



Utah County Birders:

December 2018 Newsletter

UCB Captain's Log, December 2018

by Keeli Marvel

Another year, another challenge drawing to a close. I hit gold status this last month with the addition of the Surf Scoter up at Rockport Reservoir. How's the challenge going for all of you? I hope everyone had fun! We'll have another challenge in 2020, so if anyone has any suggestions on what they would like to do for the next one - pass them my way!

We're about to launch into one of the busiest months of the year, and do you know what that means?! It's CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT TIME! Many of you are old hats at the Christmas Bird Count, but since we've had quite a few new folks joining our ranks, I'd like to give you a little history about the origins of the Christmas Bird Count and a description of what it has grown to become today.

In the late 1800s it was a tradition in some parts of the US to have a "side" hunt at Christmas where people chose sides, went out, and shot as many animals and birds as they could. The side who brought back the most animals won. Right around the turn of the century people were becoming more aware of the impact they were having on wildlife populations (the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was another result of this growing awareness), and so an early Audubon Society officer by the name of Frank Chapman proposed a census or count instead of the usual hunt as a way to reduce their impact on wildlife populations. And so, in the year 1900 the Christmas Bird Count was born!

The Christmas Bird Count is one of the oldest running citizen science programs in the world, and the data on bird populations that have been collected annually is used by the Audubon society and other organizations to assess the health of bird populations and inform conservation actions by helping track patterns and trends in the change of bird populations over the past 100 years.

Every year Christmas Bird Counts are held between December 14 and January 5 with count circles all over the US and the world. There are now over 2500 count circles around the world in the US, Canada, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, the Carribean, and Central and South America. You can see a map of all the count circles here:

<https://audubon.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=fadfb421e95f4949bde20c29a38228bd>

In any given year, there are up to 29 count circles held in Utah. The Utah County Birders currently hosts two counts, the Provo, and the Payson counts. According to the Audubon website, the Provo count was first conducted by 11 birders in 1974. That means we've officially been conducting the Provo count for over 40 years!

As far as logistics go - a count circle is 15 miles in diameter, and all birds counted within the count circle can be tallied between midnight and midnight the selected day of the count (which can be any day within the aforementioned window). Generally count circles are divided up into smaller chunks and assigned out to individuals or teams of birders who then count all the birds in their assigned area. At the end of the day the totals are turned into the leader of the count circle for tally. At the end of our Provo count we'll have a potluck and tally up the totals, and it's always a lot of fun to find out what species were seen and how many total species are reported and whether we beat previous years' totals. New and seasoned birders alike are welcomed to join on any of the counts. For information on the Provo and

Payson bird counts, contact Bryan Shirley at bt_shirley@hotmail.com or join us at our monthly meeting on Dec 13th at 7pm at the Bean Museum in Provo for a pre-count orientation.

A list of all the bird counts in Utah that you can participate in can be found here: <http://www.utahbirds.org/cbc/cbc.html>, and counts are updated as we get the information on them.

For a more complete read on the history of the Christmas Bird Count, go here: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/history-christmas-bird-count>

Happy birding, happy holidays, and hope to see you at a Christmas Bird Count!

Keeli Marvel

DECEMBER MEETING:

December 13th, 2018, 7:00 PM at the Bean Museum on BYU Campus

Presentation and assignments for the **Provo Christmas Bird Count** by Bryan Shirley

Up-coming Field Trips:

15 Dec. - Provo Christmas Bird Count

The Provo Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be held on Dec 15th. As usual we will have a presentation and be giving out the assignments at our monthly meeting on Dec 13th at the Bean Museum. As always, we will have a potluck dinner after the count while we compile the totals for the day (details about the pot luck at the meeting). Contact Bryan Shirley for details: 801-722-9346.

26 Dec. - Payson Christmas Bird Count

The Payson count will be on Dec 26th. Great way to start the new year! Hopefully you can come out and enjoy the best Holiday Tradition! For more info contact Bryan Shirley at 801-722-9346

Bird of the Month:

Sapsuckers (*sphyrapicus*)

