



Utah County Birders Newsletter

December 2023

CONTENTS:

- [Monthly Meeting](#)
 - [Upcoming Field Trips](#)
 - [President's Message](#)
 - [Bird of the Month](#)
 - [Field Trip Reports](#)
 - [Backyard Birds](#)
-

DECEMBER MEETING

Thursday December 14th at 7pm at the Bean Museum and via Zoom

Preparation and folder distribution/assignments for Provo and Payson Christmas Bird Counts.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

The Provo Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 16th, 2023. We will have a tally and potluck at 6pm. Location of the potluck is TBD. Please contact Keeli Marvel (keeli.marvel@gmail.com) to sign up if you would like to participate. Folders, maps, and checklists will be handed out in person at our Dec UCB meeting on Dec 14th or via email if requested.

The Payson CBC will be held on Saturday, December 23rd, 2023. Meet at the Payson McDonalds at 8am. Folders and maps will be handed out either at our meeting on Dec 14th, the morning of the count at McDonalds at 8am, or via email if requested. Numbers/lists should be submitted to Keeli Marvel at the end of the day via text or email. Contact keeli.marvel@gmail.com if you're interested in participating.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Yvonne Carter

This is the season for gratitude. I have been thinking about our Utah County Birders and everyone who is involved with this group. Whether you are an officer organizing our monthly meetings, or our field trips, the website magician, the monthly newsletter coordinators, publicity manager, treasurer, and especially all our members who attend in person or by zoom, or participate in the field trips, or bird alone and notify the group of fantastic finds, **YOU ARE ALL IMPORTANT**. Because it takes people taking on different roles to make up a great birding group like ours. We cannot leave out the families, and spouses especially, who are patient when we leave at crazy hours to find those birds.

Last month I mentioned the Cornell Lab of Ornithology site and the information you can find there. I hope you have explored that site if you are not familiar with it. This past week I viewed a presentation on BirdCast which is part of the Cornell Lab and Colorado State University. It is a fascinating site in which they have migration forecast maps during migration seasons that show predicted nocturnal migration 3 hours after local sunset and are updated every 6 hours.

There are a lot of organizations that give helpful information regarding the birding world. Hopefully, you are on the Ebirds email list. There are so many facets to that organization which also involves the Merlin app. They have recently been doing some updates. They cover national activities like the Oct. Big Day, the Big Sit, etc., and contests that are based on the checklist submissions with prizes for free online classes and even binoculars.

We have the Christmas Bird Count coming up. Please participate along with other birders and experience the camaraderie of this fun group.

Happy birding!
Yvonne

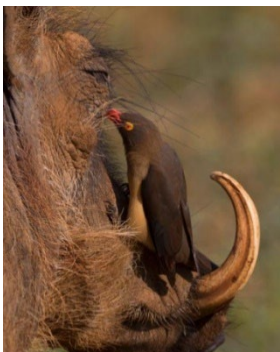
For Birding Suggestions for our "ODD" Year click [here](#)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

African Oxpeckers

(Red-billed *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* / Yellow-billed *Buphagus africanus*)

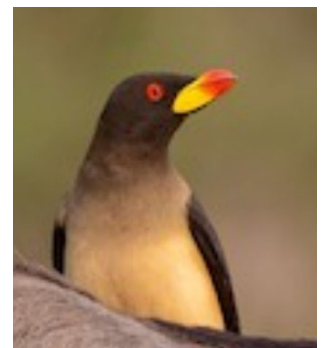
By Dennis Shirley



Red-billed Oxpecker photo
by Kendall W. Brown



Red-billed Oxpecker photo by Kendall W. Brown



Yellow-billed Oxpecker photo
from ebird

I recently had the lifetime opportunity of going to southern Africa on a birding and wildlife watching tour with my son, Bryan. We were gone almost a month, from late August to late September, and visited three countries: South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia. Africa is a dream continent to visit if you have any interest at all in wildlife, wild places, and natural wonders. Birding is out of this world! Many birders think Africa is an easy country to bird, much easier than a continent like South America where many birds are in the tropics and hard to get good looks at. Much of Africa is in open habitats: grassland, savannas, scrub, and open woodlands which makes it easier to locate and see a bird for a longer length of time.

