

Utah County Birders Newsletter

October 2017

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OCTOBER MEETING

Thursday, October 19th, 2017: Bean Museum, 7:00PM

The meeting this month will be on a different night than usual.

We will meet on the *third* Thursday of the month, Oct 19, 2017, at the Bean Museum.

J.J. Horns from the University of Utah Biodiversity and Conservation Ecology lab will come talk to us about the bird banding project going on at their Red Butte and Rio Mesa study sites.

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! :)

Monday, Oct. 9th, 2017: Garr Ranch and Antelope Island Causeway

6:30am - early afternoon. Meet at the Park and Ride lot off the NW end of Pioneer Crossing on the I-15 American Fork Main Street exit at 6:30am to carpool. We'll try and avoid rush hour traffic (although it may be unavoidable) and cruise out to Garr Ranch first thing and then bird the causeway on our way back. Bring a UT state park pass if you have one, or money to pay the entrance fee.

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: October 2017

by Keeli Marvel; pictures also by Keeli Marvel

Just got back from a week in Albuquerque spent learning about wildlife issues and research being done across the nation at the national Wildlife Society meetings. The good news is there are some amazing people out there doing some amazing things to help protect and conserve wildlife on our planet. I was encouraged by the training I participated in and the stories of the people I met.

I didn't have a lot of time to go birding, but I did make it out a few times. There are some great places to go birding in Albuquerque if you find yourself in that part of the country. The first place, Rio Grande Nature Center within the Rio Grande State Park, which stretches along the length of the Rio Grande river on the West side of Albuquerque. There is a nature center with a plethora of feeders, benches, bird blinds, and walking trails winding around the property. This is a great place to see all kinds of birds including White-breasted Nuthatches, several warbler species (we saw MacGillivray's, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, and Wilson's), a few different hummingbird species, and lots more. They also have a fabulous visitor center with windows looking out on a pond and a neat little gift shop.

The second place I visited, I went in search of Canyon Towhees to add to my life list, and was successful! On the west side of the valley, off of Tramway Blvd, there is a park called Elena Gallegos Picnic Area and Park. There are hiking trails and picnic areas there, but the best part was a paved walking trail that ended in a blind looking out over a pond. There I picked up Downy Woodpeckers, Plumbeous Vireo, my lifer Canyon Towhee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebirds, Bushtits, Juniper Titmice, several curious Woodhouse's Scrub Jays, another MacGillivray's Warbler, some fresh looking Chipping Sparrows, and a few other common species.



Cholla at Elena Gallegos Picnic Area

The last place I visited and highly recommend was the Valle de Oro Wildlife Refuge at the south end of Albuquerque. This is a small refuge with actively farmed agriculture fields adjacent to some wilder areas along the Rio Grande River. This is also a good place to see a variety of species and I saw Black Pheobes, Vesper, Savannah, White-crowned, and Song Sparrows, Wilson's Warblers, Belted Kingfisher, and Common Nighthawk, as well as a few more common species.



A sign at Valle de Oro NWR



Savannah Sparrow at Valle de Oro NWR

Of course, one of the hot spots in the Albuquerque area is the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, just over an hour's drive south of Albuquerque. Several unique species have showed up there over the years. I unfortunately didn't have a chance to visit on this trip, but maybe one day...

I missed out on finding both a Chihuahuan Raven and a Curve-billed Thrasher, both of which were on my target list. One bird at a time, that's what I say (at least until my lifering picks up the pace again – hah!).

Hope ya'll are enjoying the beautiful fall weather and the leaves changing and getting out to experience migration. I get hundreds of geese flying over my house every night going from the corn fields to Utah Lake, and I love the sound their wings make as they fly over.

Happy Birding!

Bird of the Month

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

By Machel Johnson

The Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*, is found around the world in temperate regions. A large owl with a wingspan exceeding a meter (about three and a half feet), this species has aroused fear and superstition for centuries. Reflecting this, the species is also sometimes called the Ghost Owl, Death Owl, or the “bird of doom.” (<https://suite.io/rosemary-drisdelle/13b327t>)

The description Pete Dunne gives this owl adds to the ghostly specter, “A pale, slender, long-legged, monkey-faced owl that shrieks. Most commonly glimpsed as it flushes from the structure into which you just intruded or when ‘caught’ at the edge of your headlight beam as it flies in open country. A golden-backed owl that turns an all-white face your way as it angles away”. (Pete Dunne’s *Essential Field Guide Companion*, Pg 326, 327)



Photo by Paul Higgins

The Barn Owl is a Spooky Bird, its appearance and habits have some features that make it seem frightening to people:

The bird flies at night, winging over open areas such as fields, marshes, heaths, and cemeteries, hunting for rodents. Barn Owls are silent flyers, coming without warning upon their prey—and sometimes upon humans who are out in the dark.

The birds have a pale breast and the underside of their wings is pale also, making them luminescent and ghostly against the night sky.

