



Utah County Birders Newsletter

October 2026

CONTENTS:

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

OCTOBER MEETING

Oct. 8, 2026

Oct 8th, 7pm at the Monte L. Bean Museum in Provo.

We have a VERY special Halloween treat for you this month. Please join us for a fun night of storytelling, with a birdy (and possibly a spooky) twist. Our special guest speaker is Paige Funk, a professional storyteller and the co-president of the Timp Tellers chapter of the Utah Storytelling Guild. Sit back and enjoy Paige Funk's crisp, classic, character driven storytelling. Paige's stories are thought provoking, enchanting and you can expect the unexpected.

Following Paige's storytelling we will have a special opportunity to learn how to craft stories of our own birding adventures!

We are also going to continue hosting **bird walks** each month and for October we have a special spooky bird walk!

October 22nd 4pm-6pm: Bird the Payson Cemetery. Meet at the main gate of the Payson Cemetery.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

9 **OCT 10**
SATURDAY
7:00 AM

UTAH COUNTY - "THE BIG SIT"

LOCATION: PROVO RIVER DELTA (WATCH FACEBOOK / INSTAGRAM FOR EXACT LOCATION)

JOIN US FOR THE ANNUAL "BIG SIT". THE "BIG SIT" IS LIKE A BIG DAY. AS A TEAM OF UTAH COUNTY BIRDERS, WE **FIND AS MANY SPECIES AS POSSIBLE FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET**. THERE IS ONE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE – ALL OBSERVATIONS MUST BE MADE **FROM WITHIN A CIRCLE NO MORE THAN 17 FEET IN DIAMETER**. (TIME SLOT SIGNUPS WILL BE AVAILABLE)

Sat, Oct 10th, sunrise to sunset. The Big Sit! Sponsored by the New Haven, CT birding club. This is a tradition the UCBers have participated in for many years. Birders will sit in a 17 foot circle that we will establish near the end of the trail and all birds/species that are seen by birders in that circle get recorded. We will try to beat our previous years' species counts. The Big Sit circle will be located at the end of the Skipper Bay trail where it dead ends between the Provo River Delta and Utah Lake roughly here: . https://maps.app.goo.gl/mwqDYuyeGRq7DBDv6?q_st=ic We will send out a sign up sheet but folks can stop by for as short or as long as they would like that day.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President's Message

By: KC Childs

We only have 3 months left in our challenge and with gas prices hovering around 5 dollars a gallon, we as a presidency wanted to get out the message that if you have not already visited some of the further counties like San Juan, Daggett, or Iron Counties, then you are welcome to choose to a different county closer to home to substitute instead. The challenge is all about getting out and enjoying birds and new places and we don't want that to be an economic strain on anyone. It's possible to do other closer counties like Wasatch, Tooele, or Juab County instead. We never want this to be an economic strain on anyone and hopefully this can help some people finish the challenge who may find it not currently viable to finish because of the distance. We would love to give out as many gold, silver, or bronze medals as we can at our awards dinner in January. I also want to remind everyone that finding 26 birds will be getting a bit more difficult with colder temperatures, and the duck hunt keeps ducks from being easily spotted. However, it is absolutely doable but could take a bit more effort. We also still have some more field trips that will help you finish up some of the counties. We love to see as many as possible on field trips, and you just never know what fun, exciting birds we may find on the trips! If there are any other concerns that are preventing you from finishing up the challenge, then please feel free to reach out to me, Suzi, or Keeli and we can definitely work with you so that you can finish up your challenges before the end of the year! I hope to see lots of you out on the Big Sit in October. It's one of my favorite events we do every year. I'm always amazed how many species we can find sitting in one spot all day!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

Text and photo by Atlas Goodrich

The Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is one of my favorite parts of the summer here in Utah. Their characteristic “peent” call has always charmed me. The males also make an impressive boom sound by diving with their wings to claim breeding territory. This guy pictured here is one we had to free from our mist nets when I was helping with bat sampling back in 2024.

