

Utah County Birders Newsletter

February 2016



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FEBRUARY MEETING:

Thursday, February 11th, 2016 - 7:00 pm.

Eric Peterson will give a presentation titled **"Hummingbird Mania"** featuring many of his stunning photos and birding stories about the hummingbirds he's seen during his travels.

Meet at 7:00 pm at the Monte L. Bean Museum. 645 East 1430 North, Provo, UT <http://mlbean.byu.edu/>

FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday February 13, 2016: 7:30am-early afternoon. **Antelope Island and yonder.** Meet at the Park and Ride on the northwest corner of the American Fork Main Street exit off I-15 to carpool. Bring a State Park pass if you've got one. This trip will be weather dependent (if it's cold and snowy we might end up somewhere a little closer).

Utah County Birders Captain's Log: February 2016

by Keeli Marvel

New Year, New Challenge! As most of you probably know by now, we've got a new challenge this year and I'm pretty stoked about it! I also have a new birding side kick, which I'm also super excited about. My sister Mellory has gotten hooked and she's as excited to start seeing birds for our new challenge as I am.

This last weekend was the St. George Bird Festival. Mellory and I cruised down on Thursday night ready to get out there on Friday and start checking out the birds. Friday morning we headed over to Zion NP and started at the visitor center/Watchmen Campground. At first we thought it was going to be bust. There was all kinds of construction going on in the upper campground with music playing and construction workers all over the place, and not a bird in sight. We were just about to give up and head back to the car, but we could hear house finches down in the lower part of the campground close to the river, so we followed the sound and were soon rewarded. A flock of Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches, Black-capped Chickadees, and Yellow-rumped Warblers moved through. Following the sounds of Spotted Towhees, we hit the jackpot with a Hermit Thrush, House Wren, a Song Sparrow, and a pair of immature Golden-crowned Sparrows all within a couple of feet of each other. The Golden-crowned Sparrows were especially cooperative, hanging out in a bush in the sun for quite a few minutes while we studied them.

From there we ventured further into the park. A quick stop at the Court of the Patriarchs produced a Common Merganser in the river. Another stop at the Zion Canyon Lodge produced a Ruby-crowned Kinglet along the river. Overall though, the birds were pretty quiet. We drove all the way up to the Big Bend turn around hoping for a glimpse of the condors that have taken up residence there, but no luck.

After a quick lunch in town, we headed over to the Springdale pond. Unfortunately the area was a total mess and almost a complete waste of time. It seems that improvements are planned for this area and all the trees around the pond and along the river have been cut down and reduced to piles of wood shavings. There were two female Hooded Mergansers and a Male Bufflehead on the pond, but no other birds in the area.

After the disappointment of the pond, we headed back into the park for a quick hike on the Canyon Overlook Trail. We didn't see a single bird along the trail but we did get to watch a pair of Bighorn Sheep nibbling brush along the hillside below the trail.

Friday didn't produce many birds, but at least the views were nice.

Saturday morning we hitched a ride to Lytle for the festival field trip. A Ladder-backed Woodpecker greeted us in the parking area at the ranch. Mellory and I wandered off for a while on our own through the brush by the entrance road and picked up a flock of Gambel's Quail, an Anna's Hummingbird, Phainopeplas, Western Bluebirds, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and were gone just long enough to miss a group sighting of the Purple Finch in the orchard. A wander along the hillside road produced more Phainopeplas, a Black-tailed gnatcatcher, and another finch in the cottonwoods, which after more examination, proved to be a female Cassin's Finch. We also picked up American Pipits, a Cooper's Hawk, and a single Orange-crowned Warbler back near the parking area. It was altogether a slowish day for the ranch, but at least we saw some of the normal Lytle species!

On the way back we stopped at Utah Hill to try for and dipped on the Black-chinned Sparrows (pooooosssibly the wrong time of year!?) We also checked the Ivins fields where a Lark Bunting had been previously reported, and ran into a pair of Sommerfelds and Pam and Jeff Hardy doing the same. There was no Lark Bunting to be seen, but we did see some nice Savannah Sparrows and Say's Phoebes and a Loggerhead Shrike slumming it with the White-crowned Sparrows and House Sparrows.