Barn Owls have white faces with dark eyes, reminiscent of a ghost face or human skull.

The vocalizations of Barn Owls include hisses and clicks, and a ghoulish drawn out shriek that is abruptly cut off.

Click on this link to hear the vocalizations: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barn_Owl/sounds

During the daytime, the owls roost in solitary, gloomy, secluded places: abandoned barns and houses, church steeples, ruins, hollow dead trees.

Barn Owl droppings (pellets) contain skeletons of rodents that they have swallowed whole.

The bird can move and turn its head in ways that seem unnatural.

(<https://suite.io/rosemary-drisdelle/13b327t>)

Myths and Superstitions about Barn Owls

The spooky characteristics of Barn Owls make it easy to understand why they have been feared for so long and in so many cultures.

In folklore, Barn Owls were thought to be the animal familiars of wizards and witches, and some witches were even said to ride on owls rather than broomsticks.

The cry of an owl announced that a witch was near.

Barn owls were considered harbingers of death, their cry a warning that someone was soon to

die. They were also associated with ghosts.

They cursed people and were responsible for the deaths of babies.

Some thought Barn Owls were the Devil's companions, able to make clairvoyant predictions.

(<https://suite.io/rosemary-drisdelle/13b327t>)

In North America, Cherokee Indians believed owls and other birds that called at night were embodied ghosts and disguised witches. The Cherokee name for the Great Horned Owl - "Tskili" - means a witch. Owl calls, hoots and cries - considered omens of evil - were dreaded.

Sierra Indians believed Great Horned Owls captured the souls of the dead and took them to the afterworld. Newuk Indians believed that after death the brave and virtuous became Great Horned Owls and the wicked became Barn Owls. Pima Indians gave owl feathers to the dying - perhaps to help them connect with the owls awaiting their souls. Tlingli Indian warriors rushed into battle hooting like owls. Kiowa medicine men derived their powers from owls and became owls after death. (<http://www.knoxnews.com/knoxville/life/spooky-myths-about-owls>)

There are a number of Native American stories about owls, most of which related to their association with prophecy and divination. The Hopi tribe held the Burrowing Owl as sacred, believing it to be a symbol of their god of the dead. As such, the Burrowing Owl, called Ko'ko, was a protector of the underworld, and things that grew in the earth, such as seeds and plants.

This species of owl actually nests in the ground, and so was associated with the earth itself.

(<http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/othermagicspells/a/Legends-And-Lore-Of-Owls.htm>)

In his book, Field Guide to Owls of California and the West, Hans Peeters remarks, "A cornered barn Owl puts on an impressive threat display. Not only does it, like other owls, bend forward and spread its wings to increase its apparent size, but it also may then go on to rock from side to side and back and forth and swing its head like a pendulum, or lunge at the intruder, all the while hissing like escaping steam, snapping its bill, and stamping its feet. He also relates this story:

"On a warm spring night in the inner Coast Range, two of these owls swooped repeatedly at two young dogs scampering by a campfire, occasionally hurling invective in the form of blood-curdling shrieks. (pg. 168)

Late one night several years ago, Sheryl and I wanted to check out the Barn Owls in the box that had recently been put up to relocate the owls from the training helicopter at the Provo Airport. It was about 10pm and dark. We pulled up on the side of the complex, directly west of the box. We got out our lawn chairs and bug spray and sat by the fence watching the box. We were able to see 2 adults flying around, in and out of the box, and could hear faint hissing coming from the box. While we were watching, a night watchman inside the complex saw us. He wasn't sure what to make of two women in lawn chairs with binoculars scoping out the area. Better safe than sorry, he called the Police...pretty soon a cruiser pulled up and an officer came over to us. He asked what we were doing, we told him and offered our binoculars to have a look for himself. He thought it was pretty cool, watched with us for a while, then told us to be careful and stay out of trouble. We watched for a bit longer, and were rewarded with a couple of shrieks and bill snaps, and fly-overs! It was a night we'll never forget.

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Mabelle -

mabelle13johnson@yahoo.com

Field Trip Report

Squaw Peak Hawkwatch on Saturday, Sep 16, 2017

By Keeli Marvel

We had pretty good turnout of visitors for our hawk migration watch at Squaw Peak this year. Hawkwatch brought two of their education birds, a Western Screech Owl and a Swainson's Hawk for visitors to get a closer look at. Flights during the day were fairly slow compared to last year. We recorded just over 80 individual raptors of ten different species throughout the day, including one Osprey over the north end of Utah Lake. Cooper's Hawks were by far our most observed species, with a total of 32 for the day. Totals for the day were:

Turkey Vulture- 8

Osprey -1

Golden Eagle -8

Northern Harrier -1

Sharp-shinned – 11

Cooper's Hawk -32

Accipiter sp. (could not be determined) – 2

Swainson's Hawk – 2

Red-tailed Hawk-11

Peregrine Falcon – 1

American Kestrel – 1

Thanks everyone who came out and joined us!
