



September 2025

UTAH COUNTY BIRDERS NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS:

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



SEPTEMBER MEETING

Thursday September 11, 2025, 7pm Bean Museum and Zoom

Our special guest speakers will be Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Biologists Annie Crim and Mellory Barnes:

Pelican trapping 101: Conservation efforts of the American White Pelican in Utah.

Join us for a fun presentation about the research being done on American White Pelicans and their conservation in Utah.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We are slowly seeing a drop in the high temperatures which should be a relief to all of us. On the 14th of August, we had our traditional potluck dinner at the Provo River Delta Park. This gave us an opportunity to spend time together, watching the birds as we ate and visited. Members of the board also met that evening, discussing plans for the upcoming months, as well as making a few changes in the organization of the Utah County Birders.

The Utah County Birders have a long history. Milt Moody and Dennis Shirley shared some information that should help us appreciate this group more. In the early 1990's, the Timpanogos Audubon had been organized but started dwindling. Because they felt Audubon was a distraction for what the group really wanted to experience, Reed Stone along with Merrill Webb, Robin Tuck, Weldon Whipple and his wife, Ned Hill and others organized the Utah County Birders. Weldon set up the website and Milton Moody, having joined in 1994, helped with the newsletter. The group met each month at the Bean Museum downstairs before the new Museum building was built. That tradition has been held ever since the beginning. The group has been involved in wonderful field trips, informative monthly meetings, the annual Christmas Bird Count for the Provo and Payson areas, the Big Sit, which is a national activity, a wonderful monthly newsletter and Facebook page, a Challenge for the even numbered years, and a website which Milt Moody has so dutifully handled. This website, which also includes the records of birders, has been a benefit to the entire state for bird watchers.

I have a list of over 130 people who have been part of the Utah County Birders at one time or another. A few have passed on, and we miss them. I am sharing this with you because in order to keep this fantastic group together, it takes people who are willing to help and support through participating, sharing ideas and attending the activities. Thank you to those of you who are steadfast in being there each month, and if you have been away, come on back.

Yvonne Carter, President

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

FISH SPRINGS Saturday September 6, 2025

Meet at Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride

5 AM - 5 PM

Join us for a special field trip out to the single best hotspot in Utah, Fish Springs. We will be meeting at 5 AM at the Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride in American Fork just on the west side of I-15. Keeli and I will be leading a field trip out there, with a chance we may be able to get access to areas behind the gates, but no promises. Fish Springs is known for rare migrating birds, and you never know what you might encounter out there. We will be checking different areas for shorebirds, passerines, and all the fun birds that use the marsh and ponds at this national wildlife refuge. Be sure to bring water, a lunch, bug spray, sunscreen, and plan on a full day of birding. If you have a scope, feel free to bring it, as it could be helpful looking at shorebirds. I hope we can leave Fish Springs at a decent enough hour to not be home too late. If you have any questions about this trip, please feel free to contact me or Keeli. I hope to get a good turnout for the trip and find some fun birds for those who are able to make it.

Hawk Watch Khyv Peak Road Wednesday September 17, 2025

Meet at Palisade Park Parking Lot

9:30 AM to 3:30 PM

We will be doing a hawk watch atop Buffalo Peak along KHYV Peak Rd. This requires a short hike of about a half mile in each direction with about 300 feet of elevation gain. The final part is where most of the elevation comes in and is steep, though the hawk watching from this site allows for many eye level encounters with migrating birds. If you have a portable chair that you are comfortable carrying a half mile, it comes in handy for hawk watching. Also bring water, any snacks you want to munch on, and of course your binoculars. This is at an elevation of 8019 feet, so wear sunscreen. Also, there are no bathrooms at the trailhead, or at the peak. If you need to use the bathroom, you will have to take a scenic stroll. We will meet at the Palisade Park parking lot located in Orem near the old Cascade Golf Club. We will meet at 9:30 AM. We will not be parking by the gas station at the mouth of the canyon, but at the park located west of there. The final part of the Khyv Peak Road is often dusty, rough, and slow going. If you are uncomfortable driving your vehicle, you may carpool with other people. If you are interested in driving up later and meeting us, please feel free to. If you need to leave early then bringing your car, or arranging to leave early will be helpful. We will shoot to be back to the park around 3:30 PM. We are doing this on Monday as this area can get busy during fall with the leaves changing color and want to not worry about having nowhere to park.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Least Flycatcher

Empidonax minimus

Article and photo by Esther Sumner



This year, I “met” and fell in love with a lifer bird - the Least Flycatcher. There are about 35 flycatchers in the U.S. and Canada, and almost all of them have charmingly blocky heads, straight bills, and an upright posture. If you’ve been out birding, you’ve likely seen a flycatcher perched at the top of a tree, suddenly dart out to grab a bug, then fly back in and land on the same branch. Utah’s Western Kingbirds, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Say’s Phoebe, Black Phoebe, Western Wood-Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Dusky Flycatcher are all flycatchers that I see every year in Utah County and that can exhibit this behavior.

