Utah County Birders Newsletter

November 2026

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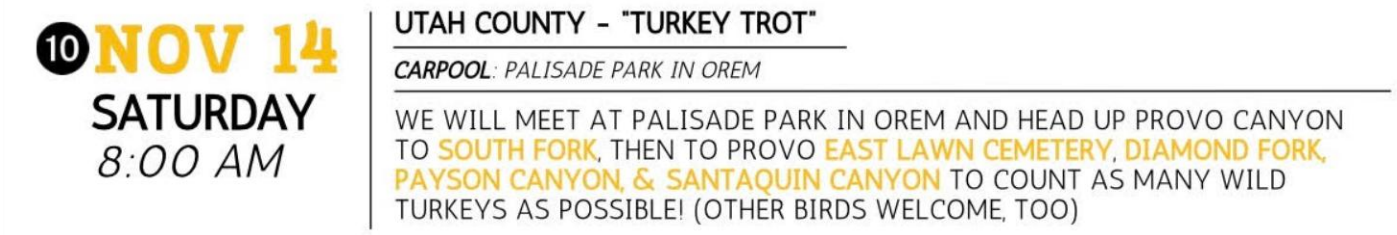
NOVEMBER MEETING

Nov. 12, 2026

UCB Nov Meeting:

Thursday Nov 12th, 7pm. "Twitching in Australia for a Year." Our guest speaker this month is Claire Chipman. We're excited to have her tell us all about her adventures living and chasing birds in Australia. We hope you join us in person or online via zoom. We will send out the zoom link via the UCBirders email the week of the meeting. Hope to see you all there!

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS



Please note that the date has been changed from what has been previously posted.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President's Message
By: KC Childs

I can't believe it is already November and that it is almost the end of the year. It has been an unforgettable year for birds, and an unforgettable last month as Hurricane Rachel brought the state of Utah all kinds of rare birds like the Storm-Petrels from St. George in the south to Logan in the North. I am sure that this El Nino year has more fun birds in store for us to get the chance to observe. As we leave October behind and head into November, I can't help but think of Thanksgiving and with that comes the moment to pause and say what we are thankful for in our lives. I have been part of the Utah County Birders since the year 2000, and I am forever indebted to this organization for all those who took me under their wings and taught me so much and gave so much to a young birder trying to learn the ropes. Fast forward over 25 years and I am still amazed and thankful for what an amazing community we have around us. I could go on for pages about all those around us that do so much to make sure that this group continues to be a resource to learn, and a community to be a part of. I know that so many put in countless hours for free to plan and lead meetings, lead field trips, put our newsletter together, keep track of finances, put together our bird of the month, write articles, organize a challenge, find prizes for the challenge, and present at our meetings. I am thankful for each person that shows up to the meetings, field trips, and helps with volunteer opportunities like the Christmas Bird Count, cleanups at various places, and help for new birders learning to appreciate the birds and nature around them. I have made some of my best friends via the bird community and that can never be replaced. I am also thankful for the moments I get to have with these birds that make a stop here before they may move on to areas of the world I'll never travel. I hope as this month goes on, we can all stop and have a realization of what an amazing community of bird enthusiasts we have, and amazing opportunities we have to take part in. Maybe you could stop and thank someone who has made your birding journey better because of some action they did, or just by being themselves. We have several opportunities this month to attend the meeting online or in person, come on a field trip, or help out on a service project, and I know that all those who offer up their time and skills are thankful to anyone who comes out and participates! Happy Thanksgiving everyone!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Song Sparrow
Melospiza melodia
Text by Yvonne Carter
Photos by Jeremy and Kristen Telford

May I introduce you to a very familiar bird we always encounter if we are birding anywhere near water. It is the ubiquitous SONG SPARROW. It can be everywhere at the same time, and in fact, it is unusual if we do not have a Song Sparrow on our list of birds when we are birding near water, although it can be found in other habitats as well. Its length is 5 1/2 to 7 1/2 inches. It is a stocky sparrow, with a round head, a long tail, and a stout bill. Its coloring is variable, but generally

streaked red-brown above, and heavily striped beneath with a distinct central breast spot. It has a white belly, a light gray central crown stripe and eyebrow, and pinkish legs.