Africa is also known for its unique wildlife and birds and has a large number of endemic bird species and families. One of these is the Oxpecker. It was one of my target families to see for sure. There are only two species of Oxpecker: The Red-billed and Yellow-billed. They are not hard to find when you are in the right habitat. Bryan and I saw both Red-billed and Yellow-billed several times during our trip.

Oxpeckers are about the same size as a starling. At one time they were actually in the same family as starlings but have since been placed in their own family, Buphagidae. The two species are similar in appearance, both with kind of gray-brown overall plumage, red eyes, a large laterally flattened bill, fairly long tail, and short stout legs with clawed zygodactyl feet (two toes forward, two toes back). This assists the bird in gripping the hide of the host animal. The big difference in appearance of the two species is, of course, found in their names: red-bill vs yellow-bill. The yellow-bill also has a red tip and has a light brown rump patch which the red-bill's entire back is the same color. Their laterally flattened bill assists in their unique feeding on the hides of large ungulates and livestock. They feed almost exclusively on ectoparasites attached to the hides of large mammals. These parasites include ticks, mites, fly larvae and other insects. They also are known to occasionally drink blood at skin sores and dead skin. They nest in tree holes and are usually found in small groups on the backs of the animals they are feeding on. Oftentimes they ride for long lengths of time on the backs of these hosts.

The Red-billed Oxpecker is found south of the Sahara Desert in eastern and southern Africa, from Ethiopia to South Africa. We saw it in both South Africa and Botswana on five different days. Our first observation, which we expected to be on a wild African big game animal, was on a small herd of donkeys in some agricultural land and later on cattle. We did see them on several of the big game animals of Africa, including giraffe, cape buffalo, hippo, and zebra.

The Yellow-billed Oxpecker has a wider African distribution, from the Atlantic side of Africa to east Africa and southern Africa. Again, it is only found south of the Sahara Desert. Overall, the Yellow-billed is similar in its habits to Red-billed. We saw them only in Botswana. They were seen riding on the backs of many different big game animals including rhino.

Having studied and read about most of the bird families of the world, I was excited to have the opportunity to see this bird family and was relieved on the first day of our trip to have found the Red-billed Oxpecker (even if it was on a donkey).

Sources: *Birds of Southern Africa* by Ian Sinclair (and others)

[\[See past Bird of the Month articles\]](#)

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Duchesne County-Starvation Reservoir, Duchesne WTP, and Strawberry Pinnacles

11/2/23

Article and photos by Suzi Holt



We headed off early for Duchesne County. Our first stop was Starvation Reservoir. Our first bird was a **Black-billed Magpie**, then a **Northern Flicker**. At the reservoir we saw a couple of **Common Loons**. Then quite a few **Common Mergansers**. We had a couple flybys of **Common Goldeneye**. We also had a mixed group of **Hooded Mergansers**, a **Eared Grebe** and a **Bufflehead**.



Common Loon-Starvation Reservoir SP



Hooded and Common Mergansers, Eared Grebe-Starvation Reservoir SP



Bufflehead-Starvation Reservoir SP

We also saw **Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon** and **Green-winged Teal**. Lots of waterfowl moving in. There were lots of sparrows along the shoreline in the bushes. We had **White-crowned, Song** and a **Lincoln**. There were also lots of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, we got Oregon, Pink-sided and Slate. We also had a surprise **Green-tailed Towhee** taking a bath. We also had **Ring-billed** and **California Gulls**. We moved down the shoreline and saw a **Canada Goose**, more Common Loons, a couple **Mountain Chickadees** and a **Common Raven**.

