

Utah County Birders Newsletter

March 2014

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MARCH MEETING:

Thursday, March 13th, 2014 - 7:00 PM

John Crawley will give a presentation on his recent trip to **Southeast Asia**.

We will be meeting at John Crawley's house. 2544 N 530 E, Provo, Utah

FIELD TRIPS:

15 March, 2014 (Sat): Juab and San Pete Counties - Time: 7:00 AM - Meet: NE corner of the parking lot of the Payson Walmart (just off the second Payson exit if coming from the north). Leader: Dennis Shirley. We will make a loop through Juab and San Pete Counties hitting areas like Burrison Ponds, Wales Reservoir, Fairview, etc. Should be back in the early afternoon.

29 March, 2014 (Sat): Antelope Island - Meet at 7:30am at Pioneer Crossing Park & Ride just west of I-15. Leader: Keeli Marvel. We are going to go to Antelope Island for some early spring birding and get our Davis County birds for the [UCB birding challenge](#).

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

by Keeli Marvel

Captain's Log: March – Songs and Sounds of Birds

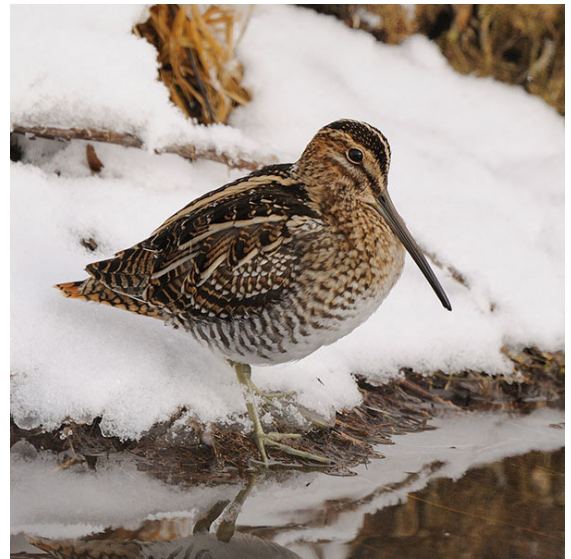
The diversity of sounds birds are able to produce is amazing – just as amazing as the ways they produce them. Birds make sounds for a number of reasons. The number one reason is to attract a mate and defend a territory, but other reasons include individual identification, communication of a threat like the presence of a predator, or other communication such as the location of food, or the desire to be fed. Bird vocalizations can take several different forms including songs, calls, call notes, and chip notes. Some species even have regional dialects (like accents).

Some species have a distinct call or song that rarely varies, while other species, like the Northern Mockingbird, mimic other birds and build up a repertoire of various calls. My favorite example of this is the lyrebird that is found in Australia. If you pull up the YouTube video website and search for lyrebird there is a video clip narrated by Sir David Attenborough of a lyrebird mimicking the most remarkable sounds. They can mimic just about everything, and the one in the video mimics chainsaws, car alarms, and camera shutters. They build as diverse a repertoire of calls as possible for the same reason Northern Mockingbirds do – to attract a mate— and the one with the most diverse collection of calls may be the one that gets the girl. Some species in the parrot and corvid (ravens, crows, etc...) families are even able to mimic human speech.

Some bird species communicate with sounds that are not actually vocalizations. Woodpeckers use their beaks to drum on trees and a variety of other surfaces in their environment. Other species produce noise mechanically through the manipulation of air and feathers. An example of this is the noise Wilson's Snipe make. I remember the first time I heard this, I was driving around the end of Deer Creek and I stopped to scan a marsh and heard this sound I could only describe as a "wubba wubba wubba" sort of noise. I found out later it's called winnowing, and snipe use the noise to attract mates and defend territory. The sound is made by moving air very quickly over their specially modified outer tail feathers. Another example of unique bird noises many of you are familiar with is the sound the male greater sage-grouse make when they are on the lek, or communal breeding ground. The bubbly or blurby sound is made by the inflation of air sacs in the male's chest, and is used as a display to attract females. Another very different lekking bird group in South America, the manakins, make unique buzzy/snappy noises during their courtship display. This noise is made by a movement of their wings snapping against their legs very very quickly.