The Least Flycatcher is part of the Empidonax (Empid) family of flycatchers, which includes Willow Flycatcher, Hammond’s Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, and Western Flycatcher. In general, flycatchers in the Empidonax family can be tough to tell apart but they often have very distinctive songs and call, like the Willow Flycatcher’s “Fitz-pew!” and the constant, up-slurred, two-note call of a Western Flycatcher. The Least Flycatcher has a very distinctive, dry, and incessant “chebec” song. I love the way they throw back their heads fiercely, as if to get the most volume they can out of the “chebec” that comes out of their tiny bodies. They remind me of Lazuli Buntings, another bird that likes to throw its head back extra fiercely, to sing. Least Flycatchers are aggressive to the point of delightfully obnoxious. You can hear them from pretty far away, which I find incredibly charming.

Least Flycatchers can be especially difficult to distinguish from Dusky Flycatchers and Hammond's Flycatchers, but once again, that distinct "chebec" is typically the easiest and most definitive way to tell them apart. However, there are other visual indicators. Hammond's Flycatchers also have a longer primary projection, and a shorter, darker bill. Dusky Flycatchers and Least Flycatchers are even more similar, but Least Flycatchers have a cleaner, sharper, and more contrasting plumage, and a bold, but complete and round white eye-ring. Dusky Flycatchers are dull in comparison, more olive, and have an asymmetrical eye-ring that one friend describes as often looking "pinched in and more elongated."

Least Flycatchers, for Empids, are also extra small, about the size of a Sparrow. They are overall gray and white and yellow, and have a short, wide bill. This year, I saw my first one at Newton Reservoir, the best-known location for them in Utah. I then saw additional Least Flycatchers in two less common spots, at Willard Bay State Park and Willard Spur (one on the same day as my lifer ones in Newton Reservoir!). Least Flycatchers can often be located in tall cottonwoods near rivers and streams at lower elevations. Most of the time, we heard them before we saw them, in exactly that kind of habitat. This is in contrast to Dusky and Hammond Flycatchers, that nest in higher elevations, in mixed conifer forests.

Newton Reservoir is the "known" spot for Least Flycatchers during Spring and Summer, and don't really show up in range maps as being found in Utah at all but they've been expanding their range into the west and have been found breeding at Newton Reservoir, Willard Bay, and Ouray NWR. In our own Utah County, we have reports for one at Warm Springs in 2017 and River Lane in 2018!

I would be delighted to run into some more Least Flycatchers, especially in our own county, but in reality, I'm getting ready to say "bye" to Least Flycatchers for the year. They will travel between 60-72 miles per day to reach their winter grounds in Mexico and Central America, starting in mid-August through early September, where they'll wait to start growing new feathers.

Sources:

1. allaboutbirds.org/guide/least-flycatcher/overview
2. audubon.org/field-guide/bird/least-flycatcher
3. ebird.org/species/leafly/US-UT
4. People sources: Bryant Olsen, Max Malmquist, and McKay Olson

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Goshen, Saturday August 9, 2025

Article by KC Childs, Photos by Ian Peay



Warm Springs

On August 9th a group of 6 birders made the trek out to Goshen Bay to see what shorebirds had begun their trek south, and what other birds were around in the adjacent fields. We also checked Secret Pond, Warm Springs, and a few in the group made a quick trip to Cedar Hollow Reservoir to see if any other shorebirds were around. Our first stop was the mile plus walk out to the shores of Utah Lake to see what was on the shore. Along our walk out to the shore we were able to get some fun looks at a **Blue Grosbeak**, **Loggerhead Shrike**, and **Hummingbirds** feeding on the blooming Bee Balm. While we hit the shore, we were greeted with hundreds of **Swallows** flying about with the bulk being **Bank**, **Tree**, and **Barn**. We Saw hundreds of gulls already building up in the bay, with most being **Franklin's** and **California Gulls**. We started searching for shorebirds and saw **American Avocets**, **Black-necked Stilts**, **Marbled Godwits**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Western Sandpiper**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Killdeer**, and a wonderful treat of seeing 28 **Snowy Plovers**, including recently hatched young.