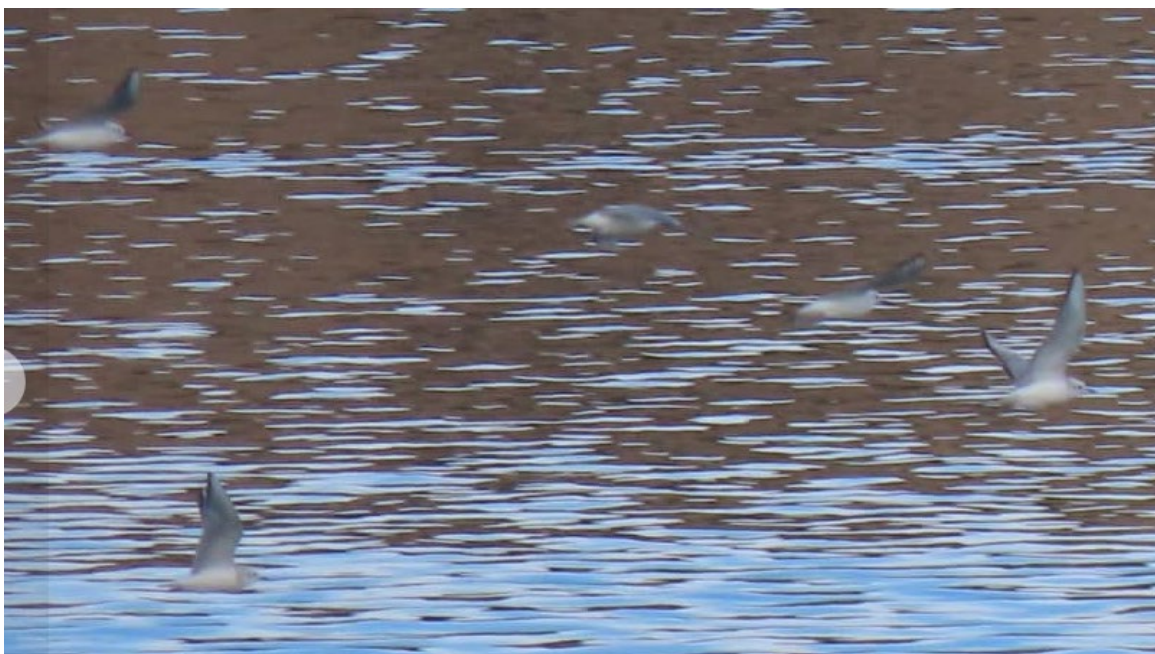
We then headed to the east end of the reservoir and saw **American Robins** and **Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** along the way. As we entered the State Park, we saw a group of Black-billed Magpies and a **Golden Eagle**. In the campground we had an **American Coots**, a lone **Franklin's Gull**, a group of **Western Grebes** and a group of **Bonapartes Gulls** fly in. We also heard an **American Goldfinch**.



Golden Eagle-Starvation Reservoir SP



Franklin's Gull-Starvation Reservoir SP

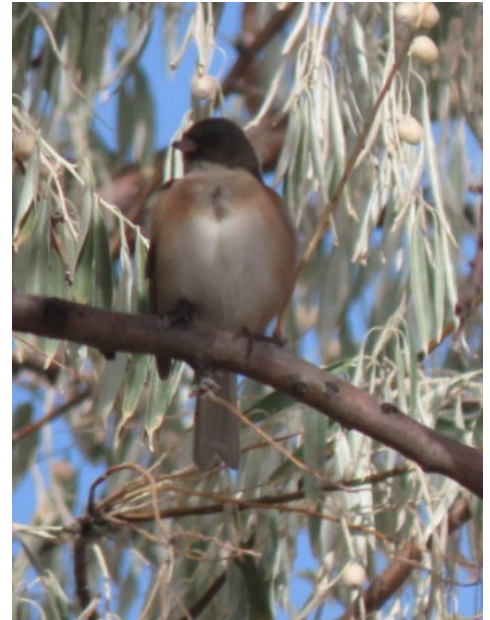


Bonapartes Gulls-Starvation Reservoir SP

At the marina we saw tons of Dark-eyed Juncos, a few Black-billed Magpies, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Mountain Bluebirds** and **House Finch**. On the way out we added a big flock of **Pinyon Jays**, a **European Starling** and some more White-crowned Sparrows.



