

# Utah County Birders Newsletter

November 2014



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## NOVEMBER MEETING:

**Thursday, November 13th, 2014** - 7:00 pm

### **Dennis Shirley - Birds of Shemya Island.**

Dennis Shirley will be giving a presentation on his trip to Shemya Island, a small island in the Semichi Islands chain in the Aleutian Islands archipelago southwest of Alaska.

Meet at 7pm at the Bean Museum. Check with the information desk at the museum to find out which room we'll be in. Probably the same room as last month, right behind the information desk.

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## FIELD TRIPS:

**8 November, 2014 (Sat). A day trip to Beaver and Iron Counties** - We will try to knock off both counties for the UCB Challenge and explore some areas that don't get birded too often. It will be an all day trip. Plan on meeting at Payson Walmart (I think it is exit 248) at 6:30 AM to carpool from there. Since we have a long drive this will be an all day trip. Leader: Bryan Shirley 801-722-9346

**20 December, 2014 (Sat). Provo Christmas Bird Count:** More details next month, but keep the date open!

**3 January, 2015 (Sat). Payson Christmas Bird Count.**

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](mailto:bt_shirley@hotmail.com)

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## Our 2014 Birding Challenge is drawing to a close!

Please email Keeli Marvel ([keeli.marvel@gmail.com](mailto:keeli.marvel@gmail.com)) with your name and level of the challenge achieved, if you have completed the challenge or anticipate doing so by the end of the year so we can get an idea of the number of prizes we will need.

For the Challenge Rules please see the January 2014 newsletter or visit <http://www.utahbirds.org/ucb/2014BirdingChallenge.pdf>

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## Captain's Log: October 2014

### Bird nesting ecology

by Keeli Marvel

The diversity of site selection and nesting habits of bird species is as varied and diverse as everything else in the bird world. Species make a living by exploiting the available niches in their environment, and that applies to nesting as well. Some birds nest on branches or in cavities in trees, some on the ground, some like Burrowing Owls, Tufted Puffins, and Common Murres, nest in burrows dug into the ground. Some birds nest in muddy river banks, or on island sea cliffs, and some, like Black Terns, nest behind waterfalls. Gila Woodpeckers nest in cavities inside Giant Saguaro Cactus in the southwest.



**Starling Nest**

Some species nest individually, while others are colonial nesters. Most of the heron species and many pelagic species such as kittiwakes, terns, and puffins all nest in huge colonial groups. Some species have very specific requirements for nesting sites. When these sites are threatened by human encroachment and development the species does not have the ability to pick up and relocated, and can become threatened or endangered as a result. This was the case with old-growth-forest-nesting species Marbled Murrelets, and Spotted Owls which both rely on big old trees to nest in/on. Other species are nesting location generalists and will nest just about anywhere, including in other bird's nests. This category includes species such as the European Starling. Where I work, it's common to see starlings nesting in American Kestrel nest boxes, in the rafters of open sheds, and once, even in a mechanical gate mechanism box. At work this past spring I was called to rescue a bird nest that was in an unfortunate location. When I got there, I found starlings nesting inside an open box next to a motor that was due to be sent to surplus. The box was sitting in an open shed and the starlings had decided that it was an ideal place to nest.

Bird species are very unique in the types of nests they build and the materials they use to do so. Swallows use mud and spit to craft cup-shaped or enclosed nests under building eaves and bridges. Tiny hummingbird and gnatcatcher species will use spider silk to anchor their nest materials together. Weaver birds in Africa use thin strands of leaf fiber, twigs, or grasses to weave intricate bell-shaped or spherical woven nests. Similarly, Orioles in North America will use vegetation to build intricate, pendulous hanging nests. Common magpies, other corvid species, and Osprey have been known to use bailing twine, bits of other man-made debris, and even in a few unique instances, barbed wire, in their nest construction. Several grebe species will build their nests on the water on floating rafts of vegetation.

In contrast, some species don't build nests at all. Peregrine Falcons are famously known for nesting high on cliff faces and the sides of really tall building in stark nesting locations called "scrapes" where they use natural rock crevices or building features for cover. Birds in the nightjar family are also characterized by their lack of nesting material, and nest on bare ground on top of leaf litter or in depressions shaded by vegetation. Emperor penguins, nesting in some of the most inhospitable conditions in the world, don't even nest at all. Instead, the males incubate the eggs on top of their feet for over two months while the females return to the ocean to feed. That's dedication right there.

