



June 2025

UTAH COUNTY BIRDERS NEWSLETTER

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JUN MEETING

Thursday JUN 12, 2025, at 7pm - Bean Museum and on Zoom

Columbia: Central Andes Adventure

Max and Mike Malmquists are our guest speakers this month and are going to present on an amazing birding trip they were able to take last year to Colombia titled "Colombia: Central Andes Adventure." Join us online or in person. Hope to see you all there!

(The Zoom link will be emailed out the day before the meeting)



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Summer is upon us, and the birds have been showing up on their way North. So, while they are resting and roosting, or making their nest, you can sit back and find a good book on birding. I'm not talking about bird guides (although, they can be very informative), there are other types of books on birding that can be informative, helpful, and relaxing.

During my first year of birding, a fellow birder told me about Kaufmann's "Kingbird Highway". I obtained a copy and it blew my mind that a young man could set off on his own, travel the country and experience birding in a completely different way. I must add that a mother or father with children would be hard-pressed to follow the same itinerary.

But here are some other books that I have come across that might interest you:

Jennifer Ackerman has written "The Genius of Birds"; "The Bird Way"; and her most recent book, "What An Owl Knows"

Amy Tan (who is a famous author of novels) "The Backyard Bird Chronicles"

Molly Adams and Sydney Anderson's "Birding for a Better World: A Guide to Finding Joy and Community in Nature"; "Turning to Birds: The Power and Beauty of Noticing"

Kaufmann's "A Season on the Wind"

Robin Kimmerer "Braiding Sweetgrass"

These are just a few books and novels on birding. So, while the birds are resting, pick up a book about birds.

Keep on birding! Yvonne Carter, President

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

WEDNESDAY June 4th – Yellow Fork Hike

Steve Van Winkle will lead a bird hike at **7 AM on June 4th**. The meeting place will be at the **Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride**. He will be leading a bird hike up Yellow Fork at the end of Rose Canyon Road in Herriman. There will be a wide variety of breeding birds that range from riparian, pinyon juniper, to even aspen and fir. It should be a great outing.

Monday June 16th – Flammulated Owls

Jeff Cooper has been nice enough to offer his time and take out people for a Flammulated Owl field trip. The field trip will be the night of June 16th, and we will be meeting at the park and ride lot at the mouth of American Fork Canyon at **9:00 PM**. Flammulated Owls will be the target but seeing and or hearing Northern Saw-whet Owl, Common Poorwill, Great Horned Owl, and even nocturnal mammals like Snowshoe Hares are a possibility. Because of limited parking space in areas that are productive for owls, we will need to condense people down to 4 cars and carpool. This means we will need to limit it to a total of 15 birders.

Please sign up for a slot at the link: <https://evite.me/krwpFZEAwq>

If there is enough interest, a second trip is possible.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Swainson's Hawk

Buteo swainsoni

Article & photos by Holly Miner



Dark morph female with some pigment issues on her head, so she has white patches that make her easy to recognize.

The Swainson's hawk, a slightly more slender cousin of the familiar Red-tailed Hawk, captivates with its varied plumage. Its long, pointed wings and relatively lengthy tail create an almost elegant, falcon-like silhouette in the air. Soaring aloft, its wings often form a shallow "V" shape, a characteristic posture against the sky. While some individuals display a pale underside accented by a distinctive reddish-brown chest band and contrasting dark flight feathers, others exhibit a uniform shade of rich chocolate or dark rufous. Juvenile birds showcase their own unique plumage, typically featuring a buffy or whitish underbelly adorned with streaks. This diverse coloration adds an element of intrigue to spotting these avian travelers.

Every spring brings the anticipated return of our nesting pair of Swainson's hawks in Erda. Their arrival signals the start of their breeding season, during which they re-establish territories and commence the process of reproduction. Typically, they construct sturdy nests—platforms of sticks lined with softer materials—in trees, often favoring deciduous species near water or junipers in drier regions. Faithfully, our hawks have returned to the same nest nestled in a small cluster of trees right on the border between our property and our neighbors. The courting partners engage in a captivating "sky dance": soaring in circles high above the nest site, the male performs steep dives and recoveries before rejoining the female in their aerial ballet.

Following mating, the female typically lays two to three pale bluish-white eggs, which she incubates for a little over a month. Once hatched, both parents diligently feed their rapidly growing young. During this demanding nesting period, their diet shifts to protein-rich small mammals like ground squirrels and pocket gophers, supplemented by reptiles, amphibians, and the occasional bird—fueling the growth of their offspring. However, as the breeding season concludes and the instinct to migrate takes hold, the adult Swainson's hawks undergo a dietary transformation, transitioning almost entirely to insects, particularly grasshoppers, crickets, and dragonflies. They even employ a clever foraging strategy, following farm machinery to capitalize on the insects stirred up in its wake. Often, while I'm mowing the lawn, our resident hawks will perch on the roof, patiently observing, waiting for me to inadvertently unearth a tasty meal for them.