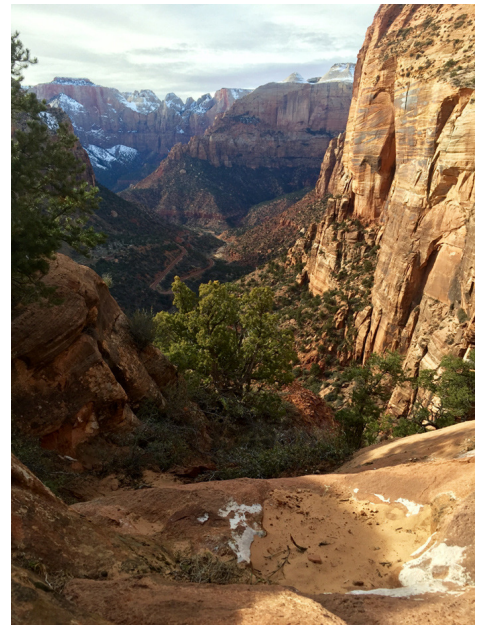
After a quick wander around Tonaquint Park to pick up the Abert's Towhees, Mellory and I headed out to find the Vermillion Flycatcher at Boots Cox Park. We cruised over to the park, walked up to the fence, and the male Vermillion Flycatcher was perched on the tree in the middle of the field. He was practically fluorescent in the afternoon sunshine. I wish all birding was that easy. We dipped on the Black Phoebe at the Hurricane water treatment plant (maybe too late in the day?), but had a nice encounter with a low cruising Northern Harrier, and picked up Great-tailed Grackles and a rogue Snow Goose. Over at Sand Hollow Reservoir in the fading light we picked up Red-breasted Mergansers, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Western Grebes, Ruddy Ducks and a Loggerhead Shrike. The storm started blowing in after that, so we called it a night. I had tentative plans to pick up a few species on the way out of town the next morning, but the weather report was so grim we decided to just hit the road and hope for the best. That seemed to be the best decision we made the entire weekend as we scooted home before the next round of storms and the ensuing wrecks that tangled everyone up later in the day.

I came home wishing we'd had more time (there's never enough time to soak in the sunshine and the birds down there), but I'm sure we'll find a reason to head down there again in the not-too-distant future.

Luck to all of you as you embark on your own adventures for this year's birding challenge! Hope to see you all out there birding, and Happy Valentine's Day next weekend!



Bighorn Sheep in Zion National Park



The Canyon Overlook trail in Zion National Park

Bird of the Month

American Kestrel

Falco Sparverius

by Jeff Cooper

[Rerun article from February 2013]

A few years ago when I first started rekindling my childhood interest in birds I was browsing through a field guide to the birds of North America and came across a bird called American Kestrel. I had never heard the word "kestrel" before and I had no idea where such a bird would exist (other than the obvious reference to "America"). I remember reading that it was the "most colorful falcon" in North America. The picture I was viewing was certainly colorful, especially the male. I remember thinking I would love to see one of those guys. Little did I know I simply needed to become aware that the bird existed and then point my eyes in the right direction when I took my usual walk along the canal near my home. I saw my first-ever Kestrel sitting on a power line and was awestruck by its colors. I'm sure I've seen a thousand since that first time, but I still take time to admire them.

American Kestrels are the smallest falcons in North America. They appear across the United States, but they are much more common in the western states. They prefer open habitats such as grasslands, meadows, and farm fields. They are often seen perched on power poles and power lines and frequently pump or bob their tails while perched, especially after just after landing. Kestrels nest in cavities and will nest in bird houses. They occupy very small territories and are often seen hover-hunting above those territories. Kestrels are opportunistic when it comes to eating. They are excellent mousers and will eat insects, small reptiles, and other birds. The image below is of a male as it was hover-hunting over a small field.



