



October 2025

# UTAH COUNTY BIRDERS NEWSLETTER

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## OCTOBER MEETING

**Thursday October 9, 2025, 7pm Bean Museum and Zoom**

Our special guest speaker this month is Emily Card. Emily is a PhD student from the University of Georgia who has been working on Pinyon Jay research in the Great Basin including across western Utah. The title of her presentation is "Pinyon Jay Conservation in the Great Basin: Protecting an Iconic Species of the Intermountain West". Hope to see you all there!

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### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Each fall our family has a tradition of attending the Storytelling Festival which is held at Thanksgiving Point on the second weekend in September. It's an event we don't miss and this year, I was in for a surprise because storytellers have rarely shared stories about bird watching. This year one of my favorite storytellers, Bill Lepp, began his story, on the Friday evening program with just under 2,000 in attendance, talking about the Merlin App with Sound ID. He asked the audience how many know and use this app! I was amazed at the large numbers of people who positively responded by raise of hand or shouting out. It was quite the 'eye opener' for me. Bill Lepp continued to share his experiences in a fun way by describing how he stood in a hotel lobby with 2 cameras, 2 binoculars, and a large scope and being questioned by hotel security appearing as if he had been stealing from someone's hotel room to clumping through mud and reeds to find that elusive bird. Such fun!

But what was even more surprising to me was a follow-up experience that night. I was sitting next to what I thought was a total stranger. But during the response to the Merlin App, she was very enthusiastically yelling out. Aah, a fellow birder, indeed. I chatted with her and a long time back, she had been birding with our UCB field trips, and since moving to St. George, she had been really active with the Washington County group. It's a small world, or is it? So, you never know who you might be sitting next to--so it pays to bring up the subject of bird watching wherever you go.

Yvonne Carter, President

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## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

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### THE BIG SIT

**Saturday October 11, 2025**

#### **Provo River Delta**

Join us for the annual Big Sit, as we try to see how many different species of birds we can find from one location. We will be sitting at the very end of the Skipper Bay Trail, or the end of the Provo River Delta Trail. It's quickest to walk from the Skipper Bay Trailhead at the west end of Boat Harbor Drive. We will be starting around sunrise and going until the evening. Please feel free to join for any part of the day that you can and help us out. There is a link to a sign-up sheet for two-hour blocks, to hopefully cover all times of the big sit. Keeli will bring bagels from Einstein's Bagels for anyone that is there in the morning. It's always a lot of fun! Bring a chair, binoculars, and a spotting scope if you have one. Hope to see lots of you there!

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1tnll7HpcXqRgMISzKzK37pP0nx\\_A8JwvlfNuh5hINhM/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1tnll7HpcXqRgMISzKzK37pP0nx_A8JwvlfNuh5hINhM/edit?usp=sharing)

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Ring-billed Gull

*Larus delawarensis*

Article and photo by Marissa Reay



*Immature Ring-billed Gull, Powell Lake*

Scrappy and resourceful, bothersome and overlooked, ring-billed gulls are not always the most highly regarded birds in Utah. They're common and widespread, often found in such glamorous locales as landfills and Walmart parking lots. This makes them one of the most easily encountered gulls in the state, and consequently, one of the easiest of the white-headed *Larus* gulls to learn to ID.

Ring-billed gulls are medium-sized gulls, slightly smaller than our familiar California gulls. Juvenile birds are mottled brown, gray, and white, with pink legs and a pink bill tipped with black. Unlike many other white-headed gulls, ring-billed gulls begin growing in the pale gray feathers of their mantle (wings and back) during their first year, which helps distinguish them from similarly aged gulls in the winter. By their second winter, they look almost adult-like, though they tend to have paler, greenish legs and completely black wingtips. Breeding adults are pure white in the head and body, with pale gray wings and back, and black wingtips with white spots near the ends. In the winter, their heads are stippled with brownish-gray streaks. Adults have yellow legs, pale yellow eyes, and their namesake black ring on the bill. Overall, both adults and juveniles have a moderate size, rounded head, and an even, stout bill.

There are a few similar gulls to look for when identifying Ring-billed Gulls. The most common culprit is the California gull. Ring-billed gulls are smaller and paler than California gulls, with paler eyes. While California gulls often have black smudges on their bill, a ring-billed gull will never have the red spot on the bill that Calis does. Herring gulls, seen in Utah in the winter, are also pale and pale-eyed, but they are much larger, with a comparatively more robust bill and pink legs. Short-billed gulls, a rare visitor to Utah county, are smaller and darker than ring-billed gulls, with dark eyes and an extremely slender bill.



*Adult Ring-billed Gulls, Lehi Walmart*

In spite of their reputation as a “trash bird,” ring-billed gulls can be incredibly entertaining to watch. They are gregarious, often gathering in large flocks, sometimes with other gulls. I’ve taken great pleasure in watching them scrap and scream over unidentifiable globs of fish, or hover as they daintily pluck Russian olives from the treetops. I’ve even watched an adorable first-year gull trying to snap snowflakes out of the air.