Common Nighthawks have long, pointed wings with white patches and a slightly forked tail. These nighthawks have very flat heads, tiny bills, and cryptic coloration all over in shades of gray, white, buff and black. Their mouths open up into a basket-like shape to help them catch insects. They almost exclusively feed on flying insects, and you’ll often see them swooping around catching them. Despite their name, nighthawks are crepuscular, meaning they are mainly active at dawn and dusk. You can often see them coming out a little before sunset and in the mornings just before sunrise. They’re very difficult to spot when they’re roosting due to their excellent camouflage. They don’t really build a nest, instead laying their eggs directly on the ground, and both parents take turns feeding the young.

Common nighthawks travel all the way to places as far as Brazil during their nonbreeding season, though little is still known about their nonbreeding range. According to the first full annual migration cycle study conducted in 2018, common nighthawks return very close (within about 1.5 km—that’s less than a mile!) to their home breeding ranges.

This species is in steep decline, losing almost half of its population from 1966 to 2019 at a steady rate of 1% per year. Some threats to common nighthawks include loss of habitat and loss of mosquitoes and flying insects due to pesticides. In urban areas the main habitat loss is flat gravel roofs being replaced by rubber roofs, and in rural areas the reduction of open forest habitat. Interestingly, some success has been found with putting gravel pads in the corners of roofs and burning clearings in woods.

I’m gonna miss these guys as we head into the winter months, but I wish them luck on their migration and look forward to our winter birds returning.



Sources:

- Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Nighthawk

- J.W. Ng, E.C. Knight, A.L. Scarpignato, A.-L. Harrison, E.M. Bayne, and P.P. Marra. 2018. First full annual cycle tracking of a declining aerial insectivorous bird, the Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), identifies migration routes, nonbreeding habitat, and breeding site fidelity. *Canadian Journal of Zoology*. **96**(8): 869-875. <https://doi.org/10.1139/cjz-2017-0098>

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

September 17th Bird Walk

Text by KC Childs

Photos by Tyler Whatcott

On September 17th a sizable group of over 30 birders met at the newly constructed Provo River Delta Gateway Park to set out along the Provo River Parkway trail and walk around the oxbow area and back to the park. We immediately had two female Common Mergansers hanging out at the footbridge at the park. The mergansers gave great looks and were a fun sight to have in September. We started our walk towards the oxbow area and looked up into a tree to see Western Tanagers, Pine Siskin, American and Lesser Goldfinches, and a Cedar Waxwing. A little further along the trail we were greeted by a beautiful Northern Flicker, which was a fun sight to see in the valley after their near absence during the summer. As we started getting closer to the oxbow, we came across a small flock of birds that included Black-capped Chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, Song Sparrow, and Western Warbling Vireo. It was soon after this point that we had a good clip of rain come down on us, but luckily we were under a thick canopy of cottonwoods that did a great job of keeping us dry. After 15 minutes the rain let up and we continued our walk and got to see a pair of Downy Woodpeckers up close, a Western Wood Pewee, and fantastic looks at a Black Phoebe that was a lifer for many. We finished our walk back and as we got closer to the car as sunset was upon us, we had a Common Nighthawk fly over us as a Black-crowned Night Heron and Great Blue Heron flew near the delta in the background. It was a great walk and I was so happy to see so many birders out on a Thursday evening. We saw 31 species on our little walk, and truly enjoyed the company of one another. We hope to see more out for our walk or Big Sit next month.