As winter begins and we all snuggle down into our own nests for the holiday season ahead, I wish you all a happy Thanksgiving, and I hope to see as many of you as possible out for our Christmas Bird Count this year! Even if you can only join us for a couple hours on the day of the count, the more eyes the better, and the more the merrier! Stay tuned to our December newsletter and meeting for more details.

Happy Birding!

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## Bird of the Month

### Burrowing Owl

*Athene cunicularia*

by Jim Strong

This is a cute, long-legged, short-tailed little owl and a thrill to see in the wild as most birders will agree. The average adult owl is slightly larger than the American Robin.

According to many sources, birding books and the internet these represent the size averages for the Burrowing Owl.

Length: 9 - 11 inches

Wingspan: 20 – 24 inches

Weight: 4.9 – 8.5 ounces

Males and females are colored alike with white streaking above the eyes on the head, white chin and throat, brown upper parts with white spotting, white to buff underparts with brown barring. They have bright yellow eyes, round head and no ear tufts. They inhabit open country, grasslands and prairies, and can be found in similar habitats near humans such as golf courses and airports.

**Behavior** Unlike other owls the Burrowing Owl is active in daylight hours. They can be seen daylight hours especially during the spring when they are gathering food for their young. They can be seen near the burrow on the ground, on a fence post and often standing on one foot. They do a lot of hunting at dawn and dusk seeking, larger insects, grasshoppers, small mammals such as gophers, mice, ground squirrels, and young cotton tail rabbits. Small birds like sparrows and horned larks are likely to be on the menu. They catch what they can, even snakes.

**EYES** The eyes of owls are placed close together. If you had eyes in proportion to the size of an owl it would be as if two grapefruits were placed in your eye sockets. An owl can look straight ahead only because its eyes are held in place by bony elongated tubes called sclerotic rings. The pupils of an owl's eye can open independent of each other, thus giving the owl excellent night vision. Owls have a third eyelid, called "nictitating membrane", that functions like a windshield wiper blade moistening with a tear at each blink, and also gives added protection when the owl has to wrestle its prey.

**Breeding and nesting** Burrowing Owls nest underground in abandoned burrows dug by prairie dogs, ground squirrels, badgers and even skunk holes. They are able to dig holes or enlarge them in the softer soils. Manmade nest boxes have been successful in some areas inclusive of Antelope Island and Salt Creek Wildlife Management Area in northern Utah.

The nest is lined with horse and cow manure, food debris, dry grass, weeds, pellets and feathers. It is built by both sexes but the male does more. The female will lay and incubate 7 – 10 white eggs for 21 -30 days. They are semialtricial and the young remain in the nest about 28 days. They are fed by both parents. One to two broods a year is typical depending on food sources.



Photo by John Crawley.

Nesting season begins in late March or April. Courtship displays include flashing white markings, cooing, bowing, scratching and nipping. The male performs the aerial displays. Often the outside of the burrow on the mound may be lined with animal dung to attract certain beetles which also serves as food for the owl family. They also have a curious habit of decorating the burrow entrance with shiny objects. One or more "satellite" burrows can usually be found near the nest and are used by adult males during the nesting period and by juvenile owls for a few weeks after they emerge from the nest.

**Mortality** Burrowing Owls are able to live up to nine years in the wild and in captivity they can live 10 or more years. They are often killed by vehicles as they cross roads in flight. They have many natural enemies such as Great Horned Owls, hawks, falcons, badgers, skunks, foxes, coyote, snakes and some domestic cats and dogs. Indications that they are declining are due to poison-control programs aimed at prairie dogs and ground squirrels and habitat loss.

### **Good birding locations for the Burrowing Owl in Utah**

1. The closest area is the west side of Utah lake and above Saratoga Springs
2. Deseret Land and Livestock
3. Antelope Island
4. Pony Express Trail near and west of Simpson Springs

**Sources:** Smithsonian Handbook BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, Field Guide of Birds, Western Region by Donald & Lillian Stokes, Bill Fenimore, iBird and the National Wildlife Federation.

