



Utah County Birders Newsletter

April 2026

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APRIL MEETING

Thursday, April 16.

Thursday April 16th, 2026, 6:30 pm-8 pm. UCB April Meeting: Spring Bird Walk (NOTE THE DIFFERENT NIGHT AND TIME THAN OUR USUAL MEETING).

Meet at the Utah Lake North Shore trail middle trailhead on Lakeview Drive in the Loch Lomond neighborhood and park along the curb by the trailhead here https://maps.app.goo.gl/9TWVLYAD9eNFodpu7?g_st=ic.

We will enjoy the spring temps and look for migrants. All birding experience levels welcome!

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

3 APR 18
SATURDAY
5:30 AM

CARBON & EMERY COUNTIES

CARPOOL: MEET AT THE CHEVRON ON POWERHOUSE ROAD IN SPANISH FORK

WE WILL LEAVE THE CHEVRON ON POWERHOUSE ROAD IN SF AT 5:30 AM. WE WILL HEAD TO **EMMA PARK ROAD** FOR GREATER SAGE GROUSE THEN HEAD TO **SCOFIELD** FOR CARBON COUNTY. THEN WE WILL GO TO **HUNTSVILLE RESERVOIR AND DESERT LAKE** FOR EMERY COUNTY.

May preview:

There will be a field trip to Rose Canyon in Salt Lake County on May 7.

Meet at Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride at 7:00 or 7:30-45 at trailhead, Rose Canyon, Herriman.

Yellow Fork trail in and out is approximately 3.7 miles with several hundred feet of undulating narrow trail and dirt Forest Service road.

Leader: Steve Van Winkle

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By KC Childs

I was walking along Utah Lake North Shore Trail this month when somebody asked me if I had seen the Bald Eagle along the trail? I am pretty sure that this has to be one of the most common questions posed to us birders when we are out with our optic equipment. I stopped to let them know that I had indeed noticed the Bald Eagle along the trail and what a beautiful sight it was. It got me thinking about how as birders, we are often rushing along to see the next bird versus stopping and enjoying the bird that is in front of us. I remember in my early years of birding taking trips up to Farmington Bay to see the incredible sight of hundreds of Bald Eagles feeding on the carp after water was drained out of the bay. It had to be one of the most awe-inspiring sights I had ever seen. That memory always makes me smile with joy, and I remember the people I was sitting in a car with, as we all were just jaws agape at the spectacle. After speaking to that person I had the realization that I often notice a Bald Eagle, but rarely stop to really appreciate what an incredible animal is sitting in front of me and all the incredible adaptations that bird has to help it survive, and how lucky I am to be seeing this bird so close to home nesting, especially considering that there were a little over 400 nesting pairs total in all the lower 48 in the 1960's. It's an incredible success story. It's mind exploding to think of all the effort of countless people to ensure that Bald Eagles would nest again on Utah Lake, and all the effort that went into me being able to enjoy such an incredible species so close to home all year long. It also seems to be the species that brings so much excitement to all the people I see down by the lake that are recreating, but aren't necessarily birding. I imagine that seeing those birds sparks thoughts of the importance of protecting the important wildlife habitat we do have. Ever since that person asked me that question, where I just usually say yes I saw it, and then move on, this time it sparked a desire in me to really stop and enjoy all the incredible birds I get to see when I am outdoors. It is especially sobering knowing that currently around 90 species in the United States are threatened with extinction, and I never know if some of these iconic birds may never be seen by people in the future. I hope we all can stop and truly enjoy and appreciate all the incredible things it took for that one bird we are looking at to end up in front of our binoculars.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Pinyon Jay

Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus

Text by: Audrey Biser

If you know me, you won't be surprised that this month's article is about pinyon jays! I'm a BYU Master's student studying their breeding habitat and water use in the desert, and while I might be slightly biased, I really do think these are some of the most interesting birds we have here in Utah.

Pinyon jays—true to their name—are most often found in pinyon-juniper woodlands throughout the western United States, though flocks have been observed nesting in juniper woodlands and limber or ponderosa pine forests. Their whole bodies are blue, with darker feathers near their heads and faces (hence their specific name, *cyanocephalus* or “blue head”) and varying amounts of gray feathers on their throat. Their generic name—*Gymnorhinus*, meaning “naked nose”—refers to their uniquely adapted bills. Unlike most corvids, they have no feathers around their nostrils to prevent pine pitch from getting stuck to their faces as they pry open pinecones with their long, strong bills.