Bird calls can be very difficult to learn, however, learning to ID birds by their call can be very helpful in the field. Many resources exist to help birders learn to identify bird calls. Smart phone apps such as iBird provide a handy field guide complete with recordings of songs and calls. A free online resource called Xeno Canto (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/>) provides a database of recorded bird sounds complete with location information (good for comparing dialects). The best teacher though, in my opinion, is practice and experience.

As we move into spring in the next couple of months the birds are going to start getting more vocal as they migrate back to their breeding habitats and start establishing territories and advertising for mates. My advice is to get out there, see some birds, and see how many calls you can identify. You might be surprised! Happy Birding!



Wilson's Snipe

Photo by John Crawley

Birding In Bare Feet or Binoculars in Bahamas

by Dennis Shirley

Life is tough being a birder. After doing a Utah County Big Month in January, I had to take time off for a little rest and relaxation. So since I had given Carolyn an island hopping trip to the Bahamas for Christmas, we combined our vacation with what was meant to be a little birding. After studying the Bahamian birds, I found out that there are 5 endemics and another dozen life birds I had possibilities of finding. I made the arrangements to go to four northern Bahama islands (Grand Bahama, Nassau, Great Abaco, and Andros) on short inter-island flights, and arranged rental cars and places to stay on each island.

So our luggage contained not only swim suits, sandals, and beach towels, but also birds books, binoculars, and spotting scope. I could tell that Carolyn was a little skeptical of this "non-birding" vacation when she tried to lift my suitcase and carry-on. Bird books and optics are heavy! The Bahamas are known for their white sand beaches, palm trees, beautiful resorts, sunsets, and relaxing atmosphere. But who can totally relax when there are birds to be seen! Eyebrows were raised when this barefooted, swimsuit clad, Utah tanned tourist with binoculars around his neck showed up on the beach. I'm sure there were questions about what this lounging beach bum was looking at when he scanned the beaches with his upraised binoculars. Few realized that I was actually looking at Magnificent Frigatebirds, Royal Tern, and Greater Black-backed Gulls. I tried to spot Brown Boobies but didn't see any!

Other than looking at the masses of people who get off the cruise ships on Nassau and the Grand Bahama, there are not a lot of tourist traps to spend your time at in the Bahamas. Even on these two busy islands, there were quiet, secluded, out-of-the-way private preserves and small national parks such as "The Garden of Groves" and Lucayan National Park on the Grand Bahama and the Bahama National Trust Retreat on Nassau (New Providence). The other two islands we visited, Great Abaco and Andros, are off the main tourist beaten path, have no cruise ships docked on them, are much more laid back and peaceful, and have a better variety of birds and more of the endemics.

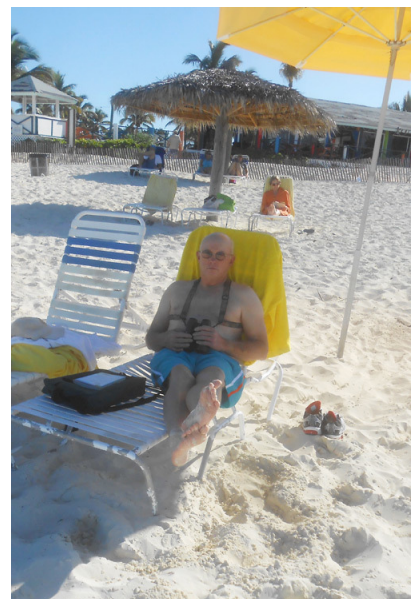
We ended up seeing 113 bird species including the 5 endemics and 12 other lifers which share their distribution in the Bahamas and Cuba. The Bahama endemics include the Bahama Woodstar, a small hummingbird which we saw on the Grand Bahama and Nassau; the Bahama Mockingbird, on Nassau and Andros; Bahama Swallow on Great Abaco and Andros; Bahama Oriole, an endangered species found only on Andros; and Bahama Yellowthroat seen on Grand Bahama and Great Abaco. The other lifers included the Great Lizard Cuckoo, my favorite bird of the trip, on Andros; the Rose-throated (Bahama) Parrot, my second favorite bird of the trip, on Great Abaco; two new world warblers - Olive-capped and Bahama (a recent split from the Yellow-throated Warbler); Key West Quail-Dove, a toughie, on Andros; Cuban Peewee on Andros and Great Abaco; Cuban Emerald, Western Spindalis, and La Sagras Flycatcher on all four islands; Thick-billed Vireo on all four islands; and the West Indian Woodpecker on Great Abaco. We also saw the Cuban Grassquit on Nassau which has been introduced.

