



# Utah County Birders Newsletter

June 2024

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## JUNE MEETING

Thursday June 13 - Our June meeting will be a field trip to Camp Floyd State Park in Fairfield. Meet at the American Fork Park & Ride at Pioneer Crossing at 6:30pm to carpool, or meet at Camp Floyd State Park at 7pm, 18035 W 1540 N Fairfield. I'm not sure if there is an entrance fee at the park or just to see the museum, but if you do have a State Parks Pass you should bring it. And bug spray!

LINK TO Recorded MAY ZOOM MEETING: (Copy link, past in browser)

[https://byu.zoom.us/rec/share/dJK3miampXwRNh\\_kq11K91ZBtKhPRykob4c2raHFtq6OOw9NP3qrTaHbRD1valuX.B\\_pFgw4gUnHA\\_SqB?startTime=1715303238000](https://byu.zoom.us/rec/share/dJK3miampXwRNh_kq11K91ZBtKhPRykob4c2raHFtq6OOw9NP3qrTaHbRD1valuX.B_pFgw4gUnHA_SqB?startTime=1715303238000)

Passcode: &cMVv9YM

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

LINK to 2024 Planned Field Trips: <http://utahbirds.org/ucb/FieldTrips/2024FieldTrips.pdf>

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## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

### Saturday June 8<sup>th</sup> Yuba Lake SP

Meet at 8:00 am at the Payson Walmart to the west of QuickQuack car wash. We will carpool to Yuba Lake SP. If you have a State Parks pass you are willing to bring, please do. Please pack a lunch, we should be home early to mid-afternoon.

\*\*The trip to Flaming Gorge has been cancelled due to lack of interest.

\*\*There is an overnight trip planned to Escalante NM, Kodachrome Basin SP, & Escalante Petrified Forest SP Sept 12 to 14<sup>th</sup>. If you are planning to go on that trip, please email [machelle13johnson@yahoo.com](mailto:machelle13johnson@yahoo.com) so we can get an idea of the interest for that trip.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President's Message:

During the week, while I was birding near the Provo River Delta construction, I bumped into Merrill Webb, a long-time birder known by most in the Utah County Birders group. I asked Merrill if he had been a field trip leader during this past Great Salt Lake Bird Festival and he replied 'No'. And he gave me the reason. In past years, Merrill has always conducted a field trip centered on 'Listening to Birds for Identification', basically identifying birds by song and call. But last year, people attending his field trip kept pulling out their smart phones using Merlin Sound ID, calling out the species before Merrill gave the species name that they were listening to. Which brought us to the discussion of using Merlin Sound ID. We need to take care as we are birding to preferably find the bird by sight if we are using Merlin Sound ID. Do not assume that using Merlin Sound ID alone will identify the bird or, that it is 100% correct all the time. Always search to find the bird by sight. Don't let Merlin ID be a crutch—listen and learn to identify the birds through their songs and calls. Please use caution using Merlin Sound ID. I recently saw an entry on Ebird for two birds in our area that are not found in the United States, and the person entering the submission said it was by Sound ID. Recently, I, myself, picked up a bird by Sound ID, saw a quick glimpse of the possible bird but not for sure. So, in my entry I explained that it appeared on Sound ID but only saw a quick glimpse of the possible bird.

Another thought I would like to share with you is the mindset we sometimes develop during our challenge year. Our challenges are fun and stretches our experiences sometimes to new areas. But here's the caution. We get in the habit of planning a birding trip to one of the areas, whether it is a state park, a WMA, etc. ONLY, that is on our 2024 Challenge. During the Big Day event, I caught myself deciding where I would be birding, planning only for those areas. But birds are all around us everywhere, including 'hot-spots, and we should not be limiting ourselves to only those areas on the challenge.

Happy birding!  
Yvonne

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## BIRD OF THE MONTH

### Gray Catbird

*Dumetella carolinensis*

Article and photos by Jeremy Telford

Driving slowly down River Lane I looked out the window into the thickets along the river. I could hear the cheeseburger calls of black capped chickadees and the sweet, sweet, sweet call of the yellow warbler. In the distance a Sandhill crane added its distinctive almost pterodactyl-like cry.