Western Sandpiper



Snowy Plover



We saw 33 species between our walk out and along the shore. We then slowly drove the fields looking at raptors like **Swainson's Hawk** and also fun sparrows like **Lark** and **Brewer's Sparrow**. Some of us also got to see a **Great Horned Owl** flush out of some trees. We then checked Secret Pond area and added two more shorebirds to our daily list. We saw a **Spotted Sandpiper**, and a very cooperative **Solitary Sandpiper**. Also there was a young **Sora** that was coming out in the open for everyone to get a look at.

We then drove over to Warm Springs in hope that maybe a bittern might show itself, but we had no luck, and not much was moving there, but seeing some **Eastern Kingbirds** was a great amount of fun. Lastly a few of us stopped at Cedar Hollow Reservoir and added one more shorebird for the trip, which were some **Greater Yellowlegs**. Altogether we had 10 species of shorebirds, and over 50 species for the morning. I always appreciate everyone who comes and makes these trips such a highlight of the month.

River Lane, Sandy Beach, Swede Lane Saturday August 23, 2025

Article by KC Childs, Photos by Landon Graff



On August 23rd, a group of 7 birders started off together heading down to River Lane to see what birds had begun their migration south, and what breeders were still around. It was a very active morning for the birds. We walked down the lane, and out to the shore and then walked along Sandy Beach looking for what else might be around. We started off early by getting to watch some **hummingbirds** feeding on the Bee Balm. Between the seven of us, we had all 4 hummingbird species that visit Utah County, including **Rufous** and **Calliope** Hummingbirds.

We soon heard a metallic chip note that was identified as a **Northern Waterthrush**. The bird began to fly back and forth over the road giving us brief views as it would go into dense vegetation. As we continued our walk we got to see other migrants and breeding passerines like **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Blue Grosbeak**, **Lazuli Bunting**, **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, **Willow Flycatcher**, **Western Wood-peewee**, and **Western Tanager**.



Calliope Hummingbird



Willow Flycatcher

While we were nearing the roundabout area we ran into a nice group of birds including multiple **Nashville Warblers**, a **Black Phoebe**, another Northern Waterthrush, **Belted Kingfisher**, and a **Common Nighthawk** sitting on a tree limb for all to get great looks. We then walked out to the shore and bumped into Cheryl and Scott who let us know that the **Red-breasted Merganser** was still around, and several shorebirds.

We walked the shore and saw a good smattering of shorebirds including **Black-necked Stilt**, **American Avocet**, **Killdeer**, **Semipalmated Plover**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, and **Least Sandpipers**. There were also lots of other birds utilizing the lake shore like **Great Blue Herons**, **White-faced Ibis**, **Osprey**, **Snowy Egrets**, and **Franklin's Gull**. Altogether we saw 63 species at River Lane. We then ran over to Swede Lane to see if there was much happening over there. We picked up a lot of American Avocets over there, Spotted Sandpipers, and a large group of peeps flying we couldn't identify. We also had many passerines moving through including **Northern Mockingbird**, **Loggerhead Shrike**, **Sage Thrashers**, **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**, **Lark Sparrows**, **Vesper Sparrows**, **Brewer's Sparrow**, and a **Virginia's Warbler**. We saw over 30 species and put us over 75 species for the day. It was a fantastic trip, and I sure appreciate everyone who came along and helped make it a success. I sure hope to see you next month at one of the field trips.



ART GALLERY

No submissions

Backyard Birds

Catherine White – Orem: Juvenile Coopers Hawk, hunting some sparrows!

Holly Minor – Erda: The juvenile Swainson's hawks have left the nest. They like to perch on our old satellite dish and glare at us when we're on the porch. And they scream as loud as they possibly can for the parents to feed them.



Bruce Robinson – West Jordan: I was excited to see the Super Territorial Rufous Hummingbirds arrive! But somehow, I get the impression that the resident Black-chinned Hummers were not as excited to have to share!

Esther Duncan – Delta: A Downy dining at a juicy ripe peach feeder.



Steve Van Winkle – Provo River Delta area: Here is a nice Western Kingbird from my extended backyard.