Mountain Bluebirds-Starvation Reservoir SP



Dark-eyed Junco-Starvation Reservoir SP



Pinyon Jay-Take my word for it

After lunch we stopped at the Duchesne WTP. There were lots of waterfowl. We added **Northern Shoveler**, **Lesser and Greater Scaup**, more Bufflehead, a lone **Ring-necked Duck**, **Mallard**, and **Ruddy Duck**.

We decided to take the Strawberry Pinnacles Road and added **Clark's Nutcracker** and a couple **Golden-crowned Kinglets**.



Greater and Lesser Scaup-Starvation Reservoir SP



Strawberry Pinnacles

We ended our trip with **43** species in Duchesne County. I tried hard to add two more to get to my 100 in that county without luck! Thanks for coming!



Golden-crowned Kinglet-Strawberry Pinnacles



Clark's Nutcracker-Strawberry Pinnacles

2023 TURKEY TROT
11/18/23
Article and photos by Suzi Holt



Trotting Turkeys

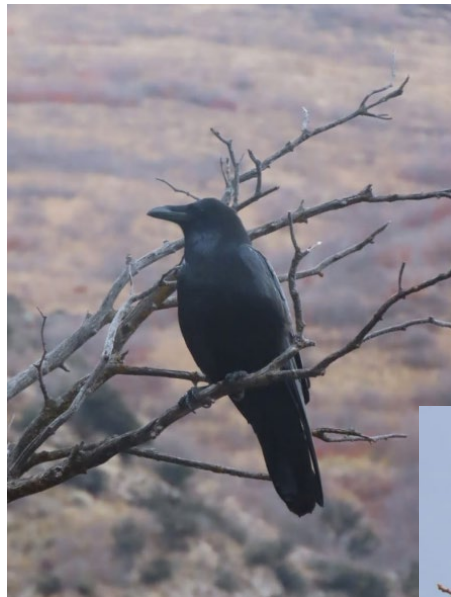
Our first stop was East Lawn Cemetery with a total of **0** turkeys but we did see "Elliot" from Open Season, and one rabbit!



From there we went to South Fork up Provo Canyon. We didn't see our usual numbers but managed **160!!** Plus we watched a **Golden Eagle** being dive bombed by a **Black-billed Magpie**. Other species we added were **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Woodhouse's** and **Stellar Jays**, and a **Common Raven**. We also enjoyed our turkey cookies. This year I made gluten free/ sugar free ones too! Yummy!!



Golden Eagle and Black-billed Magpie



Common Raven



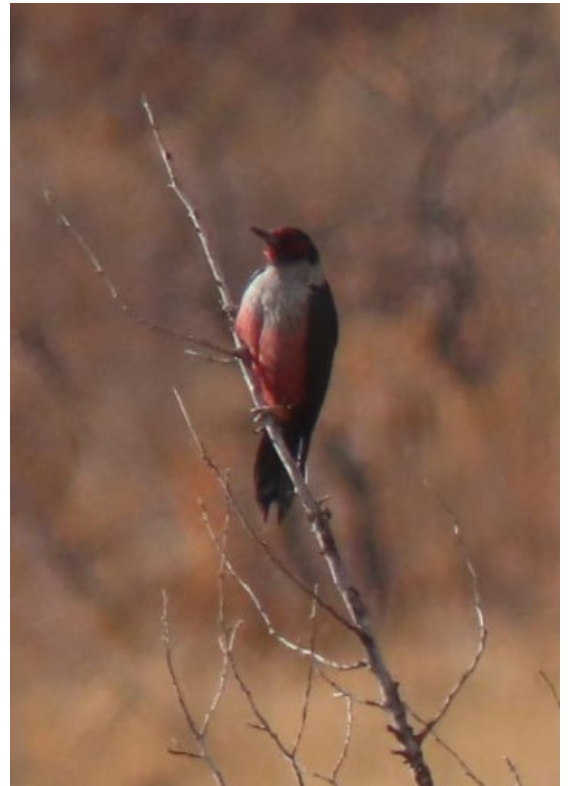
Woodhouse's Scrub Jay

Next stop was Diamond Fork. We drove the main canyon with no luck on turkeys. We did see a few Woodhouse's Scrub Jays, an **American Robin** and some Dark-eyed Juncos.