Other specialty Caribbean birds included Caribbean Dove, Loggerhead Kingbird, Red-legged Thrush, and 20 more migrant eastern wood warblers spending the winter in the Bahamas.

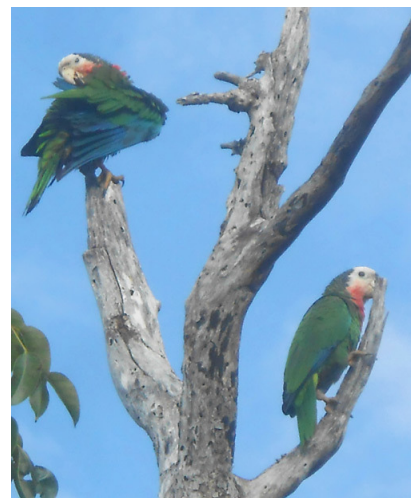
The Bahamas are also known for their Blue Holes, limestone caves, and flat Caribbean Pine/Palmetto forests. So much of the time we did have to wear shoes.



Great Lizard Cuckoo



Birding in Bare Feet



Rose-throated Parrots

Bird of the Month

Merlin

Falco columbarius

by Jeff Cooper

As fall gives way to winter in Utah I begin to think about winter raptors. I look forward to my first Merlin of each winter season and then I keep track of each sighting thereafter. These falcons are somewhat similar to American Kestrels, but they are stockier, stronger, and much more aggressive. They breed in forests near open areas throughout much of Canada and Alaska. They are uncommon in open areas and are generally solitary, especially when seen here in Utah--away from their breeding grounds. Merlins are showing up more frequently in urban areas. I've seen one or two each year in my Pleasant Grove neighborhood and in an Orem neighborhood during two recent Christmas Bird Counts.

The diet of a Merlin consists mostly of small birds. I've seen Merlins harass larger birds such as Rock Pigeons, but whenever I've seen them perched with prey it is often something the size of a sparrow or Junco. Merlins are about ten inches from head to tip of tail and have wingspans approaching twenty-four inches. There are three races of Merlins: Taiga (*columbarius*), Prairie (*richardsonii*), and Black (*suckleyi*). All are streaked underneath, but they range in color from pale for Prairie to rather dark for Black. Taiga is most common in Utah. They are darker than Prairie yet lighter than Black. There is overlap in color and intergradation does occur so it is not always easy to assign a Merlin to one race or another. I've included images of all three races and labeled each. I've seen both Taiga and Prairie in Utah. I've seen some pretty dark Merlins in flight, but I can't confidently say I've spotted a Black Merlin since I started birding about four years ago. The Black shown in this article shows less white banding in the tail, no visible eye line, and a buffy wash on the entire chest and under tail coverts. The mustache mark is less conspicuous because of the darker head. If you could see it better, the light throat would not contrast as much as with the Taiga above.

