

Utah County Birders Newsletter

November 2017

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NOVEMBER MEETING

Thursday, November 9th, 2017: Bean Museum, 7:00PM

Bryan Shirley will lead our weekly meeting and give a presentation on winter loon and vagrant duck ID.

Address for the Monte L. Bean Museum is 645 East 1430 North, Provo, UT <http://mlbean.byu.edu/>

FIELD TRIPS:

We're always looking for people to lead trips, so if we're not leading them frequently enough, feel free to volunteer to lead one! You don't have to be an expert, you just have to show up! :)

Saturday, Nov. 18th, 2017: Loon Loop time!

We will meet at 7:30am at the parking lot at the mouth of Provo Canyon. We will follow reports of vagrant loons/ducks to wherever they may be. Dress warmly as it's bound to be cold up the canyon, and bring a lunch/snacks. Likely stops include Deer Creek, East Canyon Reservoir, Rockport, Echo, etc... led by Keeli Marvel. Weather dependent.

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: November 2017

by Keeli Marvel

Howdy ya'll! Not much exciting to report for the last month. I haven't been out birding near enough. Some of you probably saw my recent post on our UCB Facebook page about finding a Pacific Wren at work last week. That was a weird find, for sure, and while it wasn't a new bird

for me, it was a lifer for my coworker, Sam. Not a bad way to end a day, for sure! Coming up next month I should have a really good story to tell as Sam and I are getting ready to head down to South Texas next week for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. We're both looking forward to it with great anticipation.

There's been some interesting movement of Steller's Jays, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Evening Grosbeaks down around the valleys and in yards over the last few weeks. I hope you've enjoyed seeing them, and I wonder if this forebodes more interesting irruptions in our near future. Time will tell, I suppose!

Someone asked me on one of the most recent field trips what happens to birds during hurricanes. I didn't know the answer to that, but I did a little research and came up with the following answers. Hurricane season coincides with migration, but often the two are moving in opposite directions. It seems many birds migrate with optimal weather and can avoid hurricanes entirely. Some birds, it seems, can also sense the oncoming storm through the changes in barometric pressure, and will adjust their schedule to leave early ahead of the storm. Those that don't have been observed to ride along with the storms – sometimes even by following the eyes of hurricanes. They also get sidetracked or blown off course, or hunker down and ride out the storms at various points along their migration routes. Larger birds can be surprisingly resilient when it comes to flying through or around hurricanes.

The biggest problem of hurricanes it seems is loss of habitat and the impact on food resources and the cascading effects those can have on migration and future breeding seasons. The large hurricanes that recently decimated many of the islands in the Atlantic Ocean and caused an ongoing humanitarian crisis also wiped out critical habitat for several species. In addition to the efforts to rebuild and restore services on some of the islands, there are also a brave few who are out looking for signs that some of the more sensitive or endemic bird populations were able to ride out the storms. There are signs that some have persisted, despite the devastation, but there's also less hopeful signs that some populations did not fare so well. For more information, including updates on the status of some of the more sensitive bird species populations in the Caribbean, here are a few articles.

<https://abcbirds.org/hurricanesandbirds>

<http://www.audubon.org/news/how-do-hurricanes-affect-birds>

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/10/hurricane-irma-harvey-maria-bird-impacts-caribbean/>

As a side note, in the next couple of months I'm going to get ready to step down as president of the UCB and (at least partially) turn over the reins to someone else. If you've enjoyed reading the monthly newsletters, attending the field trips, and the monthly meetings please consider volunteering to serve on our board. I would like to see the Utah County Birders club continue to be a place where those passionate about birding can join likeminded people and enjoy learning about and seeing birds, but we need the support of our members to make it happen.

Hope this article finds you all well and as per usual, Happy Birding!

Bird of the Month

Greater Yellowlegs

Tringa melanoleuca

By Machel Johnson

I would love to be able to give you great pointers on telling the difference between Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, or between Yellowlegs and other shorebirds that all look so similar in their non-breeding plumage – but alas, I’m usually stumped. Something that I have learned over the years from the awesome birders in our group is that there is more to it than just looking at the bird. You need to watch it for a bit, note the habitat, and listen as well. Fortunately the Greater Yellowlegs can put on quite a show.

Greater Yellowlegs are common and widespread in North America. Typically found in wetlands, lakeshores, and river bottoms – essentially any fairly substantial wet area that supports fish, amphibians, or aquatic insects.



Photo by Paul Higgins

You know I love to quote Pete Dunne, so here is his description: “There is little delicacy to this large, gangly, sturdily proportioned shorebird distinguished by long bright yellow legs and a long, slightly upturned bill. Resemblance to Lesser Yellowlegs is only plumage-deep. It is larger than LEYE and slightly smaller and less stocky than Willet.”

Still sounds a bit vague to me, but behavior will surely give it away, Dunne says: “Less gregarious than Lesser Yellowlegs. Mixes with other shorebirds, but amid medium-sized shorebirds, often feeds apart, in deeper water, and is frequently found feeding among herons and egrets. A more active, angry, and aggressive feeder than LEYE. Walks with longer strides – a Tyrannosaurus Rex of a shorebird. Usually hunts with the head up, visually searching for prey. It runs to catch fish and other aquatic life, stabbing and jabbing its bill into the water. Also bill-sweeps with head down and bill submerged, charging ahead with bill sweeping side to side. While using this technique, several GRYEs may move abreast, forming an interception line; though LEYEs may also bill-sweep, they appear more methodical than aggressive.” He continues: “Noisy and alert, Greater Yellowlegs becomes vocal when approached, raising its head and neck, leaning forward, and yapping constantly. They have a distinctive call, a loud, ringing three- to five- whistle, “TEW, TEW, TEW”, that is repeated ad nauseam until you leave or the bird flies.”



Greater Yellowlegs (left) with Lesser Yellowlegs; Photo by Jim Bruce

So maybe the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs aren't that hard to tell apart if you pay attention to the behavior, or if you get to see them together. It's always a fun challenge to breakdown the data you have in front of you and make an ID!

References: Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion

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

Field Trip Report

Antelope Island Causeway and Garr Ranch on Monday, October 9, 2017

By Keeli Marvel

Four people met on Mon Oct 9 to bird the Antelope Is. Causeway and Garr Ranch. The weather was pretty chilly for our drive out along the causeway, but we managed to pick out an American Golden Plover amongst the few Black-bellied Plovers. Other highlights included dozens of Killdeer, a large flock of Sanderlings, a pair of Long-billed Curlews, and a several dozen American Pipits along the causeway shoreline.

Garr Ranch was pretty quiet and the majority of birds we saw were either Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Northern Flickers, or Hermit Thrush, which were all abundantly present. We also picked up a Lincoln's Sparrow and a few Cedar Waxwings as highlights. From there we drove over to the bison corrals and found a pair of Great Horned Owls roosting in the corral barn. At the visitor center we saw several Chukars on and around the rocky hillside. We looked for

Burrowing Owls but did not locate any. I'm guessing they've probably moved on somewhere slightly warmer for the winter.



Blackbirds on feeder near Visitor Center

On the drive back out along the causeway we picked up a large raft of Red-necked Phalaropes at the bridge closest to the marina, more Black-bellied Plover, Sanderlings, Least Sandpipers, Western Sandpipers, and another cool find - two Pectoral Sandpipers.



Pectoral Sandpipers



View from the Causeway

Thanks to those who joined me for the field trip. Hope to see ya'll out birding!