



Utah County Birders Newsletter

October 2023

CONTENTS:

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

October Meeting:

Thursday October 12th at 7pm at the Bean Museum and via Zoom

Mike and Max Mahlmquist, father and son birders extraordinaire will be our special guest speakers this month presenting "Accidental Big Year", a tale of birding in Utah, California, Texas, and Florida, and how it accidentally turned into a big year. This is going to be a fun presentation and we hope to see everyone there!

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday October 14th THE BIG SIT

2-3 Hour shifts from 6am to dark

The Big Sit will be held from 6 am to dark on Saturday October 14th. The location is the SW corner of the Provo Airport Dike. This is a unique opportunity to bird this part of the dike road that is normally closed to the public. We have to turn in info about those who will be attending to the people that manage the property. Please sign up ASAP. Make sure to put all the information on so you can drive onto the dike. It is a lot of fun. We need lots of help so sign up!!

Here is the link to sign up for the Big Sit on Oct 14, 2023. Please sign up ASAP!

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UYFxl-EqNyILond8C6vqwBR7QkYUpA8DG-B_oDQUuE/edit?usp=sharing

President's Message – October 2023

By Yvonne Carter

We are right now in the middle of the migration season and our group experienced a great field trip to Antelope Island to participate in the migration this season. There are some good websites for the birdwatcher community to help increase our knowledge of migration. Look for these sites and join them--they can be very informative.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a good site. They have some 'for pay' programs but they also have monthly programs and free webinars on their site. At this time of the year, they have "Migration Celebration" in which they have free programs such as Merlin Bird ID Trevia, fall migration maps, questions answered on Exploring Bird Migration, and shedding light on protection birds. In the past, they have had webinars to help use Ebird.

Another site is Bird Note, which has good sites to check out such as their gallery, listening to bird calls and songs, podcasts, tips and field notes. National Audubon Society also has an informative site.

Let me say something about the value of our field trips. You will have a great learning experience by attending field trips, since instead of one set of eyes there are many more eyes to sight those birds. Also, I have always experienced the people who make up our group willing to share their knowledge and expertise. We have an awesome field trip leader, Suzi Holt, who does a great job in choosing the places to go and seeking those target birds. So please join us!

Happy birding!
Yvonne

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

BIRD OF THE MONTH:

Woodhouse's Scrub Jay

Apelocoma woodhousei

Article by Jeremy Telford

Photos by Jeremy and Kristin Telford

The Skeleton swung slowly in the crisp autumn breeze; its bones a stark white in contrast to the yellowed leaves on the branch from which it hung. Unlike the dark sockets of the eyes the grinning jaw was not empty. Between the grinning teeth was jammed a peanut. Perhaps a small morsel to satiate the dead as it passed into the next life? No. I just thought it would make a fun bird feeder for Halloween. The Woodhouse's Scrub-jays did not disappoint either. One soon landed on the shoulder snatching the peanut from the skull, causing the jaws of the plastic skeleton to snap shut. The bird calmly took its shelled treat and left to hide it somewhere in the yard. Some birds have all the tricks.



This is a medium sized bird of the drier parts of the intermountain west. It has a blue back, gray underparts, and a hunched over posture. It tends to keep to juniper, sagebrush, or the gnarled scrub oaks, usually below the elevations where it's cousin the Stellar's Jay, with its black hood, likes to haunt. At one time this bird and the California Scrub-jay of the Western Coast were one bird- the Western Scrub Jay, until scientists, likely mad with power, forcibly split the species in two in 2016.

These scrub-jays are omnivorous, their large appetite satiated by whatever happens to be in season. In the summer they live mostly on insects and fruit. In autumn they eat nuts and seeds, including pine nuts once the cones have opened enough for their thin bills to reach inside and pluck out the tasty morsel. But they have a taste for flesh as well, eating small lizards. In the spring they will also shadow other birds, following them back to their nests, where they feast on the small and helpless.

Woodhouse's Scrub-jays tend to nest lower in small trees, anywhere from about eye level to fourteen feet up. Both the male and female of the species work fiendishly for about a week to weave the roots, small sticks, and animal hair into a serviceable nest. One to five pale green or gray eggs, blotched with olive or brown, are then laid. After seventeen to nineteen weeks the young birds break from their shelled prisons. These newly hatched nestlings are born with their eyes closed, helpless and naked. Here they sit and are often preyed upon by raccoon, snakes, weasels, skunks, squirrels, magpies, crows, or even their fellow jays. Adults are not safe either. Cats, wild or domestic, will pounce on them if given the chance. Accipiter's, like the Cooper's and Sharp-shinned hawks, hunt the trees and swoop down upon unsuspecting jays. And in the dead of the night, they may meet their fate in the talons of the Great Horned Owl. If they avoid these fates, they can live up to nine years.

These birds are often thieves, not just stealing peanuts from the dead but have often been seen stealing acorns and pinecones from birds like Clark's nutcrackers. They also have a fondness for parasites, plucking ticks and other less savory creepy-crawlies from the backs of mule deer. The deer often stand still, holding up their ears to give the jays better access.