From the thick bushes I heard another cry. I turned my head and listened again. It was the mewing cry of a cat. Or was it? Was that a bird? I turned off the car and pished quietly. A gray bird with a black cap sprang up out of the bushes. It got my attention, and now I had his. It was a Gray Catbird.

The Gray Catbird is a medium sized bird that is a little smaller than a Robin. It is a mostly gray bird with a black cap and bright rusty under tail coverts. It is related to mockingbirds and thrashers and when it is not doing its feline impersonation you can hear mockingbird relationship in its song. Gray Catbirds often use a bit of birdsong from other birds while singing. They can sing up to 10 minutes at a go, putting a lot of variety into their calls. In fact, Gray Catbirds can produce two different sounds at once by using each side of their syrinx, their vocal organ, independently.

During the summer Gray Catbirds eat mostly insects but they do enjoy fruit when it is available and can be considered pests eating smaller fruits and berries like cherries, strawberries, and grapes. They will occasionally eat small fish as well. The Audubon website says that at feeders Gray Catbirds are willing to dine on a more eclectic variety of food. This can include such things as doughnuts, cheese, boiled potatoes, and corn flakes. This of course begs the question as to who fills the bird feeders at the Audubon buildings.

Gray Catbirds typically nest somewhere about four feet off the ground in dense thickets and shrubs. Just like their song, though, this can vary. Sometimes you can find them nesting on the ground or as high up as sixty feet in the branches of the trees.

Female Catbirds typically build the nest though the male bird will sometimes help with gathering materials. The nest is usually a woven cup or bowl about five inches across. The outer layer is usually twigs, straw, bark, and mud while the inner lining is made of softer grasses and pine needles. They often return to the same nesting grounds from year to year. So, if you find one, remember the spot, you have a good chance of finding them again there next year.

Gray Catbirds can lay anywhere from one to six turquoise green eggs and have up to three broods a year. Brown-headed Cowbirds, like cuckoos, lay their eggs in the nests of other birds in hopes that those birds will raise the young as their own. They try this with Gray Catbirds as well, but often unsuccessfully. The female Gray Catbird closely studies its eggs after laying. If later, it finds a new egg in the nest it will puncture and remove it.



Although Gray Catbirds are permanent residents along the Atlantic coast they are migratory in much of the rest of the US including Utah. During the winter they can move south to anywhere from Florida down through Central America and the Caribbean. To prepare for the big migration flight Gray Catbirds can add up to 150% to their body weight. Those flying over land increase their lean body weight while those that travel over the Gulf of Mexico add their body weight as fat.

A Gray Catbird's resting heart rate is between 307 and 427 beats per minute. Compare that to a hummingbird whose resting heart rate is only around 225 beats per minute. Of course, an actively flying hummingbird's heartbeat can exceed 1200 beats per minute. A human resting heart rate is typically 60-100 beats per minute.

During the summer I have two reliable spots where I find Gray Catbirds around Utah County. The first is in the thickets along River Lane, or specifically Spanish Fork River Road, (40.165758, -111.735116) on the way to Sandy Beach. The other is at Diamond Fork Campground (40.072011, -111.428669) up Diamond Fork canyon near the bridge that crosses the river and nearby campsites. Again, look in the dense thickets and brush.



- Allaboutbirds.org
- Audubon.org
- audubon.org/news/10-fun-facts-about-gray-catbird
- flatheadaudubon.org/bird-of-the-month/gray-catbird
- [https://havertown.wbu.com/content\\_section/show/257809](https://havertown.wbu.com/content_section/show/257809)
- <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/hummingbirds>

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

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## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### Burraston Ponds Saturday May 25<sup>th</sup> (Article and photos by Suzi Holt)





Well the weather was just right at **Burraston Ponds**. I checked the UDOT camera first thing in the morning, and we even had blue skies off in the distance. We had 19 Birders show up for our fieldtrip. We started off on the southeast end with **Barn, Northern Rough-winged** and **Cliff Swallows** skimming over the ponds. A couple of **Great Blue Herons** flew over the ponds and off to the west. We had lots of **Yellow Warblers, Western Kingbirds, Western Tanagers, Song Sparrows** and **Western Meadowlarks** and a **Common Raven** flew off to the south.