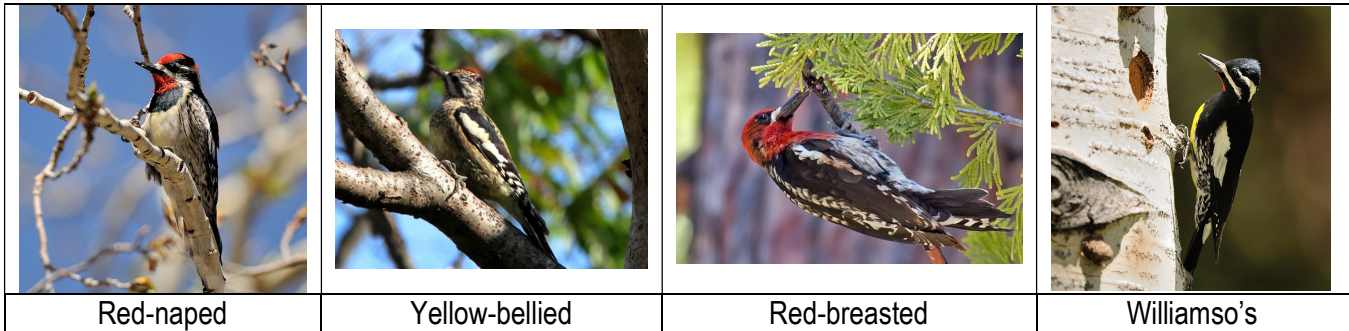
by Dennis Shirley

Rather than pick one bird-of-the-month to spotlight, I decided to discuss a group of closely related species. So close, in fact, that three of the four species which make up the group were one “superspecies” until 1985 when they were split into three.

Woodpeckers as a group are unique and popular among naturalists and birders. Their structure and behavior set them apart from other birds. Their zygodactyl feet (meaning two toes forward and two backward), along with their stiff tail feathers, are both used when climbing the vertical sides of trees. Their wood-pecking, chiseling bill, and unique tongue for probing into drilled holes for insects and

other things are specialized structures unique to woodpeckers. Their bright coloration, drumming habits, and even a tougher-than-normal skin to protect against stinging insects often encountered in trees are interesting aspects that woodpeckers have.

One of the specialize woodpecker groups is the sapsuckers. We are fortunate here in Utah to have all four of the world’s sapsuckers occurring in our state, although two are very rare. Sapsuckers are the most migratory group of the woodpeckers. Most woodpeckers have small home ranges and live their entire life and die in a small home range.



There are four species of sapsuckers in the world of the genus *Sphyrapicus*: Yellow-bellied, Red-naped, Red-breasted, and Williamson’s. The word *Sphyrapicus* is derived from Greek and means “hammer woodpecker.” Sapsuckers are a specialized woodpecker which like its name indicates, feeds primarily on sap which oozes from rows of drilled holes. All four have similar habits, and are sexually dimorphic (meaning the males and females have somewhat different colorations). Since the juveniles are also different than the adults, identification of the 12 appearances of these four birds can be tricky.

By far, our most common Utah sapsucker is the Red-napped. Its name points out the red patch on the back of the head (nape) and is typically the most diagnostic characteristic for the adult male and female. But be aware that sometimes this red patch is not very prominent and is even occasionally lacking. Red-naped Sapsuckers and the Yellow-bellied Sucker are the closest look- alike of the four. Along with the red nape ,another key character that separates these two is a more extensive red throat in the Red-naped which partly covers the black “frame” surrounding the throat. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker normally has an entire black frame separating the throat from the rest of the face. The back of the Red-naped has less white banding which is generally arranged in two areas separated by a black mid-line.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are a rare fall and winter migrant and visitor to our state. It, along with the Red-breasted and Red-naped, were prior to 1985 considered one species. Many of the early Yellow-bellied Sapsucker records for our state were probably Red-naped. To date, there have been approximately 20 vetted records for Utah. Most of these have come from Washington County during the winter months. There are currently three records being reviewed for this fall, all of which are juvenile. The juvenile plumage is retained later in the fall and winter than the other sapsuckers which helps separate species. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is the widest ranging of the four, occurring across Canada and the eastern United States. It is also the most migratory of the four species, wintering in to Central America.

The Red-breasted Sapsucker is also a rare winter visitor to our state. It’s normal breeding range is From British Columbia to the Pacific States. There have been 14 vetted records, most occurring in the last 15 years, which interestingly coincides with the increase in the number of birders in the state. One problem that exists with this sapsucker and the other two mentioned above is the fact that their ranges often overlap and they are known to hybridize fairly commonly which complicates identification. Many of the reported sightings since as early as 1931 have been recognized as hybrids. Again, the records committee is currently reviewing three Red-breasted Sapsucker records from Washington County from

November 2018. The Utah records committee normally reviews two or three records per year for this species

The fourth Utah sapsucker is the Williamson's Sapsucker. It is noticeably different in coloration and distribution in the state. The male is strikingly more black but still has the prominent white wing patch which all the sapsuckers have. It is a fairly common summer breeder in the higher mountains of the state and is uncommonly found in the winter. In Utah County, they are often found in American Fork Canyon, Sundance and Aspen Grove in Provo Canyon, along the Strawberry and Manti ridges, and the Nebo Loop.

Field Trip Reports:

Washington County Fall Field Trip

2nd and 3rd of November.2018

By Suzi Holt

On Friday morning November 2, 2018 thirteen birders set out at 6:30 am. It was still dark as we rode out towards Lytle Ranch Rd. Our first stop was at Welcome Springs it was dusk and so we headed up the wash. We saw two **Long Eared Owls!** What a way to start the day! We also saw **Dark-eyed Junco**, a **Pinyon Jay**, and a **Red-naped Sapsucker**. From there we made our way to Lytle Ranch. On the way we saw **Cactus Wren**, **Rock Wren**, **Mountain Bluebird**, **House Finch** and some **White-crowned Sparrows**. **At the Ranch we were greeted by Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Robins, House Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows and Pine Siskin.** and some WESTERN and LEAST SANDPIPERS, a few FRANKLIN'S GULLS, and a LONG-BILLED CURLEW.

