Yellow-rumped Warblers**. Right when KC stepped out of the circle, he saw a **Red-naped Sapsucker** fly by! Fortunately, Esther was still in the circle and saw it when KC pointed it out, so we were able to officially count it.



Photo by Esther Sumner



Photo by Esther Sumner



Photo by Esther Sumner

Around that time, Laurie and John, and Steve, and Lynn arrived and we added **American Kestrel, Western Meadowlark, Snowy Egret, American Pipit, White-faced Ibis, Downy Woodpecker, Green-winged Teal, Pine Siskin, Northern Flicker, and Ring-billed Gull** to our list.

Unfortunately, there were two sets of duck hunters out all morning. One group had biked in and stayed out of sight past the No Trespassing sign at the end of Skipper Bay. The other group was right between our circle and the lake, having boated in to hide in the grassy reeds in the water.

This meant there were somewhat regular gun shots for the first four hours of the Big Sit. We watched a lot of ducks escape, and sadly, a few ducks did not make it past the gauntlet.

We also watched some rocks spray down where their shot went a little too close to shore during the first hour. The hunters that had ridden in on bike told us they had to move because of a fisherman on a pontoon boat so it seems like there was plenty of activity on the end that we couldn't see to startle away some of the shorebirds that might have drifted in from the other end.

Lynn had to leave. Then, around 9:22 a.m., the sky started doing weird things, becoming noticeably brighter, then getting dim again as clouds rolled in front of it, then getting brighter again. The solar eclipse had begun! Esther brought glasses for everyone, and we occasionally took a peek at the sun. That's when we saw our first "solar eclipse bird," a **Rock pigeon** shooting across the sky over us, toward the sun (don't look!).

Soon after, a **California Gull** flew by, then, two **American Crows**! We finally added **Black-billed Magpie** and **American White Pelican** to our list. We also enjoyed the Belted Kingfisher doing some laps around us and landing in a tree behind us, then in front of us toward the lake, then there were two Belted Kingfishers!

We don't know if it was related to the eclipse but in those first few minutes, things started hopping in a nearby tree - **Black-capped Chickadees, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows, European Starlings** started moving around and calling. We added a **House Finch**, and then, a **Merlin** flew past us! As we were watching the Merlin, a **Cooper's hawk** gave chase, and chased it past the no trespassing sign into the trees.

We tried to look around for the hawk and merlin a bit more (by stepping out of the circle) and in the process, saw a lot of other little birds (chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet) in the trees but we weren't in our big sit circle at the time.

Laurie and John had to leave, and as they left, KC asked them to spot something special on the way out. The hunters all left too at this point, so the gunshots stopped. Maybe more birds would pop their heads out! Then, we identified a **Say's Phoebe** that landed on a log behind the no trespassing sign.

Soon after, Laurie sent word that they had complied with KC's request and spotted a beautiful male **Vermillion Flycatcher** in the campground on their way out. At that point, we all abandoned the circle for a quick outing to find the flycatcher. We picked up Leanne and Clark walking up the path on their way to join the circle and they came with us to find the flycatcher instead. Steve drove around looking but had to leave. It took the four of us a bit of walking around the campground to find the flycatcher. Finally, KC spotted it at the top of the tree. Yay! There were gasps of delight at this gorgeous little bird that stole the show today. After flycatching in front of us for a little bit, it flew toward the fence between the campground and the trail and disappeared out of our sight.

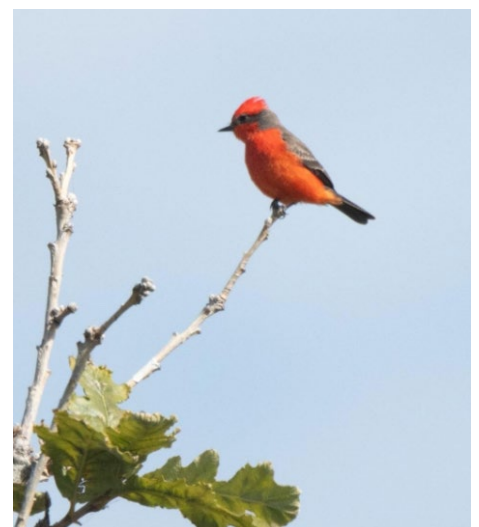


Photo by Esther Sumner

Cliff M., Natalie M., and Dave H. walked past on the path to the Big Sit spot and were right by where the flycatcher landed on the fence, so they were able to spot it too, as they headed to the Big Sit circle. Then, all of us met back up in the Big Sit circle.