*Ring-billed Gulls of various ages. Powell Lake*

Ring-billed gulls are opportunistic eaters, eating everything from fish and insects to rodents and garbage. They are able to forage for food in the air, on land, and on water, depending on their needs and environment. Because of their varied diets and behaviors, ring-billed gulls are well-suited to live near human habitation, making them a common sight in both wild and suburban areas. Depending on the time of year, they can be found almost anywhere in the continental US, spending the summer in the northern US and Canada and migrating to the southern US and coastlines in the winter.

In Utah, ring-billed gulls can be found year-round, though they're often easier to find in the winter. Look for areas with plentiful food sources, such as deltas, damp fields, and marinas around Utah Lake– or, of course, the Walmart parking lot. Whenever you see a big flock, it's always worth taking a closer look; ring-billed gulls will frequently flock with other interesting gulls! Even if they're alone, though, I always get a kick out of watching these fascinating, resourceful birds in whatever habitat they may be.

Resources: Cornell University's [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org); The Gull Guide by Amar Ayyash.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### Fish Springs, Saturday September 6, 2025

Article by KC Childs, photo by Robby Nielsen

A real fun group of 13 birders trekked out early in the dark on September 6th to Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge. It's quite the journey to get out there, but you never know what will show up in this oasis in the desert. As we got out of the car we used the restroom, then started to walk around the housing area at the refuge. Almost immediately we had a **Black-and-white Warbler** being chased by a **Loggerhead Shrike**. It's an absolutely gorgeous bird, and their nuthatching ability is so entertaining to watch. We walked around the housing complex and saw many small migrants trying to feed on the few trees that were around. We had **Nashville**, **Orange-crowned**, and **Yellow Warblers**. A **Western Tanager**, **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, and **Western Wood Peewee** to name a few. After giving the housing area a good search we headed over to the picnic area and saw a hawk that at first I thought it was a Red-shouldered Hawk, as one had been reported there recently, but turned out it was a **Cooper's Hawk**, which kept the area pretty quiet. We watched it try to catch a blackbird. We also saw a **Cedar Waxwing**, and a group of sparrows with **Lark** being the dominant. After that Keeli guided us around the wetlands of the refuge hoping to find some shorebirds. We saw ten species of shorebirds including **American Avocet**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Long-billed Dowitcher**, **Killdeer**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, and **Semipalmated Plover**. We logged 9 species of waterfowl also. Another highlight in the wetlands were two different **Black Tern**. We then went back and checked the housing area again and got to watch the Black-and-white Warbler some more, then went over to enjoy lunch at the picnic area. We picked up a few more species like **Warbling Vireo** and **Brewer's Sparrow** while eating. Altogether we had 70 species at the refuge, which made for a great day. On the way home some of us stopped at Simpson Springs and picked up a **Red-naped Sapsucker** in this tiny little oasis. It was a wonderful trip and everyone had a great time! I appreciate everyone who joined!



*Black-and-white Warbler*

## Khyv Peak Wednesday September 17, 2025

*Article by KC Childs, Photos by Suzi Holt*



A group of ten of us ventured up onto Khyv Peak Road on September 17th to enjoy some hawk watching. I look forward to doing this every fall, as it is truly incredible to watch birds on their journey south, and watch as they catch the thermals. We parked and hiked out to what has been called Hawk Knoll, and began our watch. It took a bit to get going, but when it did, it felt like it was pretty non-stop. You never know from day to day how well the hawk movement will be, and what hawks will be moving, which is always part of the fun, and besides the hawks moving we saw other interesting things moving around like a **Double-crested Cormorant**, **White-throated Swifts**, **Violet-green Swallows**, and local little birds like **Mountain Chickadees** and a **Downy Woodpecker**. However the highlight of the trip was a flyover by a beautiful juvenile **Broad-winged Hawk** that Suzi got a photo of thankfully. It was a lifer for some on the trip even.

I'll leave what hawks we saw and our totals below. I truly appreciate the group that came and made it a great success! Hope to see you in October for our big sit at the Provo River Delta.

Turkey Vulture-2

Sharp-shinned Hawk-10

Cooper's Hawk-19

Northern Harrier-1

Broad-winged Hawk-1

Red-tailed Hawk-28

American Kestrel-2

Prairie Falcon-1



*Broad-winged Hawk*



*Red-tailed Hawk*





# ART GALLERY

Lynn Garner:

Hummingbird Haiku

Small flight of fancy,  
Dancing, darting, hovering,  
A flower on wings

“I realized that if I had to choose, I would rather have birds than airplanes.” – Charles Lindbergh

Machelle Johnson: Fall Wreath



Jim Strong: Black-capped Chickadee. I love them in my yard!



# Backyard Birds

**Yvonne Carter – Highland:** I have noticed an increase in Northern Flickers.

**Holly Minor – Erda:** A backyard bird I wasn't expecting in Erda. A Great Blue Heron landed in the field and hung out with the horses for the better part of today.



**Steve Van Winkle – American Fork Canyon:** Osprey, neighborhood bird from my frequent hikes and camping at Granite Flat CG and Tiffle Fork Reservoir.