We then headed straight for the Orchard to find some woodpeckers. I learned a valuable lesson from Dennis and Merrill that morning to just stop and listen! As we listened...in a couple minutes I could hear drumming and we located a Sapsucker. Everyone got a great look and then it flew into the Mulberry Tree and was working it's way up into the thick branches near the top. Dennis and Merrill gave reasons to why it was a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** vs Red-naped Sapsucker.

What a great find! We went on to find **Phainopepla**, a cooperative **Black Phoebe**, **Spotted Towhee**, **White-crowned Sparrows**, more **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, **Western Bluebirds**, **Ring-necked Pheasant**, **Bewick's Wren**, **Ravens**, **Golden Eagle**, **Great Blue Heron**, **Gambel's Quail**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Rock Wren**, **European Starling**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **American Kestral** and while eating our lunch and changing Kaylene's flat tire we saw **Yellow-rumped Warblers**.

We stopped at a wash on the way out to look for **Black-tailed Gnatcatchers** and didn't have any luck, so we followed Dennis to another spot on the Beaver Dam Slope. Here we immediately found it as it jumped from bush to bush. We also saw a couple more **Cactus Wrens**, **Rock Wrens**, **White-crowned**



Sparrows, House Finch, and a Loggerhead Shrike! What a great morning!!!

On the way back we stopped at Ivin's Reservoir and saw **Belted Kingfisher, American Coots, Canada Geese, Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Mallards, Say's Phoebe, Black Phoebe, Pied -billed Grebe, Eared Grebe** and a **Great Blue Heron**.

We then stopped by a feeder in Kayenta. We saw **Anna's Hummingbird, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Abert's Towhee, Gambel's Quail, Lesser Goldfinch, Mourning Dove** and **Northern Flicker**.

We went to Snow Canyon in search of **Crissal Thrasher** and found one in the campground, we also saw **Anna's Hummingbird, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Gambel's Quail, Bewick's Wren, Rock Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, White-crowned Sparrow** and **Yellow-rumped Warbler**.

A few of us decided to go by Tonaquint Nature Park. We found the **Green Heron, Black-crowned Night Herons, Wood Duck, American Coot, Mallards, Anna's Hummingbird, Eurasian Collared Dove, Mourning Dove, Abert's Towhee, Orange-crowned Warbler**, and a **Marsh Wren**. A few continued and went to Boot's Cox Park for the **Vermillion Flycatcher**. What a great first day!!!

(Day Two)

On Saturday morning November 3, 2018 we met at Walmart at 8:30 am. From there we went to Hurricane to look for the Inca and White-winged Doves. We found 27 **White-winged doves** but it was really windy so I think the little Incas were still hiding out. We saw **Wild Turkey's, Eurasian Collared Doves, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **Norther Flicker**. We also met one of the neighbors who is a falconer. He brought our a beautiful juvenile **Harris's Hawk** for us. And we had a good visit with him, noting he had just had a Spotted Owl in his yard a week ago. Wow!

We then headed to Dalton Wash to track down a **Rufous-crowned Sparrow**. It took a lot of patience but Dennis finally located two! We also saw **Canyon Wren, Rock Wren, Ravens, White-crowned Sparrows** and **Dark-eyed Juncos** there. We made a stop again for the Inca doves, still windy and no luck.

Then went in search of a Roadrunner. First stop was Confluence Park, still windy and we only saw **White-crowned Sparrow, Robin, Ravens** and our highlight a **Verdin!**

With the wind we decided to break up and a few of us went through Hurricane Fields we saw **Brewer's Blackbirds** and a couple **Red-tailed Hawks**. We stopped by Sand Hollow and saw a **Golden Eagle**, more Red-tailed Hawks, a million **American Coots**, some **Ruddy ducks** and **Eared grebes, Bufflehead** and a lone **Tundra Swan**.

We thought we were finished but stopped at the Hurricane Water Treatment pond not much but a few **DC Cormorants**. Then dropped off our last two birders back in St George. Mom, Amanda and I stopped to see the **Vermillion Flycatchers** at Boots/Cox Park and then stopped again at the Hurricane Water Treatment plant after a tip from Dennis to see a lone **Snow Goose** with the **Canada Geese**, lots of **Northern Shovelers, Ruddy Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Bufflehead, Red-tailed Hawk** and **DC Cormorants**.

On the way home from dinner we finished out the day with a **Great Horned Owl** by the Hurricane Water Treatment Plant. Thanks to everyone who joined us it was a great trip!!! Our final total species was 72!!! Not to bad for a Fall trip!