On the telephone line there were **European Starlings, Brown-headed Cowbirds** and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. On the fence line we had a flock of **House Finchs**. As we walked along we added **House Sparrows**, a **Killdeer** and **Cedar Waxwings**. We also had a flock of **White-faced Ibis** and **California Gulls** fly over headed north. And an **Osprey** was hovering above looking for breakfast! As we walked along, we scared up a pair of **Ring-necked Pheasants**.

Continuing along the edge of the pond we heard and then saw **Common Yellowthroat!!** I noticed some flapping across the pond, it was a **Black-crowned Night Heron!** We also had **American Robins, Mourning Doves, Bullock's Orioles** and **American Goldfinch**. A **Wilson's Warbler** and an unidentified empid were deep in a Russian Olive tree. I heard a **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** flyover. We watched a pair of **Western Tanagers** flit around for a while. Lots more Cedar Waxwings flew into the trees as well.



Amanda spotted a **Pied-billed Grebe** and we had a **Double-crested Cormorant** and a **Caspian Tern** fly over. On the northeast edge we heard the meow of a **Gray Catbird** and he came out for a great look. Also, a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was perched above a pink Wild Rose Bush. On the North side we also added **Warbling Vireos** and a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**. KC said he saw a **House Wren**. Then I saw a brown bird down in the water by bushes and cattails. When KC got his eyes on it, it was a **Northern Waterthrush!!!** We also heard and called out a **Sora!!** Some **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** were flitting around in the olives as well.

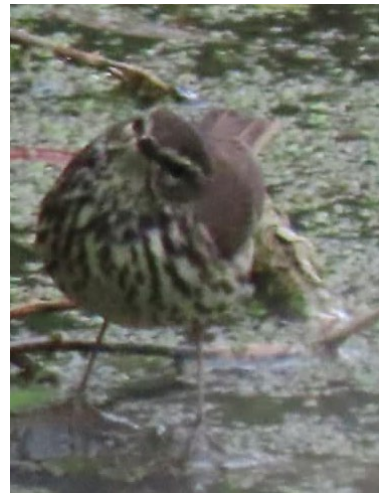


Down the trail

have a care in the world out in the open and Jessie spotted a **Virginia** running on top of the cattails. A couple deer were grazing off in the distance.

As we headed down the west side, we saw more of the same birds but added a **Western Flycatcher**, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Eastern Kingbirds** and two **Mallards!!** Also, Casey Richardson had a **Say's Phoebe!**

more Sora's



didn't  
**Rail**



So, in total we had 45 species. I'd say that was a pretty great morning. And we got out of there right before the rain storm came in! Thanks for coming!





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### Back Yard Birds

**Lynn Garner – Provo:** In April, a pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches hollowed out this nest hole in my backyard tree! It is an active nest, we're excited to watch their progress! I also welcomed a pair of Cassin's Finches to the yard.



**Bruce Robinson – West Jordan:** #1- Western Wood Pewee, right on schedule, and #2- Let the hummingbird wars begin!

**Yvonne Carter – Highland:** One Saturday, I stood at my kitchen sink preparing food and when I looked out the window there was a Western Tanager right there on a tree limb close to the window. I think it is a first in my yard and the next day a Bullocks Oriole fly by, another first!



**Holly Minor – Erda:** Our family of California quail have returned in Erda. The male uses our bird bath as a perch to keep a watchful eye out while the female feeds.

**Milt Moody – Provo:** Around this time of the year I usually have some Green-tailed Towhees come to my yard for a short stay. They like to lounge under my wild rose bush and eat the seeds I put on the nearby ground and drink and bath in the not-very-fancy bird bath. They come now and then for maybe a week and then head on to their breeding grounds.



**Esther Sumner – Lindon:** I was standing in my backyard around 10 p.m. on Memorial Day when I heard the unmistakable song of the Common Poorwill. I live fairly close to the foothills but it was still a delightful surprise.