The scary thing about these birds is that, while still quite common, they have been showing a decline in recent years in some parts of their range. Perhaps this Halloween we can leave out a peanut or two as we listen for the harsh and scratchy cry of the Woodhouse's Scrub-jay.



https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Woodhouses_Scrub-Jay/overview

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/woodhouses-scrub-jay>

<https://peechnature.org/learn/nature-guides/featured-critters/woodhouses-scrub-jay/>

FIELD TRIP REPORTS:

River Lane – Sandy Beach

9/2/23

Report & Photos by Suzi Holt



New River Lane/Sandy Beach access

It was a beautiful overcast fall morning. On the way in I saw a couple **Swainson's Hawks** and a **Eurasian Collared Dove**. Although the clouds were threatening, we only had a few raindrops. There is hardly any beach! We looked long distance towards Swede Lane and saw a lot of **Great Blue Herons**, a mixed flock of **Franklin, California and Ring-billed Gulls**, lots of **Clark's Grebes** with juveniles and lots of **Caspian Terns**. There were tons of swallows, we saw **Barn, Tree, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged** and tons of **Violet-green Swallows**.



Lots of **White-faced Ibis** were headed southward. **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were still flying from phragmites to phragmites, and a **Snowy Egret** flew west towards Lincoln Beach.



White-faced Ibis

We also saw a few **American White Pelicans** and **Double-crested Cormorants**. I tried taking the group through the phragmites to get a little closer to the end with no success we turned around, dropped off the scopes at the cars and began our walk down River Lane.

Our first birds were a couple **Yellow Warblers**, a **Marsh Wren**, **Song Sparrow** and a **Gray Catbird**. You could hear multiple **Western Wood Pewees**, and we all but stumbled on a **Great-horned Owl**. Thanks to Corey for pointing it out. Down the road a ways we had a family of 4 Western Wood Pewees. The parents had caught a dragonfly, ripped off the wings and fed it to the little.

We finally found a mixed flock of passerines. We had **Yellow** and **Wilson's Warblers**, a few **Warbling Vireos**, **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Lesser** and **American Goldfinch**, **House Wren**, **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, **Townsend's Warbler**, **European Starling**, **Mourning Doves**, **Downy Woodpecker**, and a **Belted Kingfisher**. Towards the end we added a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**.



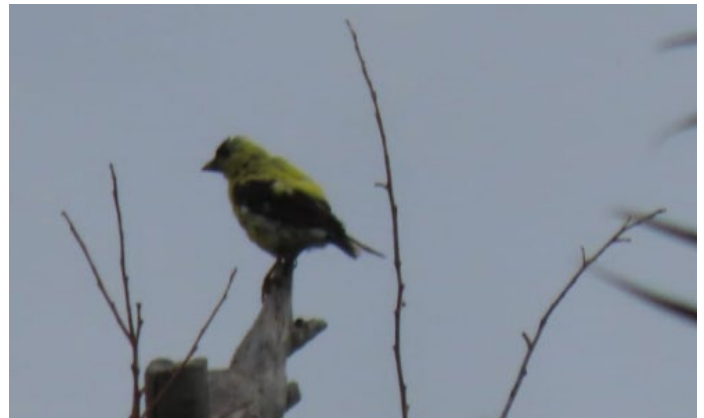
Western Wood Pewee



Downy Woodpecker



Black-capped Chickadee



American Goldfinch

Four

Osprey were sitting along the lake on a fence line, one was eating a fish. Something spooked all the shorebirds and a large flock of peeps flew off with a ton of Caspian Terns and gulls. A group of **Canada Geese** flew in and we also saw an **American Robin**.



Osprey



Osprey with fish

As we walked back down the road I spooked a **Barn Owl** that only Machele and I saw. We also had a juvenile **Brown-headed Cowbird** that we were sure momma Yellow Warbler was exhausted from its motherly duties.

Overall, it was very slow but we all decided we did get our steps in. I think I got around 7,000!



Happy Birders!

Some decided to head over to Provo to try for the Summer Tanager.

KC, Esther and I went to Lincoln Beach. We were pleased to add **Black-necked Stilt**, **Western, Least** and **Spotted Sandpipers**, and a **Sanderling**, **American Avocet**, a pair of **Say's Phoebes** and a first for me in that area **Belted Kingfisher**!



Say's Phoebe



Least Sandpipers, Sanderling



Western Sandpipers



Sanderling



Belted Kingfisher

Thanks for coming. It was a beautiful morning and good to get out!