Esther left. By now, the sun was back to “normal” so the House Finch was the last bird we identified in the circle during the eclipse, and the Vermilion Flycatcher was the last bird we saw before the eclipse ended. We saw many more birds, but they were ones we had already recorded earlier in the day. Leanne and Clark left.

A little while later, Cliff and Natalie left, but not before catching sight of an **American Wigeon** flying through the circle. Then both Dave H. and KC left together at around 2:30 p.m. KC returned to the circle around 4 p.m. Clarissa arrived shortly after. Then, KC told Clarissa about the Vermilion Flycatcher, and she went to go find it. KC saw a **Red-tailed Hawk**. When Clarissa returned, they spotted a **Canvasback** out in the Delta and a **Northern Shoveler** flew through the circle to add to the list.

Then, when Shawn M. joined us, and then Daxton B. came also to join in to see what we saw, and both were able to go get a look at the Vermilion Flycatcher just out of the circle. Natalie T. came also, and took her chances to see the flycatcher, but the evening was coming to a close and it wasn't around.

When everyone returned, we saw more birds, but nothing new to add to the list. However, we got to enjoy a gorgeous sunset as a group of **Snowy Egrets** flew off to roost for the night.

We were sad that some of the regulars couldn't be with us, but we enjoyed some of their amazing photos of the eclipse. We had a good turn-out all day long, and ended up seeing **48 birds** from our circle, from dawn until dusk. Thank you to everyone that joined in the fun! If you get the chance, join us next year for this fun annual tradition!



Beautiful Sunset, photo by KC Childs

BACKYARD BIRDS

Suzi Holt – Payson: I've had **Woodhouse's Scrub Jays** which aren't normal for me, so that's been fun!

Robert Parsons – Orem: Winter is coming. **Cedar Waxwings** are back. We saw a small flock feeding in the top of our trees.

Bruce Robinson – West Jordan: A 'lost' **Great Blue Heron** flyover. No backyard ponds or streams in the neighborhood.

Milt Moody – Provo: The mountain birds are returning! A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** has been coming to my bird bath for a drink. I usually have one or two of these spiffy, little streamlined birds spending a lot of time in my Blue Spruce near my feeders and bird baths. I see them climbing head-down on the trunk of the Honey Locust tree just over the fence and enjoy these unique, slightly hyper little characters. Welcome back!

Yvonne Carter – Highland: About 11 pm last week I could hear two **Great Horned Owls** hooting away, and as I listened, I could tell they were moving towards our home. They usually come near our home towards 4 or 5 am.

Spencer Halverson – Provo: We live in an apartment in Provo near the BYU stadium and we normally see **House Finches, House Sparrows** and **Starlings** every day. Recently the resident **Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay** has been coming to our feeder as well, and we've also seen **Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and even a **Northern Flicker**!

Esther Sumner – Lindon: I was pretty thrilled to see this **Ring-necked Pheasant** in my neighbor's front yard (which I can see from my yard) here in Lindon. I was also amazed and delighted to see how completely this pheasant vanished into these bushes when a car drove past.

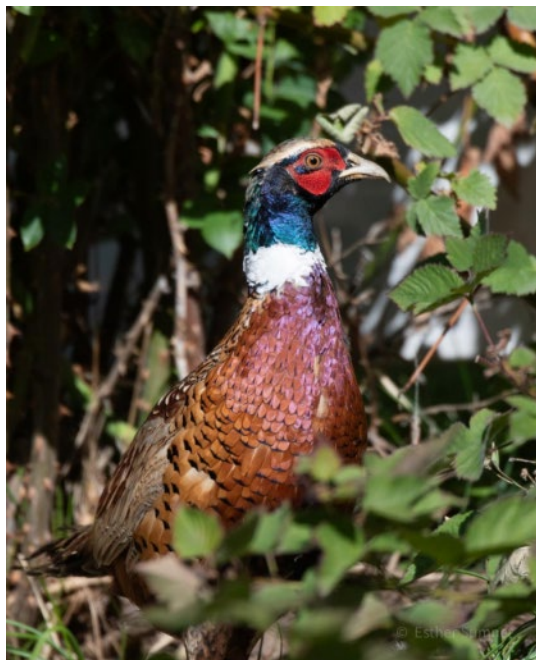


Photo by Esther Sumner