Black Phoebe



Sanpete and Sevier Counties Field Trips

September 19th

Text by KC Childs

Photos by Mike Morrell

We had a great group of 13 birders that headed out to Sanpete and Sevier Counties to get our 26 species for the UC BIRDERS challenge. We started early at 7 AM and drove towards Wales Reservoir for our first stop in Sanpete County. As we drove towards Wales Reservoir, some of the birders were lucky enough to see a group of Sandhill Cranes and other fun birds. However, Wales Reservoir was rather empty of water, but it had enough water to provide us a few water birds like Mallard, Green-winged Teal, White-faced Ibis, and Killdeer. We also picked up several raptors like a Ferruginous Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and Turkey Vulture. There was also a smattering of passerines around like Sage Thrasher, Vesper Sparrow, Horned Lark, and a beautiful Belted Kingfisher where the water left the reservoir. We then headed into Ephraim for a potty break when I got a call from Brian Shirley with a great tip to go look at a local birder's feeders in Ephraim. This turned out to be a great stop, and we are so grateful for Paul Gardner allowing us onto his property to partake in his great set up of bird feeders. We got to see lots of fantastic birds like Cassin's Finch, Evening Grosbeak, White-winged Dove, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Western Tanager, Red-naped Sapsucker and a Lewis's Woodpecker to name a few. We then had a quick final stop at Palisades State Park where we were able to pick up an American White Pelican. At this point everyone had 26 species for the county and we decided to go on to Redmond Lake in Sevier County to see if we could manage 26 species at the lake.

As we drove into the town of Redmond, Keeli, Marissa, and Steve spotted a Merlin looking for lunch. It flew off, and as we tried to find it, we had a Sharp-shinned Hawk in town competing for its share of the House Sparrows. At the reservoir we found lots of great water birds and some wonderful passerines. We had Canada Goose, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, and Ruddy Duck for the waterfowl. We had a nice assortment of shorebirds like a Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Western Sandpiper. We enjoyed other birds like Caspian Tern, Black Tern, Sandhill Cranes, and a Great Blue Heron. We also had some fantastic passerines like Northern Yellow Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, and Western Tanager. As soon as we were wrapping up, we got to see one last incredible bird which was a Grasshopper Sparrow. This was a first ever find for Sevier County, at least that was logged on eBird. It gave us all satisfying looks, and everyone that stayed to the end was able to get 26 birds and then some. It was such a fun trip, and we saw so many wonderful birds that I hope everyone who came was happy with their experience. I can't wait to see many of you next month at our bird walk or big sit field trips!



Wilson's Warbler



Red-naped Sapsucker



Grasshopper Sparrow

BACKYARD BIRDS

Yvonne Carter, Highland. We have had a good increase in Northern Flickers.

K.C. Childs, Orem. I have been enjoying all the mountain birds in my yard this month like White and Red-breasted Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees and have had many warbler species like a Townsend Warbler, but my best was a new yard bird and that was a MacGillivray's Warbler. I'm excited to see what else the yard has in store this fall.

Audrey Biser, Provo. My husband and I often go to Sunday dinner at his parents' house in Edgemont. They have almost ten birdfeeders of all kinds and they're almost always swarming with lesser goldfinches, pine siskins, house finches, black-chinned and broad-tailed hummingbirds, and the occasional downy woodpecker and red-breasted nuthatch. We were eating dinner outside on their porch, which is about eye-level with the birdfeeders, when a white-breasted nuthatch swooped in and clung to the tree right above my head, only two or three feet away! It watched us for a few minutes before attacking the suet. I've never seen a white-breasted up that close and didn't realize how much bigger they were than red-breasted nuthatches. There've been a lot of white-breasted all over the valley the last few months, and I was excited to add one to my backyard bird list.

Dan Simmons, Orem. On Sept. 15, while walking above the Orem water treatment plant near our home, I came across a flock of around 20 Pinyon Jays just above the Bonneville Shoreline Trail. That seemed unusual, since this is not a pinyon/juniper habitat. The other unusual thing was that Merlin seemed unable to figure out what they were. Some of them flew right over my head while calling and Merlin recorded nothing. While they were on the ground Merlin called them Northern Flickers a couple of times and two or three times called them Marbled Godwits. Have any of the rest of you had trouble with Merlin identifying Pinyon Jays or have you seen them in atypical habitats?

Alton Thygerson, Provo. Daily, my backyard usually has 6 or so different species randomly arriving. Best specie seen during September: White-breasted Nuthatch.

Steve Van Winkle, Provo. Here's my Osprey shot at Utah Lake State Park on the 9th of September.