Female Kestrels show brown streaking on their chests. Males have cleaner chests with a soft salmon color above and a few spots on their sides. The females have rufous (rusty) and black barring on their wings and back. Males have distinctive blue upper wings with black markings. Both males and females have distinctive face patterns that include two black stripes. Both sexes also show "false eyes" on the backs of their heads. This is believed to help deter possible predators that may be approaching from behind. Here are some images showing the differences between the two sexes.



The photos below show some of the differences between the two sexes when seen from below. The male's tail feathers show a broad dark terminal band. The female shows banding throughout the tail feathers. Again, the male has a cleaner chest with a soft salmon color at the top and a few spots along the sides where the female shows streaking throughout the chest.



This article was condensed from a post I originally published on my blog:
<http://neovistabirding.blogspot.com/2013/01/american-kestrel-small-but-colorful.html>

Field Trip Report

South Utah County - January 9th, 2016

by Keeli Marvel

The Utah County Birders field trip around the south end of the county yesterday had a really good turnout. We started the trip in East Bay where we relocated the Eurasian Wigeon as well as a probably hybrid Eurasian x American Wigeon. Thanks to Suzi for spotting both birds! The Eurasian Wigeon only gave us brief looks as it was in a flock of American Wigeons further west on the golf course and dropped down into a pond out of sight soon after it was spotted.

From there, we went south to the Lewis's Woodpecker spot in Spanish Fork/Salem. The Lewis's were a no show. If anyone has some free time, we should scout around the area for them - it seems they've picked somewhere else to be as they haven't been seen in their usual spot for awhile.

We checked the Salem cemetery for the Crossbills, but it appears they have also moved on. At Salem Pond there was quite a nice variety of ducks, including two female Barrow's Goldeneye, three female Buffleheads, and both male and female Wood Ducks that were right up close to the shore.

To finish off the trip we relocated the Red-shouldered hawk that is still hanging out in the previously reported location in Spanish Fork.

Thanks to everyone who joined us!

Backyard Bird of the Month

January 2016

Jack Binch - Sandy

I still have the Yellow-rumps and Merlin, but I think my favorite for January was the **Cedar Waxwings**. Last I will see of them until the flowering pears get more fruit.

Harold Clayson - Salem

Sunday as I am shoveling snow to get to church, a **Northern Harrier** comes out of the fields and buzzes my front yard feeders. Had a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** do the same and followed a Goldfinch for a minute without success while I was shoveling snow a week ago.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

I spotted a **Black Merlin** perched high in a tree when I pulled up to my home after work.

Lynn Garner - Provo

A new backyard bird in January was a **White-throated Sparrow** among the Juncos.

Martha Happ - Sandy

Look who's moved in. A **Western Screech-Owl**. (see photo)

Suzi Holt - Payson

Cedar Waxwing, I love hearing their song and then running out to see them is even a bigger bonus!

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

Red-naped Sapsucker - It sat in the maple tree right outside my bedroom window for over an hour. Unexpected this time of year.

Keeli Marvel - Saratoga Springs

I saw a pair of **Great Horned Owls** on my neighbor's roof and I've heard them hooting around dusk several times in my neighborhood in Saratoga Springs. Pretty awesome to have resident great horned owls.

Milt Moody - Provo

I've had a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** in my apple tree almost every day lately. It pecks on the shriveled apples and on the suit in the feeder hanging in the tree.

Leila Ogden - Orem

Still seeing the **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at my feeders.

Leena Rogers - Provo

Had an **American Crow** fly over your back yard. It's the first crow I've seen this year and it was a new yard bird as well.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

Jan. 13, 2016 -- Just the same flock of 39 **turkeys** I've been feeding since mid November. But they've now flown the coop - on to greener pastures, I guess, where the snow is less than 2 feet! Anyone need three 50lb bags of cracked corn?

Alton Thygerson - Provo

Downy Woodpecker - Occasional visitor to a suet feeder.

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



Western Screech-Owl in Martha's yard.
photo by Martha Happ

2016 Birders Challenge

The Utah County Birders have announced their much acclaimed biennial "Birder Challenge" with Gold, Silver and Bronze levels of birding performance. Points will be awarded depending on the rarity of the birds seen in Utah during the year. Visit <http://www.utahbirds.org/ucb/BirderChallenge2016.html> for more info.