

Utah County Birders Newsletter

August 2014

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AUGUST MEETING:

Thursday, August 14th, 2014

Annual Summer Social - Saratoga Springs.

Our monthly meeting will be our summer potluck on Aug 14 at 7pm at the Saratoga Springs Owners Association park (Eagle Park). The park address is 188 Centennial Blvd in Saratoga Springs. Contact Keeli Marvel if you need directions to the park. Please bring a potluck item to share. We will provide plates, cups and utensils. Hope to see everyone there!

Here is a link to a map with a marker on the meeting spot - <https://maps.google.com/?q=40.33465+-111.90708>

FIELD TRIPS:

No Field Trips scheduled this month.

We are actively recruiting people to lead local half-day field trips, any time, any place. If you would like to lead a field trip or if you have any ideas for this year's field trips, please contact Bryan Shirley at - bt_shirley@hotmail.com

Captain's Log: August 2014

by Keeli Marvel

Take them as they come

Sometimes life throws you a curveball and you end up on a last minute flight to Florida to attend a funeral for someone you've never met. My grandmother found out her brother-in-law had passed away and she wanted to attend the funeral, but was not able to make the long trip by herself, and so I found myself in Florida for about 36 hours a few weeks ago. My purpose on the trip was to provide support and company for my grandmother, but fortunately she's very supportive of my birding habit as well, and I was able to squeeze in a few life birds and a quick trip to the coast while we were there.

When we arrived in Orlando the evening of the 4th of July, we picked up our rental car and drove the hour north to the DeLand, FL area. Because it was the 4th of July, the drive was a spectacular firework show the whole way up there. We stayed with cousins of cousins in the rural area of Lake Helen. They live on a dirt road surrounded by five acres of land in a more rural area, and they were gracious enough to let us stay with them for a couple of nights.

On the morning of the 5th I sacrificed sleep in favor of getting in some birding before I was due elsewhere for the day's events. I left the house around sunrise to go for a wander around the property and a little pond down the road. There I picked up several eastern specialties including Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Cardinals, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and one lifer, a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers, which disappointingly enough looks just like our Ash-throated/Brown-crested varieties. I think if something is called "Great Crested" it should be sporting a 'do more like a Hoopoe, don't you think? Maybe we should have a word with the naming committee.

After wandering around the property watching the sun come up and the mist slowly burn off I hopped in the car for a bit of a wander around the lakes in the area, hoping to find some Anhingas or Limpkins. No luck on either, but I picked up some Purple Martins at a park, Cattle Egrets in a field where a bunch of cows were grazing, a Turkey Vulture roosting in a tree trying very hard to pretend to be a Black Vulture, a Turkey that may or may not have been wild, and a Little Blue Heron in a water runoff canal along the road. I also discovered the local population of practically-domesticated Sandhill Cranes that hang out in shopping center parking lots conveniently near "Warning- Sandhill Crossing" road signs in the DeLand area. They were very confiding birds. I pulled up next to them to snap a picture, and they posed obligingly. I headed back after that to get ready for the day.

We attended the memorial service, and headed to the DeLand Memorial Park for the graveside service, and believe it or not,



Sandhill cranes posing for pictures.



Armadillo!



Gulls and a pigeon on New Smyrna Beach.

that's where I picked up another lifer. While we were waiting for the service to begin, a lifer Swallow-tailed Kite flew over. Of course I didn't have my binoculars on me at that point, but a pair flew right over us with their distinctive black and white swallow-tail pattern and I had my lifer. Funny circumstances to get a life bird in, but I'll take it!

A trip to Florida wouldn't feel complete to me without a stop at the beach so that afternoon after a family luncheon and some visiting we headed out with my cousin and her kids for a quick trip to New Smyrna Beach. On the way there I got some great video of an armadillo chasing bugs around on a lawn. I know they're considered vermin locally and they can carry diseases, but it was so dang cute I couldn't help jumping out to get pictures! A storm was rolling in for the afternoon, but we had a chance to do a little wading in the Atlantic Ocean, and I picked up some Laughing Gulls. It rained for the rest of the day so we ended up back in DeLand visiting with family, and that was it for my quick trip to Florida. Two lifers and some quality time with family – not too shabby for such a quick trip!

