



UTAH COUNTY BIRDERS NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS:

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



MAY MEETING

Thursday May 8, 2025, at 7pm - Bean Museum and on Zoom

Everything I Need to Know I Learned while Birding

Alison Hill Spencer has her dad (who you might know as our very own Utah County Birder Ned Hill) to thank for her love of watching birds and drawing them. When she was a child, he guided the family on adventures around the world to hunt for birds with their binoculars. As an adult, she paints portraits of local birds in an effort to show people what we have in our own community. She still goes on weekly birding trips with her dad.

Please join us this month for this very special guest!
(The Zoom link will be emailed out the day before the meeting)



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Utah County Birders participates in 2 nationally promoted activities during the year: the Christmas Bird Count and The Big Sit. For 2024, Suzi Holt was in charge of The Big Sit and Keeli Marvel was in charge of the Christmas Bird Count. The national organizers of these two activities keeps a tally of the results sent in by the participating groups.

The national organizers for The Big Sit just emailed the results of their tally for the October 2024 event. There were 93 'circles' reported in 3 countries: The United States, Guatemala, and Portugal. As you will recall, our group participated at the Skipper Bay Trail location and our group was recognized as one of the Top 5 to have the largest number of participants, coming in at 4th. This says something important about our group--we have birders who are willing to participate in these kinds of activities!

To keep it up, birders! Participating in activities like these makes for a great group. As these activities come along, please find the time to be involved. Not only are we learning as we are bird watching, but we are also associating with a great group of people and sharing our knowledge. It is a wonderful way to learn.

Keep on birding! Yvonne Carter, President

Here is the link to The Big Sit information: <https://www.thebigsit.org/>



UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

WEDNESDAY May 7th – Soldiers Pass

We will meet at **7 AM on May 7th** at the **Payson Wal-Mart**. We will meet in the parking lot on the west side of Quick-Quack to go out to Soldiers Pass and see what Pinyon Juniper birds have arrived including birds like Black-throated Sparrow, Sagebrush Sparrow, Gray Flycatcher, Gray Vireo, Burrowing Owl, and so many other fun birds. We will hopefully be back to Payson Wal-Mart no later than 1:00.

Saturday May 31st – Provo Canyon-Alpine Loop-American Fork Canyon

We will meet on **May 31 at 7 AM** for a fun Saturday bird trip. We will meet at the **Palisade Park Park-and-Ride in Orem** near the mouth of Provo Canyon. We will see what we can find as we make a loop starting and ending at the mouth of Provo Canyon. We will drive up Provo Canyon, then up the Alpine Loop, down American Fork Canyon, and back around the front of Timpanogos to end up back at the mouth of Provo Canyon. We will hopefully find a wide variety of species as we travel into several different habitats. (There is a fee for Alpine Loop of \$10 per vehicle-for a 3-day pass. For other pass options, visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r04/uinta-wasatch-cache/passes>).

Steve Van Winkle has agreed to 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.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Virginia Rail

Rallus limicola

Article & photos by Dan Simmons



The Virginia Rail is an interesting bird that is sometimes heard and less frequently seen in the wetlands of North and Central America. Though secretive, it is not rare and may be found in central Utah year-round.

Virginia Rails are members of the family Rallidae, which includes rails, coots and gallinules. Rallidae members often found in Utah include the Virginia Rail, Sora and American coot; Sibley Birds also shows the Common Gallinule as a summer resident in Central Utah, though I haven't been fortunate enough to see one here yet. The Ecuadorian Rail (*Rallus ecuadorianus*), found from southern Colombia to coastal Peru looks very similar in size and coloration to the Virginia Rail and apparently at some time in the past was considered a subspecies of *Rallus limicola*, but there is no overlap of the ranges between the two species.

As with other rails, Virginia Rails are primarily marsh birds but may be found at the margins of ponds and other wet areas. During migration they have rarely been found in odd, atypical areas such as city parking lots. It has been noted by some birders that Virginia Rails tend to become habituated to human activity on boardwalks constructed in marshy areas and may be more readily seen in such areas. In validation of that idea the accompanying photos were taken from a boardwalk.

Virginia Rails build loosely woven basket nests, sometimes with a canopy over the nest. The female lays 4-13 eggs, which will hatch in 18-20 days. The young are black and fuzzy, looking very much like the young Sora.

The photos above were taken at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, San Antonio, NM, in Sept. 2024. In the same area where the Virginia Rails were seen we were also fortunate to find Soras and a Least Bittern. The photo of the bird swimming isn't very clear, but I found it interesting to observe. When swimming the body is carried lower in the water than a Coot and the head is held in a little more forward position. During the few minutes that I observed it swimming I did not ever see it dive under the water, although Virginia Rails are reported to be capable of doing so.



References:

- 1) Cornell Labs, All About Birds.
- 2) The Sibley Guide to Birds by David Allen Sibley.
- 3) Virginia Rails are Bad at Hiding. Bob Duchesne, You Tube 2023.
- 4) [Audubon.org/field-guide/bird/virginia-rail](https://audubon.org/field-guide/bird/virginia-rail).
- 5) [eBird.org/species/virrai](https://ebird.org/species/virrai).

Field Trip Report

Antelope Island

Saturday April 26, 2025

Article and Photos by KC Childs



On April 26th, a group of 16 birders set off for a fun filled day birding Antelope Island Causeway and Garr Ranch. We began our way by crossing the causeway to see what kind of shorebirds, ducks, and gulls might be migrating through. We were lucky that we had a wind and were able to keep the bugs at bay while we watched some beautiful birds. We were able to see 12 species of shorebirds including **Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Greater Yellowlegs, Sanderling, and Baird's Sandpiper**. It was an awe-inspiring sight to watch a flock of over 1000 peeps form a murmuration and fly around while we all watched in amazement. We saw other stunning birds like **Franklin's** and **Bonaparte's Gulls, Blue-winged Teal, and Lesser Scaups**. We saw 46 species crossing the causeway. We then went and started driving to Garr Ranch and stopped and appreciated a pair of **Burrowing Owls** that were giving us a great show. We then went and stopped at the Mulberry Grove where we were given quite the show by a Porcupine that climbed a tree for us. Our final stop was over at Garr Ranch that was still pretty slow. The migrating birds hadn't quite arrived yet, but we were able to see **Barn** and **Great-horned Owls**. We saw a nice grouping of sparrows including a **Lincoln's Sparrow**. We also saw a couple of Porcupines that were super adorable to see! It was a wonderful way to spend a Saturday morning, and I truly appreciate everyone who woke up early and joined in. I hope to see some of you at one of our May field trips.



Backyard Birds

Robert Parsons – Gdansk, Poland: Happy Spring. We are seeing Blackcaps, Eurasian Wrens, lots of Eurasian Jackdaws and Eurasian Jays.



Eurasian Jay

Yvonne Carter – Highland: We've had a Cooper's Hawk in the southeast corner of our property, in the big trees. He has been quite though, so maybe he's picked a new spot.

Holly Minor – Erda: Our nesting Swainsons hawks have returned for the season in Erda, and I had a Long-billed Curlew fly over my house!

Nicky Davis – Toquerville: I have seen a couple of hummers at our feeder off the balcony this month.

Kaylene Hamilton – Mapleton: Cassin's Finch, Brewers Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbirds that have been here for a while.

Jim Strong – Lehi: Albino Goldfinch at my feeder a couple of years ago.