I checked some bar charts in eBird and it seems that Merlins begin showing up in Utah County toward the end of September and beginning of October. Our last sightings of the season occur mostly in March, but they sometimes extend to April. That means our final chances for seeing these ferocious falcons of the north are waning. If you don't get a Merlin on your year list in March you'll likely have to set your sights for the end of the year.

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Mabelle (new Bird of the Month Coordinator!) - mabelle13johnson@yahoo.com

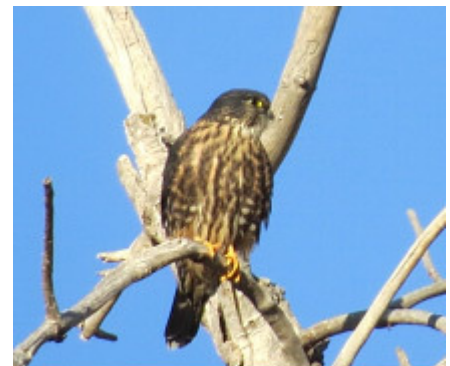
[Click here for past 'Birds of the Month'.](#)



Prairie Merlin
photo by Jeff Cooper



Taiga Merlin
photo by Jeff Cooper



Black Merlin
photo by Mike Hearrell

Field Trip Report

Wasatch County - 8 February 2014

by Brian Shirley

Yesterday 6 birders braved the weather and ended up with a decent day in Wasatch County & Summit County. We started out at the mouth of the Provo River in Deer Creek Reservoir. There were several hundred Canada Geese, thousands of ducks, and a few Mute and Tundra Swans. The waterfowl was being kept pretty busy by a few Bald Eagles that kept harrasing them. We weren't able to find any rare ducks, but in total found 15 species or waterfowl there. The wind and rain made birding slow overall, but we made a few stops around the outskirts of town and had our 29 species for the county before long. Since it was still early we decided to hit Summit County for about an hour before heading home. We drove along the upper Provo River and saw a couple of Dippers, but the best bird there was a Northern Shrike near Francis.

Good Birding,

Bryan Shirley

Backyard Bird of the Month

February 2014

Jack Binch - Sandy

Nothing new at my feeders, but I now have at least **14 Yellow-rumps** and I still enjoy watching them.

Yvonne Carter - Highland

Our **Great Horned Owl** is hooting early in the morning. Have the usual Amer. Goldfinches, junco, house finches, Scrub Jays at the feeder and in the yard a busy Northern Flicker and Hairy Woodpecker, besides a Cooper's Hawk.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

I had a **Cassiar Junco** at my feeder for several days during February. It's the second winter in a row that I've had birds at my feeder that show the typical field marks of a male Cassiar.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

A **White-throated Sparrow** showed up under my feeders for a couple of days after a snowstorm, Feb 7th & 8th.

Milt Moody - Provo

The **Hermit Thrush** that showed up in December is visiting more frequently lately -- maybe a couple of time a week drinking from my birdbath.

Carol Nelson - Provo

I was actually home for a couple of days and found the pond unfrozen and a male **Hooded Merganser** displaying his finery on it. A Bald Eagle sat in the tree above and a Great Blue Heron stood on a high tree stump. I felt like I had hit the jackpot. The next day there was nothing.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

Six **Spotted Towhee** on Feb. 2nd.

Alton Thygerson - Provo

Spotted Towhees are daily visitors. Fun to watch them wag their tails while perched on the fence.

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

The Utah County Birders Newsletter is now online only/mostly.

We've decided to stop the regular paper mail version of the UCB Newsletter. This will save our club on Printing, Postage and Paper. If you would like an email notice each month when the Newsletter is posted online please send an email to Eric Huish at erichuish@gmail.com or subscribe to the ucynet mailing list. To subscribe to ucynet just send an e-mail to ucynet-subscribe@utahbirds.org

We are willing to print the online version of the newsletter and mail it out to anyone who still wants a paper copy or who doesn't have internet access. If you know of anyone who enjoys the UCB Newsletter but doesn't have internet access please let Eric Huish or Keeli Marvel know and we will make sure they get a copy.