The Song Sparrow is the most widespread sparrow in North America. But it hides in dense cover, although it also lives in suburban gardens and parks, where it can become quite tame. I have a resident Song Sparrow which I always find flying around even when I am out in the yard gardening. I can see it scuttling around under my bushes and flowers. It nests usually just above the ground, building a cup of grass and plant stems well-hidden in vegetation, in which it lays 3-6 greenish-white eggs heavily spotted with brown. These are incubated for around 2 weeks by the female bird, and the young are ready to begin fending for themselves around 10 days later. It is possible that there can be several broods in a season.





The Song Sparrow usually lives in family groups or pairs and is rarely seen in flocks. It eats seeds, grain, berries and insects. I thought about this statement about never being seen in a flock. I don't think I have ever seen two or three together in the yard, although I know they are there. One nest is close to our east edge of the property in a tree four feet up from the ground, and has a year's supply of dried berries. There are similar species like the Lincoln's Sparrow which is more buffy with narrow streaks beneath and no central breast spot. The Savannah Sparrow lacks a central breast spot and it has a shorter tail. Enjoy the Song Sparrow!!

Sources

"The Complete Encyclopedia of North American Birds" Michael Vanner, editor
"Essential Field Guide Companion" by Peter Dunne
Yard observations from Yvonne Carter

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Payson Cemetery bird walk
By Suzi Holt

We had our Payson cemetery walk today at 4! We had about 12 birders join us.
It was pretty windy and hard to hear any birds, and blowing so many leaves around made for not the best birding. But we ran into a mixed flock of birds with Mountain Chickadees, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Red-breasted Nuthatch! In the tree right next to them was a BARN OWL! As we walked, we added Northern Flicker, European Starling, Mourning Dove, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Black-billed Magpie, Northern Harrier and a couple of Cooper's Hawks. Then we heard a Steller's Jay and located it across the street as it flew into a big pine tree.

We also had Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, a small flock of Cedar Waxwings, American Goldfinch and a House Finch. A California Gull flew over and we saw a couple of Common Ravens across the street! I was watching a quick moving thunderstorm over by the mouth of the canyon and in about 5 minutes it came in full force, with hail and rain, and we all got soaked while running to our cars. Walk over at 5! Headed home to get changed and warm up! We managed a total of 20 species! Driving off we saw a full rainbow over the cemetery! Thanks for coming!



Storm-Petrel Adventure

Many of us went out looking for the Storm-Petrels after the October storms. Not all of us found them, but Suzi and company had a successful outing and shared their experience:

Ok this is up in the top tier of my birding career!
Hurricane Rachel pushed in a tropical storm to Utah last Monday. It brought in the first, farthest inland Storm-Petrels. Three species! I was in Disneyland with Amanda Holt Tinoco and her family. We got home Sunday and I tried to see them from the Provo Airport Dike and the Harbor but no luck so Jessica Holt and I got up and headed to River Lane this morning. Asher Lee Photography was there and had seen one out by bird island not too much before we got there, so we began scanning the





lake with our scopes. We were looking for a tiny seabird called a Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel, a tiny black seabird with a white rump and an erratic up and down, side to side, bat-like flight. After about a half hour I spotted one way out far on the lake. Asher got on my scope and said, “Yes it’s a Wedge-rumped!!!” I was so excited! It had flown out of sight by the time Jess looked. So I had her scope, and not too much later she had one too! Amanda showed up and we tried to find it again for about an hour with no luck. So we decided to go try at the Utah Lake SP. No luck. But I really felt if we went home and got the boat, we may have better luck! So we did, and about 3:30 we started searching. We'd asked KC for an estimated buoy pin and headed towards it. We never found the buoy, but all of the sudden I saw a



petrel. Jess and Amanda got binos on it and we got a little closer. WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL!!! I am so excited. It breaks my heart that it won't make it back to the ocean. But I am so grateful for the experience!