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

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

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### **Field Trip Report**

**Provo Airport Dike Big Sit!** - 11 October 2014

by Eric Huish

On a Big Sit you pick a spot and spend the day sitting within a 17 foot circle and only count birds you see from that one spot. Many people across the country participate in "The Big Sit!" on the second weekend of October every year.

This year's Provo Airport Dike Big Sit was covered continuously from 6:09 am to 6:20 pm. (12 Hours 11 Minutes). We sat at the Southwest Corner of the dike loop. The weather was nice and we had several birders out helping us count but for some reason this year we only saw 45 species, one of our lowest counts in the 13 years we've done the big sit. Last year we sat at the same spot and got our record count (61 species). We didn't get any sit lifers this year, our 13 year (13 day) Big Sit Life List is still at 117 species. A Great Horned Owl and Mountain Chickadee were seen from the sit spot the day before but couldn't be found on the day of.



**Big Sitters Standing in the Sit Circle.**

Sit Participants - Keeli Marvel, Carlos Caceres, John Crawley, Milt Moody, Alona Huffaker, Robert Brown, Yvonne Carter, Larry Reeves, Cliff Miles, Jim Strong, Kay Stone, Jason Lane, Kathleen Blanchard, Alton Thygerson, Suzi Holt, Amanda Holt, Carol Nelson and Eric Huish.

I would like to especially thank Keeli Marvel, Carlos Caseres and John Crawley for co-leading the sit.

If you'd like to know more about the Big Sit! rules or see how other Sit Circles across the country did visit - <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/index.php?sc=migration>

### Our Big Sit List

Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, California Gull, Caspian Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Downey Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Black-billed Magpie, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Yellow-headed Blackbird, House Finch, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch.

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### Field Trip Report

**Payson Canyon - 30 October 2014**  
by Suzi Holt

Payson Canyon Field trip with Carol, Amanda, Layne, Nicole and Ty, Valynn, Lindsey and Maggie. We saw steller and scrub jays, american robin, brown creeper, black-capped and mountain chickadees, dark-eyed junco, ruby crowned kinglet, european starling, northern flicker, song sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, spotted towhee, white-breasted nuthatch, red-breasted nuthatch, lesser and american goldfinch, pine siskin, red-tailed hawk, black-billed magpie and house finch. Overall it was a great and beautiful day!!!



Some photos from the Payson Canyon Field Trip.

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## Backyard Bird of the Month

October 2014

Jack Binch - Sandy

A toss up again this month. **Mountain Chickadee** and a female **Evening Grosbeak** on the same day.

Yvonne Carter - American Fork

Maybe a first! a **Red-Breasted Nuthatch** plus busy Black-capped Chickadees and Western Scrub-Jays.

Lyle Bingham - Payson

**Steller's Jays** - They are everywhere in the Payson Hollow. I had 5 jays under my feeder yesterday, 4 Steller's Jays and 1 Western Scrub Jay. It will be interesting to see how things are after this storm passes.

Harold (Herb) Clayson - Salem

**Northern Flicker** - During the cold snap earlier they showed up but have left now.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

A few weeks ago a ferocious looking immature **Cooper's Hawk** spent raced around the yard before settling in the maple tree by the pond.

Keeli Marvel - Saratoga Springs

One morning a couple of weeks ago I looked out the front window at my house in Saratoga Springs and I had **Dark-eyed Juncos**, a **Northern Flicker**, **White-crowned Sparrow**, **Eurasian Collared Doves**, and an **American Robin** all hanging out on my front patio. Some kind of bird convention must have been going on. When I looked out a few minutes later, they were all gone.

Milt Moody - Provo

It's a tie, in my backyard in Provo. Two mountain birds showed up: A **Steller's Jay** and a **Mountain Chickadee**.

Bruce Robinson - West Jordan

**Mountain Chickadee** - First one in the yard in a couple of years.

Leena Rogers - Provo

**Downy Woodpecker** - So cute, climbing a telephone pole.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

**White-breasted Nuthatch**

Alton Thygerson - Provo

**Steller's Jay** - Two Steller's Jays seem to arrive around the same time as four Western Scrub-Jays.

Report your favorite backyard bird each month to Eric Huish at 801-360-8777 or [erichuish@gmail.com](mailto:erichuish@gmail.com)

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### 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](mailto:erichuish@gmail.com).

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.