At the campground there is a dirt road to the left that goes up Juan Rhodes, we found **69** turkeys. They flew across the road in quite a spectacular show. We also added more Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos and 4 **Lewis's Woodpeckers**. We had 3 Golden Eagles soaring above a couple Common Ravens and a couple **Northern Flickers** too. We then followed a slow-moving cattle drive or "cow jam" out of the canyon. Esther saw 5 more turkeys by the campground bringing our total to **74** there.



Flying Turkeys



Lewis's Woodpecker

Most everyone needed to head home, but the Hadlocks and our car headed for Payson Canyon. We found a flock of **44** on the east hillside in the meadows. Added another Golden Eagle and a kettle of Common Ravens!



Marching Turkeys

Last stop was Santaquin Canyon. Luckily, I didn't run over and kill the turkeys as they ran out of the oak and across the road. Although it may have been a good addition to Thanksgiving dinner! There were **21** turkeys. We also saw another Golden Eagle making a total of 7 for the day!! Driving out we saw Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Flicker and a flock of **Pine Siskins**. Another successful year and a bunch of turkeys (us) and wild ones!! We saw a total of **299** Wild Turkeys!!!



Pine Siskins



Happy Turkeys

BACKYARD BIRDS

James Biser – Provo: I am in Provo, up the hill from Timpview High School in Edgemont. I live in a large grove of Gambel Oak. Currently, my yard is full of California Quail, Wild Turkey, House Finch, Black-capped Chickadee, Damned, I mean Eurasian Collared Dove, Cooper's Hawks, (hopefully killing the doves, but sometimes quail), many Red-breasted Nuthatch at the sunflower seed feeder. About two weeks ago, the Lesser Goldfinch briefly came back to the Nyjer feeder.

Suzi Holt – Payson: Not much, just my juncos

Robert Parsons – Orem: Nothing new or exciting for us this month but we have started seeing a few juncos and goldfinch.

Bruce Robinson – West Jordan: **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, I have a love/hate relationship with them. Love that they are so cute, hate that it means winter is coming!

Yvonne Carter – Highland: While putting up lights I noticed a **Cooper's Hawk** right above us, but the smaller birds like our **Spotted Towhee, Finches, Chickadees**, and **Red-breasted Nuthatches** just ignored the hawk.

Lynn Garner – Provo: I went out to rake leaves last week and found a small pile of small white feathers. It looked like a Chickadee met its end, probably to a Northern Pygmy Owl, which we have seen in our yard before.

Keeli Marvel – Saratoga Springs: I've had a **Mountain Chickadee** hanging out in my front pine tree on and off for a few weeks now. It's kind of weird to see them this low in elevation and on the west side of the lake, at least this early in winter, so I thought it was an interesting sighting. I wonder if it's taking advantage of the sunflowers I planted in the backyard this year - the goldfinches and house finches sure loved them!

Alona Huffaker – Springville: There have been several **Red-breasted Nuthatches** hanging around in my yard. My next-door neighbor had an **unidentified hummingbird** visit her feeder a couple of times this month!

Jeff Cooper – Pleasant Grove: My winter-roosting **Western Screech-owl** started to sporadically use my owl boxes during the latter part of October. It's been regularly using one or the other box since the beginning of the month. This is the fourth season that I've had an owl use one of my boxes, but I suspect that this individual is new to my yard. It ducks back into the box anytime I have to work in or go to the backyard. In previous years the owl would never mind me doing work in the yard while it sunned itself at the entrance to the box.

Paul Killpack – Lindon: I saw for the first time in my yard a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**!