Happy Birding!
Keeli Marvel

Bird of the Month

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus
by Mabelle Johnson

An uncommon woodpecker of the western mountains, this medium-sized, handsome woodpecker breeds in open forested areas with conifers, mainly Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, and Grand Fir. Typically found in higher elevations. It usually nests in aspens, both live and dead, and in snags as well as the main body of the tree.

Pete Dunne's description says: "The classic sapsucker body is complete with a strong, straight, pointy sapsucker bill. The male is unmistakable. Shiny and uniformly black above (head, back, tail), it has a head creased by two white stripes and a bold white wing patch. The prominent white rump is visible only in flight. Underparts are black on the chest, yellow on the belly. Immature males are like adults but lack the red throat and yellow belly. Females are overall pale and, in spectral defiance of the wraparound pattern of narrow blackish and grayish barring, have a brownish cast. Their heads are warmer and buffier, and their faces conspicuously plain. The blackish breast-band and yellow belly (not usually visible, since birds forage with their bellies pressed against tree trunks) are absent on immature females. Although female Williamson's lacks a white patch in the wing, a very conspicuously white rump (visible in flight) distinguishes this species from other female sapsucker. Cool fact: Originally, the female was considered to be a different species and named the Black-breasted Woodpecker by Cassin.



Female on tree, Male in nest hole.
photo by Paul Higgins

Sapsuckers get their name from their foraging strategy of drilling holes in tree trunks, and then coming back to those holes later to feed on the running sap and the insects attracted to that sap. They also chip bark from trees to get to insects boring beneath. Sometimes they work up from the bottom of one tree and then fly to the base of another when the canopy is gained, much like a creeper. These birds seem just as inclined, however, to switch trees as to climb and will forage horizontally through a woodland--landing, searching a trunk for ants or other insects, then flying on to another tree. Because of this active feeding pattern, Williamson's is usually conspicuous when breeding--an advantage

from a birding standpoint because the species also tends to be quiet. They are most commonly found on the trunks of trees.

This species took its common name from Lieutenant Robert Stockton Williamson, who was the leader of a surveying expedition which collected the first male. They were trying to identify the best route west for a railway to the Pacific Ocean.

References: Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion, Wikipedia, birdweb.org

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Machele - machele13johnson@yahoo.com

Backyard Bird of the Month

July 2014

Jack Binch - Sandy

An adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** just made it into the yard on the 31st. Yes.

Yvonne Carter - American Fork

Western Scrub Jays and **Black-headed Grosbeaks** plus a **Rufous Hummingbird**!

Harold Clayson - Salem

American Crows flew over my home in Salem this month. Knowing the hunters are supposed to "Eat Crow" after harvesting makes all of this the more ridiculous.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

The **Rufous Hummingbirds** have returned, but so far the Black-chinned have succeeded in defending the front and back yard feeders. I suspect the Rufous will take over in the next few days. I always enjoy their return near the end of July.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

Rufous Hummingbird - I'm always excited to see them return.

Milt Moody - Provo

Bullock's Oriole - Looked like a new juvenile coming to my bird bath for a drink.

Leena Rogers - Provo

A handsome **Downy Woodpecker** was investigating some older trees in our yard. It was fun to watch his busy "hunt and peck" antics.

Bruce Robinson - West Jordan

Swainson's Hawk - Two youngsters ready to leave the nest

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

July 31, 2014 - A First Year **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (probably just out of nest based by its bewildered behavior) being mercilessly harassed by a flock of five magpies.

Alton Thygersen - Provo

Black-headed Grosbeaks - Fun to watch them ³walk² down the 5-foot rod holding the feeder.

Report your favorite backyard bird each month to Eric Huish at 801-360-8777 or erichuish@gmail.com