

Utah County Birders Newsletter

May 2017

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MAY MEETING:

Thursday, May 11th, 2017

Skipper Bay Trail bird walk with Suzi and Amanda Holt. Meet at the parking area at the Skipper bay trailhead. Bring bug spray just in case!

Meet at 6:00 pm at the Skipper Bay Trailhead; the walk is anticipated to end around 8:00pm. Directions and details for Skipper Bay can be found here: <https://www.utahbirds.org/counties/utahco/SkipperBayTrail.htm>

FIELD TRIPS:

Thursday, May 11th, 2017

See May Meeting section above (there will be a field trip in place of the monthly meeting).

Other Field Trip Options:

Come join us at The Great Salt Lake Bird Festival! Keeli is leading two field trips for the festival - one on Friday May 19th to Diamond Fork, and one on Sunday May 21st to Clover Springs, Lookout Pass, and Fitzgerald WMA in the West Desert. For more information on registering for these and other exciting field trips, classes, or the GSL Festival banquet you can visit the festival website at: <http://www.daviscountyutah.gov/greatsaltlakebirdfest>

Also of note, the Ute Mountain Mesa Verde Birding Festival will be held May 10-14, 2017 in Cortez, CO. There are many interesting festival events and field trips scheduled. For more information go to: <http://cortezculturalcenter.org/birding-festival/>

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 Keeli at - keeli.marvel@gmail.com

Utah County Birders Captain's Log: May 2017

by Keeli Marvel

Just got back last night from back to back trips to Florida and the Grand Canyon and I'm gone again next week training for work. May is going to fly by, I can already tell!

The nice thing is I actually have some great birds to report. I picked up 11 life birds on my recent trip to Florida. We flew into Miami and spent the first day doing the boat tour at Biscayne Natl. Park, about an hour's drive south of Miami. The boat tour takes you out to Boca Chita Key where you have an hour or so to bird around the small island. We did the afternoon tour, so it wasn't as birdy as we hoped, but I bet the morning tours would prove to be even birdier. Even so, I picked up lifer Gray Kingbirds, Magnificent Frigatebird, and a Bananaquit, and Terri, who was along for the trip, picked up a lifer Cape May Warbler. We also got to see a black-tipped reef shark and an unidentified species of ray from the top of the lighthouse. Biscayne NP is a great place to pick up some interesting birds during migration and I highly recommend it!

The next day Terri and I did a little bird watching from our porch and the dock along the key channel at our resort and picked up lifer #4 for me, a White-crowned Pigeon. From my limited research, I'd read that you have to go specific places in the keys to find them, but we found that wasn't true. If you pay attention, you can see them flying around, perching in trees and on powerlines all over the island. They're pretty obvious, too, as they are tall dark pigeons with bright white crowns. We also saw a few other good birds while hanging out on the dock and wandering around the hotel throughout the week, including both Brown and American White Pelicans, a Green Heron, the ubiquitous Laughing gulls, Cape May, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Blue Warblers, Red-eyed Vireo, Least Terns, Summer Tanager, Indigo Buntings, and more Magnificent Frigatebirds.

The best birds of the trip were, of course, on our visit to Fort Jefferson on Garden Key in Dry Tortugas National Park. The park service employs a major tour operator to take boat loads of people from Key West on the 2.5 hour boat ride to Garden Key every day. The tour isn't cheap, but it's the cheapest way to get there, as the alternatives are charter boats, planes, and private (and pricey) birding tours. If you have the money, the private tours are definitely the way to go because they may get you in closer to some of the islands where the breeding colonies of boobies and noddies are. If you don't have the money, the National Park tour boat is the way to go. They feed you breakfast and lunch and provide snorkeling gear and tours of Fort Jefferson if you like to hear about the history. Because of our limited time on the island, Terri and I chose to spend the entire time birding. I was rewarded for our efforts with 6 more lifers: Brown Booby, Brown Noddy, Sooty Terns, Sandwich Terns, a Chuck-will's-widow roosting low in a tree inside the fort, and Prairie Warblers. They maintain a fresh water fountain inside the middle of the fort and they provide benches so you can sit and watch the birds come up to the water. At the fountain we saw several species of warblers, including Ovenbirds, Black-and-white Warblers, Tennessee Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Cape May Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and Palm Warblers (which were very common and foraging on the ground all over the island).