Pinyon jays are highly social corvids, living and breeding in flocks of up to 150-200 birds. They have complex social interactions, forming monogamous pairs and sometimes returning as yearlings to help parents to rear new broods of chicks. When a flock is foraging, birds rotate through a “sentry” position: one bird perches at a vantage point to look out for danger while the rest of the flock is on the ground or in low vegetation. If the sentry spots something suspicious (like a birder or a raven), they give a special alarm call to alert the rest of the flock to get to safety.



Pinyon Jay

From utahbirds.org, copyright Marlene Foard

Pinyon jays have co-evolved with pinyon pines (including *Pinus edulis* and *Pinus monophylla* here in Utah), dispersing their pine nuts by collecting up to 50 at a time in their crop to cache them around their home range. A single bird can cache more than 2500 pine nuts in a single season! While most nuts are retrieved, many are forgotten and germinate into new pinyon pines. This means that pinyon jays are incredibly important seed dispersers for these trees. In turn, the ripening of pinyon cones stimulates physiological changes in pinyon

jays' reproductive systems, triggering breeding each year. Pinyon jays and pinyon pines are truly interdependent for successful reproduction.

Unfortunately, pinyon jays are declining more than almost any other pinyon-juniper obligate songbirds: according to data from the USGS Breeding Bird Survey, their numbers have declined by 84% since 1960. Nobody is quite sure why; their habitat is actually increasing in area, which is often the main culprit in situations like these. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently reviewing the species for potential listing under the Endangered Species Act, but so little is known about their ecology that decisions have yet to be made about what exactly we can do to protect them.

If you'd like to talk more about pinyon jays, or if you know of any breeding flocks (which would be super helpful for my research), email me at audreyhbiser@gmail.com! You can read more about pinyon jays at their profile on Cornell's [All About Birds](#).

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Suzi Holt posted on Facebook the following report about March's field trip to Beaver and Iron counties:

BEAVER AND IRON COUNTY

So yesterday we left bright and early and headed for Beaver County! First stop was the Lewis's Woodpecker in downtown Beaver. It was a bust. Plus, with 12 cars and over 40 Birders it was really rough in the middle of town. We did add Rock Pigeon, Great-tailed Grackle, European Starling, House Sparrow and Eurasian Collared-Dove.

We decided it was best to just head out to the reservoirs. On the way into Robinson/Tanner Reservoir we got to watch a couple of Bald Eagles being tormented by Common Ravens. The Ravens were harassing them and got one Eagle to drop its breakfast from the top of the pole in a flurry of feathers. The reservoir was really productive; we found 22 species there. Some of the favorites were the Common Merganser, Northern Pintail, Common Goldeneye and Ruddy Duck. We had a Bonaparte's Gull too!! There were flyovers of Red-tailed Hawks, Canada Geese and Double-crested Cormorants. A few Eared Grebes and a lot of Ring-billed Gulls sat happily on the water. As we were leaving, a huge flock of American White Pelicans lifted off! On our way out we saw a beautiful Golden Eagle. At Minersville Reservoir we added Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal, Great Blue Heron, American Coot, American Robin, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco and a Clark's Grebe. Our final total species was 35! Beaver check check!!

From there we made our way through Minersville to Iron County. Just after the county line we had a flock a Pinyon Jays!! Passed a heap o' sheep and made our way to Quichapa Lake. The heat waves and sun glare made it impossible to see anything on the lake but duck species and Ring-billed Gulls. A few Bald Eagles gave a good show though.

We decided to try Bulldog Pond. It was great! We added Great Blue Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, Hooded Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Mallard, Ring-billed Gull, American Robin, American Kestrel, Canada Goose, Great-tailed Grackle, Rock Pigeon, and a Black-crowned Night Heron!! From there we stopped at Cedar Hill Pond, adding Common Merganser, American Coot and Redhead. That put us at 21!!

After a lot of turn arounds we finally got to Lower Cedar Canyon trailhead. It was pretty quiet but the farther up the trail we walked the better. We added Spotted Towhee, Bushtit, Juniper Titmouse, Bewick's Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay and Dark-eyed Junco, rounding out our species in Iron County to 28!! It was a whirlwind and a lot of fun!! Thanks to everyone for coming!! "B" and "I" are finished!!



BACKYARD BIRDS

Suzi Holt, Payson: I have American Crows in my yard, a first for Payson!

Steve Van Winkle, Antelope Island, Rock Canyon: Here are a few of my extended neighborhood birds for March.



Northern Harrier



Canyon Wren