After approximately six weeks, the young hawks take their first flight, fledging from the nest, though they may continue to rely on their parents for some time before fully venturing out on their own. Breeding birds exhibit fierce protectiveness around their nest site, aggressively chasing off intruders, including Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Turkey Vultures, Golden Eagles, and even humans simply trying to get into their car for the morning commute. I can attest to this defensiveness; in 2023, I was once late to work due to being dive-bombed by one of the vigilant parents. Since then, my routine trips to the car have occasionally turned into exciting encounters.

Yet, it is the Swainson's hawks' epic journey south that truly captures the imagination. Embarking on a roughly 6,000-mile voyage each way, they undertake one of the longest migrations of any North American raptor, their destination the rich pampas grasslands of Argentina. As autumn begins to paint the northern hemisphere, these hawks often congregate in impressive flocks, sometimes numbering in the hundreds or even thousands, forming mesmerizing swirling "kettles" as they gain altitude for their long flight. Their southward route frequently takes them through Texas, Mexico, and Central America, where observers marvel at the sheer numbers passing overhead. They arrive in their South American wintering grounds as the southern hemisphere welcomes its summer. The return journey in spring mirrors this incredible feat, with the hawks arriving back on their North American breeding territories in April and May, ready to begin the cycle anew.

While currently listed as a species of "Least Concern," the Swainson's hawk faces a number of challenges in our rapidly evolving world. The loss and degradation of their open habitats due to agricultural expansion and development diminish both their nesting sites and foraging opportunities. The use of pesticides in agriculture poses a direct threat through poisoning and indirectly by reducing their vital insect prey base. Power lines present a risk of electrocution, and collisions with vehicles can also take a toll on their populations. Furthermore, the long-term impacts of climate change on their habitats and the availability of their prey remain a significant concern.

Ultimately, the Swainson's hawk, with its remarkable migratory prowess and adaptability, serves as a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of ecosystems across continents. Witnessing their graceful flight or the awe-inspiring spectacle of their mass migrations is a privilege, forging a connection to the intricate web of life that spans hemispheres. Ensuring the continued protection of their habitats and diligently mitigating the threats they face are crucial steps in safeguarding the future of these incredible avian travelers.



Female (L) bringing a Pocket Gopher to a juvenile (R).



Juveniles from 2024 nesting

References:

1. Cornell Labs, All About Birds
2. The Sibley Guide to Birds by David Allen Sibley
3. HawkWatch International - Swainson's Hawk Fact Sheet
4. Montana Field Guide - Swainson's Hawk

Field Trip Report

Soldiers Pass

Thursday May 7, 2025

Article by KC Childs, Photos by Clarissa Chipman

A small group of 9 birders headed out to the west side of Utah Lake on May 7th to see what new migrants had showed up on Soldiers Pass Road. It was a beautiful day and lots of new life and year birds were seen. It was so nice to see that many of the spring migrants had shown up already out there.

We got to see some of the fun pinyon juniper specialties like **Pinyon Jays**, **Gray Vireo**, **Gray Flycatcher**, **Bushtits**, and **Bewick's Wrens**. We also got to see some fantastic birds down in the sagebrush and desert grasslands. It was so fun to see **Long-billed Curlews** displaying, **Black-throated Sparrows** showing off, **Sagebrush Sparrows** singing, **Lark Sparrows**, and **Brewer's Sparrows** too.

We also got to enjoy beautiful blue skies. As we were leaving Soldiers Pass, we were treated to a very cooperative and beautiful **Short-eared Owl**. It's definitely a bird you never take for granted to be able to watch. We ended the day out near Elberta where we were treated to not only one, but two **Burrowing Owls**. It was the perfect bird to finish a fantastic trip out west.

Altogether we saw 35 species of birds. I hope that in June we will be able to see some of you and thank you to everyone who was able to show up for the fun trip!





Photos: Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Gray Flycatcher, Brewer's Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, Short-eared Owl, Birders.

Backyard Birds

Steve Van Winkle – Lehi: Neighborhood photos along the Jordan River at Riverside Park Golf Course: Swainson's Hawk, Western Tanager.



Yvonne Carter – Highland: I finally had the Black-headed Grosbeaks show up at my feeders this week. Two males and 2 females.

Bruce Robinson – West Jordan: The nesting Robins were sounding the alarm, so I had to investigate. This is who I found:

