



Utah County Birders Newsletter

February 2024

CONTENTS:

- [Monthly Meeting](#)
 - [Upcoming Field Trips](#)
 - [President's Message](#)
 - [Bird of the Month](#)
 - [Field Trip Reports](#)
 - [Backyard Birds](#)
-

FEBRUARY MEETING

Thursday February 8th, 7pm at Bean Museum and on Zoom

Join us for our February meeting with our guest speaker Robert Parsons as we learn about the Wild and Wonderful Birding in Borneo.

LINK TO 2024 CHALLENGE: <http://utahbirds.org/ucb/Newsletters/2023/2024Challenge.pdf>

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Lee Kay Ponds and Farmington Bay – Saturday February 24th

Meet at 8am at the Pioneer Crossing Park & Ride. We will be trying to get 24 species at each location for the 2024 challenge. We will be gone most of the day so bring a lunch!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We have had a lot of gray skies, some rain and snow, and strong winds haven't helped the birding. But as I am preparing this message, I'm looking out the window at sunshine, no less. And the weather forecast looks super for the week ahead. Hopefully by the time you read this, there will still be good birding weather. Maybe we are experiencing a 'January Thaw' period. We have included in our newsletter a link to the challenge and the list of the areas it covers in our state. Suzi has done a great job selecting areas in our state to help with this challenge. So, I hope to see all of you out there.

I had the experience recently to be teaching a science class for one day at Alta High School, and their unit was on birds. It was so fun to share my experiences while birding, demonstrating the apps available on their phones (which they were excited about since they cannot live without them, it seems) and talked about a few of the stuffed species the teacher had in the room. But the students had questions that told me they wanted to know all about birding from a book or the classroom. My main message to these teenagers was to get outside and look for them or join a group. So here we are in a "challenge year"--get out there and participate with us.

I came upon a very informative podcast entitled, "Bring Birds Back" which has been around for at least 5 seasons. As I scanned through it, I noticed that it covers a lot of subjects related to birding. I found subjects such as bird behavior, trees, people who monitor the rivers and wetlands, birds that squawk in the night, how to be an ethical birder, to name a few. This podcast looks like it is easy to find, as I use Spotify.

Hope to see you on our field trips!
Happy birding!
Yvonne

BIRD OF THE MONTH



Blue Grosbeak

Passerina caerulea

Article and photo by Steve Van Winkle

Blue Grosbeak, Azuillo Grande, its Spanish name describing a magnificently deep-blue colored bird: that sings with a richly warbling voice while perched atop roadside power pole lines and trees.

With great pleasure Steve Hegji, Preston Yardley and I had the pleasure of observing and photographing several Blue Grosbeak, 2 juveniles and 3 adults at the Equestrian field center adjacent to Hunter Park.

Our Rocky Mountain, western basin and intermountain breeding populations begin migrating from their breeding grounds to their wintering grounds in mid to late fall, along the coast of Western Mexico and central and western Central America. While having not been recorded at this site previously with its richly diverse riparian of cottonwoods, boxelder, Russian olive, willows, hawthorns and brambles it's certainly a likely breeding location. This lush riparian and irrigated field of grasses provides an abundant food source of grains, grasshoppers, other insects, in addition to snails and other invertebrates prominent in the clear water of a permanent small creek and adjoining irrigation ditches. During our efforts, individuals were observed sallying back and forth from their prominent perches to snare flying insects. However, eBird data records indicate that the species is more than likely nesting in stretches of the Jordan River; in particular, sightings during the expected breeding season in the Bluffdale – Porter Rockwell region along the Jordan River are noted.

*Surprisingly, breeding bird survey, BBS, routes omit the Jordan River and its associated riparian entirely.

On a recent Utah County Birders field trip to Desert Lake Waterfowl Management Area in July, we located a pair of Blue's most likely nesting amongst the riparian scrub along a small creek flowing into Desert Lake. What a plus if fortunate in discovering a well-constructed compact cup nest; placed low in available scrub, shrubby trees and briars consisting of twigs, bark strips, rootlets and other similar materials one will find a 3-4 clutch of pale blue to bluish-white oval eggs being incubated by only the female; although, males perhaps participate in nest construction. Additionally, mated pairs may raise two broods per season. * Surprisingly, a pair of nesting Blues have been recorded utilizing a Bluebird nesting box.

Interestingly, Blue Grosbeaks, of a low conservation concern, have actually been expanding their range northward into the continental United States; most likely associated with low elevation forest clearing (deforestation). And unfortunately, other species of birds and other life forms will certainly be impacted by changes in their preferred forest habitat while others, such as the Blue and other species of grosbeaks may in fact benefit from these habitat alterations.