The Big Sit Wrap-up
By Keeli Marvel

We started off the morning with Jeff Cooper, Mike Munnerlyn, and KC Childs finding a spot to sit at the end of the Skipper Bay Trail at the Provo River Delta. As we were setting up, we heard our first bird of the morning which was a Cassin's Finch! I believe this was a first for our Big Sit since it began. Soon after we were joined by Robert, Rob, and Andrew Parsons, Andrew Hart and Andrew Pinock. We started looking onto the delta and lake to begin adding up our species count. We started picking up water birds like Great Blue Herons, Double Crested Cormorants, Western and Clark's Grebes and Eared Grebes. We had some sparrows showing up like Song, Lincoln's, and a count-first Vesper Sparrow. Shorebirds started to fly by the sit sight, including several flocks of Long-billed Dowitchers. While one flock flew by, we heard one of the dowitchers sound off that went “tu-tu-tu” and we then knew there was at least one Short-billed Dowitcher in the flock, which was a count first. Soon more birders arrived like Ethan Wait, Marissa Noelle, and Clarissa Chipman. We kept looking for more species, slowly adding to our total. We kept being entertained by a Belted Kingfisher that would come and pose for us nicely. We started sorting the gulls and could see California and Ring-billed Gulls and a Lesser Black-backed Gull loafing out on the lake. Keeli Marvel arrived and brought some refreshments and some energy to lead the back half of the sit. At the halfway point we were sitting at 42 species total.



Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs had been seen earlier and failed to make it on the list, so we added those and Canada Geese. We also picked up Mourning Dove and a Yellow-headed Blackbird in a large group of Red-winged that flew over the delta. A newish birder, Jeff, stopped by for a while to join in the count. Afternoon brought some thunderstorms and so the count took a break for a couple of hours while the storms rolled through. Once it was safe to continue, an Idaho birder colleague of Keeli’s and Atlas Goodrich joined Keeli on the count. Cliff Miles and his wife dropped by for a little bit, Tyler Whatcott joined the group, and the Simmons were able to join for a while, in time to enjoy the beautiful sunset. At the end of the day, we were able to add American Goldfinch, Cliff Swallow, and a Downy Woodpecker to the list, wrapping it up with a solid 52 species. For a day with some challenging wind and thunderstorms, that’s not too shabby of a count!

For those keeping track, 2002 was our first year participating in the Big Sit count. For most of the years we were able to hold it on various parts of the Provo Airport Dike, but had to move it out to the Delta once the dike was closed off to vehicle traffic. The Big Sit Provo count circle has been hosted all but a handful of years since 2002. Our high count over the years is 64 species (so that'll be the number for us to try and beat next year!)





BACKYARD BIRDS



Alton Thygerson, Provo. We've had three Steller's Jays making unpredictable appearances at our feeders for the past couple of weeks. A Great Horned Owl has been heard several times and seen once.

Suzi Holt (Oct 30). I had my first Steller's Jay in my tree this morning (see photo) in Payson!!! I've lived here almost 27 years!! So excited!

After bringing up some sort of spooky bird references in our e-mail to the group we got back the following responses:

Suzi Holt, Payson. I've had Black-billed Magpies and the Black-capped Chickadees are back in the yard in Payson. Waiting for the Dark-eyed Juncos!!

Steve Van Winkle, Highland. The only spooky group of birds I found in my folders is from Cano Negro, Costa Rica. I came up with "Ghosts" name for a group of egrets after reading your e-mail.



A "ghost" of Cattle Egrets

Dan and Leesa Simmons. We enjoyed Steve's Halloween suggestion that a group of egrets might be called a Ghost (according to AI, a group of egrets or herons can be called a "siege," although the boring term "flock" is most common). However, it seems that Cattle Egrets do have their dark side. Earlier this year we had a conversation with a conservation officer in Hawaii who refers to Cattle Egrets as "white devils," because they eat the chicks of the endemic Hawaiian Coot and Ae'o (a subspecies of Black-necked Stilt) that he is trying to protect.