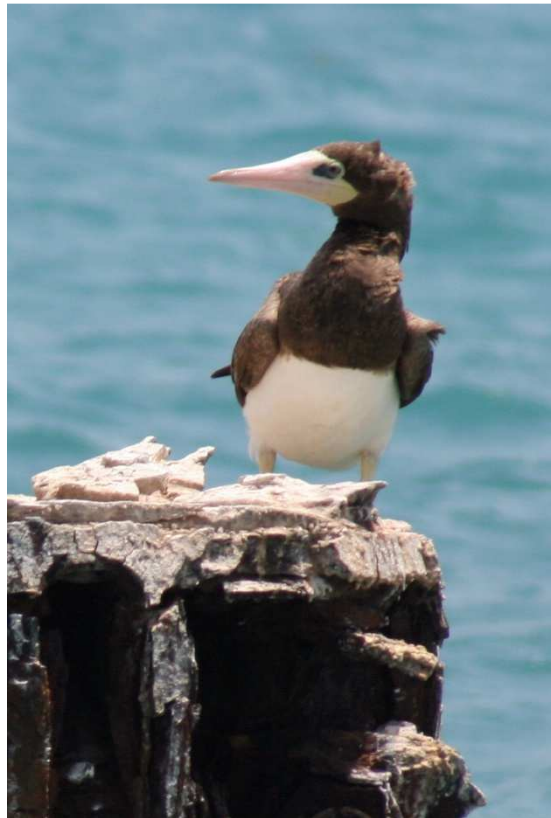
Other interesting birds on the island included Baltimore Oriole, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, three different thrush species (Gray-cheeked, Swainson's and Veery), Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Royal Terns, and dozens of Ruddy Turnstone foraging along the shorelines. The whole time we were there, there were probably two dozen or more Magnificent Frigatebirds circling around in the air above the island, and we took a spotting scope and were able to pick out several males on the closed portion of the island blowing out their red air sacs in full breeding glory. Dry Tortugas was a magical place to mark off my bucket list. My only disappointment was that we didn't have more time to explore.



Chuck-will's-widow (all pics by Keeli Marvel)



Brown Noddy



Brown Booby

Our final day in Key West we went to the Key West Botanical Gardens just off Hwy 1. There I picked up a lifer Kentucky Warbler, and we topped off the visit with 13 warbler species including a Worm-eating Warbler and a Northern Waterthrush. We also picked up a brightly colored male Painted Bunting, a couple of Dickcissels, another Chuck-will's-widow, and an Anhinga to round out our trip lists. The Botanical Gardens were a great place to bird – in fact – we ran into a couple from the Dry Tortugas trip the day before who were also there birding. The garden staff focus on passive gardening, so don't go expecting perfectly manicured flower gardens. Good news is though, the birds love it and we did too.

The day after returning from the Keys I drove down to the Grand Canyon where I hiked down to the bottom of the canyon for two days. On the hike down we saw both Black-throated and Black-chinned Sparrows, Canyon and Rock Wren, and Blue-gray gnatcatchers. At the bottom, Lucy's Warblers and Ash-throated Flycatchers were my morning wake up calls. We weren't lucky enough to spot any Condors on our hike, although a couple of different people tried to tell me the Turkey Vultures and Ravens might be Condors. On our drive back we stopped at Navajo Bridge at Lee's Crossing and caught a glimpse of a condor possibly setting up shot in a nesting cavity. I also had a quick visit with one of the really nice biologists from the Peregrine Fund who are monitoring the condors and was out on the bridge tracking the birds and answering questions. All in all I had a great couple weeks birding and saw some amazing scenery and some fantastic birds! Stay tuned next month and I'll report back from the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival and the Mesa Verde Bird Festival.

Happy Birding!

Bird of the Month

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)

by Mabelle Johnson

FUN FACTS:

• The first time I heard the word crepuscular was in regards to a Nighthawk:
“Crepuscular: of, relating to, or resembling twilight. Zoology. Appearing or active in the twilight.”

• They are also known as nightjars.
What the heck is a nightjar?
Word Origin and History for nightjar:
n. nocturnal bird, so called for the “jarring” sounds made by the male when the female is brooding, which have been described as a “churring trill that seems to change direction as it rises and fall”.



photo by Eric Huish

- An Old English word for it was nihtræfn “night raven”.
- Another name is "goatsucker" (the Latin for goatsucker is *Caprimulgus*), from an archaic, erroneous idea that the birds would fly into barns at night and suck dry the teats of goats.
- The most remarkable feature of this aerial insectivore is its small beak that belies the massiveness of its mouth. Only the small tip of the bill is usually visible.

I think it’s fascinating that we can learn something new about birds every time we go out birding. For instance on a fieldtrip last year I first heard the booming sound the males make at the bottom of their dive display. The sound is created by air rushing through the primaries after a quick downward flex of the wings.

The Common Nighthawk is fairly common and widespread. We start seeing them around here in April, they start their fall migration from early August to mid-October.

Pete Dunne describes it as “a wheeling, drunken-looking, falconlike bird feeding high overhead at dawn and dusk.” Tiny bill, small head, big white patches near the tips of the wings, and a long body that is big in the chest and tapers acutely toward the tail. Overall mottled and mostly gray with dark, pale, and some brownish patches. Common Nighthawks are well camouflaged when perched! By day, perches length-wise along tree limbs. Nighthawks hunt on the wing for extended periods at high altitudes or in open areas. Crepuscular, flying insects are its preferred food source. The hunt usually ends when dawn becomes day or dusk becomes dark, but they can be seen hunting in the bright lights of stadiums and billboards.

Call is a buzzy, reedy “beeeez’t”, uttered after the bird executes a rapid wing flutter.

Next time you’re out on a warm summer evening, watch as the “Common Nighthawks roam the skies over treetops, grasslands, and cities. Their sharp, electric peent call is often the first clue they’re overhead. In the dim half-light, these long-winged birds fly in graceful loops, flashing white patches out past the bend of each wing as they chase insects”.

Reference: Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion, dictionary.com, Wikipedia, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, AllAboutBirds.

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Machel - machelle13johnson@yahoo.com