Article contributors: Steve Van Winkle, Cornell Labs "All about Birds" and Audubon Field Guide

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

FIELD TRIP REPORTS



Saturday January 27, Utah Lake State Park

Article and photos by Suzi Holt

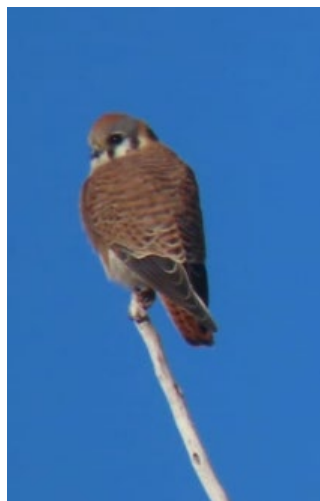
Got up early and headed to Provo. I was going to be early this time!! Yeah right! Traffic was at a standstill just past the first Springville exit. A semi-truck was on fire under the second Springville overpass. I had to call KC Childs and have him start the fieldtrip. Thanks KC! By the time we got to the ULSP it was a traffic heap with all the people coming to the "Frigid 5K and Penguin Plunge"! We finally got parked and headed to the campground to meet the group. They had 16 species already and we were an hour behind so we quickly got to birding!

We saw **European Starlings**, **American Kestrel**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Mallard**, **Sandhill Crane** with a serenading flyover, **Ring-billed Gulls** and **White-faced Ibis**. About 7 species in the campground!

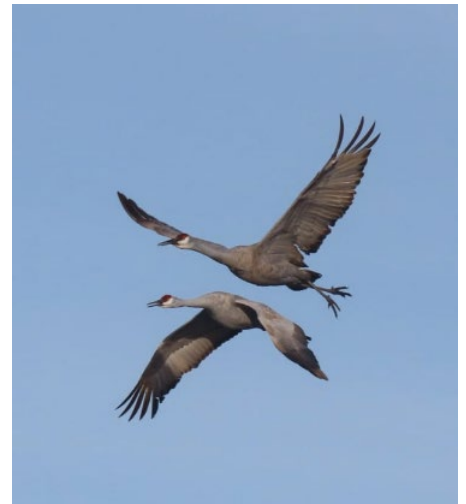
By the Visitors Center KC located a beautiful male **Red-naped Sapsucker**! He was drilling sap holes in a pine tree.



Red-naped Sapsucker



American Kestrel



Sandhill Cranes

We then walked across the river into the nature trail area, adding **Downy Woodpecker**, a small flock of **Black-capped Chickadees**, a good-sized flock of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and **Orange-crowned Warbler**. Some saw a **Northern Flicker**, and we also had a few **Song Sparrows**. An unidentified buteo and a **Great Blue Heron** flew over too. As we neared the bridge again a **Belted Kingfisher** flew west down the river. At that point most of the group had 24 species and headed home.



American Wigeon, Gadwall, Canada Goose

KC, Amanda, Tatum and I went back to the campground. As we went across the park we added 3 **American Pipits**. In the campground we quickly found **California Quail**, **Gadwall**, **Canada Goose**, **California Gull**, **American Wigeon**, **Common Merganser**, **Northern Pintail**, **Northern Shoveler**, **American Coots**, **Pied-billed Grebe** and **Black-billed Magpie**.

On our way back a **Northern Harrier** was surveying the farmers' field. A grand total of 27 species for us and 32 for KC. We finished out the morning watching the penguin plunge...brrrr!!

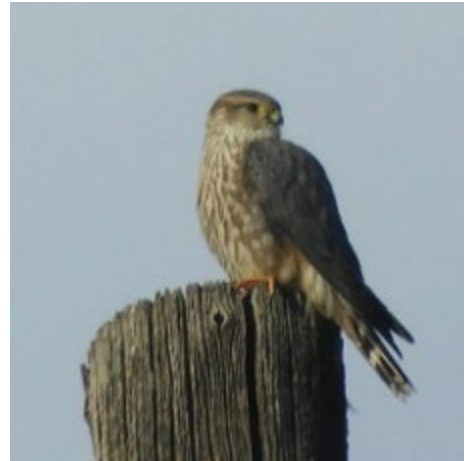
The sun came out and it was a nice day!!



Back Yard Birds

Lynn Garner – Provo: In January I saw 2 **Merlin's** from my driveway, one of which I only saw briefly. The other came back to the pole and stayed quite a while. She was chattering away in the obviously female way 😊 (I compared the recorded calls on Sibley), which made me think the other may have been a juvenile.

Holly Minor – Erda: While not unusual, I got to add a **Northern Harrier** to my yard list at my home in Erda. It flew across the road in front of my car as I was coming home and went out to hunt in our field.



Merlin by Lynn Garner

Jeff Cooper – Pleasant Grove: About a week ago, the male **Western Screech-owl** that has been roosting in my second owl box started singing each night. Just the other night, I decided to go out into the dark and listen to him. I eventually realized that he was doing his continuous monotonous courtship call from the hole of the box that he does not use as his roost (I have two boxes in my yard). It dawned on me that he was trying to draw a mate to a potential nest site, so I continued to observe from a slight distance. Within minutes, I heard his mate respond from a nearby spruce. It wasn't long before they began dueting. After the volume and frequency of their vocalizations increased, he flew to her in the spruce where they both squealed and chattered with each other. It was likely that he made a food delivery to her as part of their courtship routine. I am hoping that the female finds his nest box offering acceptable, and that their offspring are raised in the backyard this spring.

Milt Moody – Provo: My Provo backyard has been a little less birdy in January this year. Could be because of this little male **Sharp-shinned Hawk** who is trying to learn the subtleties of stealthy hunting but has only learned how to keep the birds from the feeders.



Sharp-shinned Hawk by Milt Moody