Antelope Island Field Trip

9/16/23

Report and Photos by Suzi Holt



19 Birders joined us on this beautiful, early Saturday morning trip to Antelope Island!

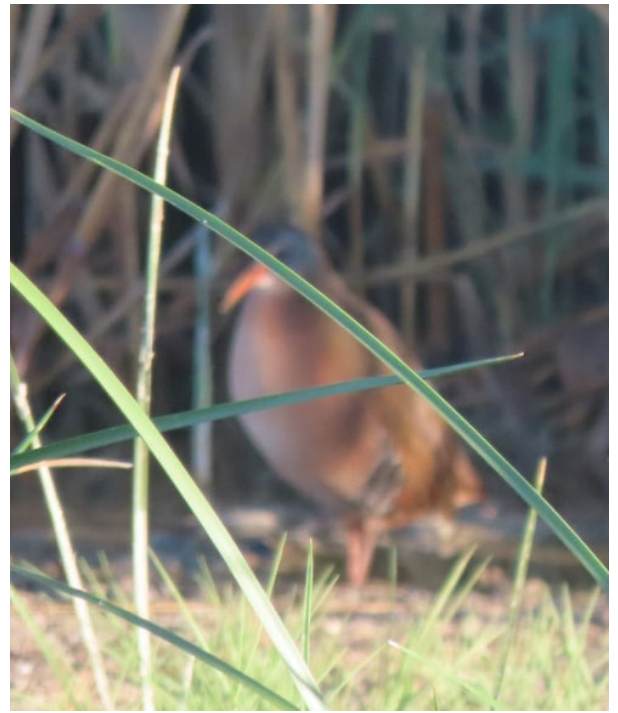
We started by the entrance station in some small ponds. We saw lots of **Killdeer**, a couple of obliging **Sora**, and a bashful **Virginia Rail**. We also had **Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs**, **Wilson's Snipe**, **Marsh Wren**, **Savannah Sparrow**, **House Sparrow**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **White-faced Ibis**, **Northern Harrier** and **Common Raven**.



Sora



Lesser Yellowlegs



Virginia Rail

Down the causeway there were **Black-necked Stilts**, **Franklin's** and **Ring-billed Gulls**, **Barn Swallows** and lots of **American Avocets**.



Black-necked Stilt



Franklin's Gull



American Avocet

We then came upon a area with lots of peeps. We had **Western, Least, Semipalmated** and **Baird's Sandpipers**, a lone **Snowy Plover**, **Wilson's Phalarope** and a flyby of **3 Red-necked Phalarope**, and a couple large flocks of **Sanderlings**. There were lots of **Northern Shoveler**, a few **Green-winged, Cinnamon** and **Blue-winged Teal** and **Gadwall**. We also saw **Vesper Sparrow**, **Long-billed Curlew** and a **leucistic American Avocet**.



Western Sandpiper



Baird's Sandpiper



Snowy Plover



Leucistic American Avocet

Down by
the bridge

we added **Eared Grebe, Willet, California Gull, American White Pelican American Pipit, a Caspian Tern** and a **Clark's Grebe**. Sadly, our only **Barn Owl** was a wing and some feet. And we can't forget the **Turkey Vultures**.



Willet



American White Pelican

As we made our way toward Garr Ranch we stopped and saw a couple **Burrowing Owls** and had a **Western Meadowlark**, **Northern Harrier** and **Common Ravens**. We also saw lots of Bison and a group of Antelope too.



Burrowing Owl

At Garr Ranch we started off with a **Red-naped Sapsucker** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**. In the wooded area we had **Wilson's** and **Orange-crowned Warbler** and a **Hermit Thrush**. There were **Western** and **Dusky Flycatchers** too.

By the spring we had a **MacGillivray's Warbler** and a calling **Virginia's Rail**. We added **Western Wood Pewee**, **Western Tanager**, **Gray**, **Hammond's** and **Willow Flycatcher**. There were also **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, a **White-crowned Sparrow** and a beautiful **Cassin's Vireo**.



Dusky Flycatcher



Western Flycatcher



Cassins Vireo

Above us we had **Barn Swallows** mobbing a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. We ate our lunch at the picnic tables then searched one more time for the Great-horned Owls. We found a **Dark-eyed Junco** by the spring, but no luck on the owls so we decided to head out.



Barn Swallow chasing Sharp-shinned Hawk

We stopped at the Bison Corrals and saw a couple of Great-horned owls roosting in the rafters, plus a Say's Phoebe. We saw orb-weavers pretty much everywhere.



Great Horned Owl



Say's Phoebe



Orb Weaver Spider (Holly's friend of a friend)

We drove to the Visitors Center. Out on the lookout we had more **Turkey Vultures** and a **Cooper's Hawk** flyover. On the backside there were three juvenile **Barn Swallows** still being fed by the parents in their nest. Such a fun sight!

As we left, we saw a Northern Mockingbird sitting on a sagebrush. On our way back down the causeway we added Pectoral Sandpipers. Such a fun place to go and a good group to enjoy it with! Thanks for joining us!

Back Yard Birds

Robert Parsons – Orem: We were in Maryland much of the month. We saw a lot of **Blue Jays**, **Chimney Swifts** and **Cedar Waxwings**, along with a few **Olive-sided Flycatchers**, **Yellow-throated Vireos** and **Canada Warblers** in our yard.

Bruce Robinson – West Jordan: **Olive-sided Flycatcher** squabbling with **2 Western Wood Pewees** and **2 Black-chinned Hummingbirds** over territorial rights of one tree branch.