



# The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the **Wasatch Audubon Society**

Volume 40, Number 1 January/February 2021

## WAS MEETINGS AND HAPPENINGS

### Tuesday, January 19 - 7:00pm

Join us on Zoom for a showing of “What Color Is a Bluebird?” This is a slide show about the physics and chemistry behind bird colors.

### Tuesday, February 16 - 7:00pm

Join us for yet another online Zoom meeting where we will explore love in nature by playing a trivia game. To clarify, the love featured is that of animals with an emphasis on birds.

### *Christmas Bird Count*

### *Preliminary Count Report*

by John Bellmon

I would like to thank everyone for their help with this year’s Christmas Bird Counts which are under Covid restrictions. This is a preliminary report on only our first two Christmas Bird Counts because of printing deadlines, but things are going very well.

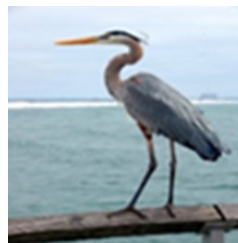
On the Bear River CBC some of the highlights were: Tundra Swans, Mew Gull, American Tree Sparrows and a Northern Shrike. A total of 50 species were seen.

On the Ogden CBC some of the highlights were: Black-crowned Night Heron, Thick-billed (McCowan’s) Longspur, Leucistic Red-tailed Hawk, Wilson’s Snipe and American Tree Sparrows.

A full report on all five Bird Counts will be in the next Mountain Chickadee. Thanks again to everyone involved.

## Keep in Touch With Us!

Do we have your email address? We often want to communicate with our members in between newsletters about changes in plans, new opportunities, or conservation action, but less than one third of our members have provided their email address either through National Audubon or directly to us. If you want to know what’s up and haven’t been getting emails from WAS, please send a message to Lynn at [bradlynn@comcast.net](mailto:bradlynn@comcast.net).



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**Wasatch Audubon Society**

Website: <http://www.wasatchaudubon.org>

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Newsletter	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
Programs	Susan Snyder	801-388-4201
Publicity	Arnold Smith	801-829-3383

**About Us:**

The **Wasatch Audubon Society** is an association of people who share an interest in birds, all natural things, and Utah's varied habitats. Our goals include: educating ourselves and others about wildlife and the natural environment; enjoying the out-of-doors in fellowship with others who share similar values; fostering an appreciation of wildlife and understanding of ecological principles; promoting opportunities for the public to see and appreciate birds and bird habitats; and influencing public policy toward a conservation ethic. You might also want to visit our website at <http://www.wasatchaudubon.org>.

IN MEMORIUM

Paul Merola 1950-2020

by Dennis Collins



Former Wasatch Audubon Society President and longtime Audubon member Paul Merola will be missed by the local birding community.

Paul enjoyed bird watching, but he excelled at bird photography. We enjoyed sharing bird pictures after our many mornings on Antelope Island. He would hang out my truck window trying to get a good shot of a sandpiper or a shrike. At the end of the year, he would gather his best pictures and have them incorporated into a calendar. Some of us were lucky enough to get one of Paul's famous calendars.

When I needed help with various projects at elementary schools, Paul was always willing to join me and pass his love of nature to the students. For the Great Backyard Bird Count, we would visit schools and instruct third and fourth graders in binocular use and bird identification. Birding with students in the school neighborhood was Paul's favorite activity. Students and teachers would later comment on how much they enjoyed their time with him.

We always had a memorable time on The Christmas Bird Count. Paul and I would spend the day talking birds and politics. Paul's biggest discovery was a flock of Gray Partridge along the Weber River! After spending 25 years with Paul on this special day, the Christmas Bird Count will never be the same for me.

Thanks for the camaraderie, Paul!

Welcome New and Rejoined Members!

- Evie Adams Meredith Lund
Bruce Barker Elisa Mace
Gordon Belnap Barbara Madsen
Micah DeMoux Maynard Morris
Geraldine Felt Amy Morton-Miller
Dorothy Gibby Karen Palmer
Lil Graves Julie Sabato
Kevin Haugen Ossi Shupe
Jay Hudson Valerie J. Story
Dennis Jeppsen Paul Vernet
Ben Johnson David Warden
Mary Latulippe

Conservation Corner: Biocrust

by Lynn Carroll

I watched a fascinating webinar about Dr. Sasha Reed’s work with biocrust, presented by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) last summer. Their online article, “Healing the Desert,” is the basis for this column.

Biocrust is “the craggy, often dark or burnt looking carpet stretching between shrubs and grasses in arid lands ... —a community of lichens, mosses and cyanobacteria that live on the soil surface of drylands.” Also known as “cryptogamic soil,” it covers about 12 percent of Earth’s surface. Biocrust is fragile but performs important services that benefit both nature and people:

Stabilizing soils When the cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) become wet, they move through the soil, leaving behind sticky fibers that bind soil particles together. With time, a tangled mat is formed and lichens and mosses grow into it. Erosion by wind and water is reduced and dangerous dust storms are prevented.

Boosting fertility Biocrust transfers both carbon and useable nitrogen to the soil, acting as natural fertilizer. Increased plant growth and diversity result, which support more varied wildlife or improve agriculture.

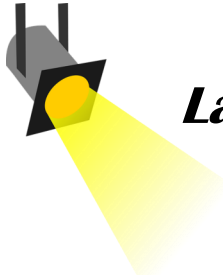
Retaining moisture The miniature peaks and valleys in biocrust slow runoff of rain, allowing more water to soak into the tangled mats, where it is held like a sponge. This is essential to the whole dryland ecosystem.

Biocrusts worldwide are being lost to common threats. The crusts crumble when compressed and are torn apart by hikers, cattle, machinery, etc, and if dry are blown or washed away. If invasive grasses take root, biocrust can burn in wildfires. Natural recovery after disturbance is slow—two years to decades. Now climate change is threatening more destruction via longer drought and excessive heat.

Scientists such as Dr. Reed with the U.S. Geological Service are looking to help re-establish biocrust where it has been lost. They first showed that it would grow in laboratory conditions, then on a larger scale in a greenhouse, and it grew fast! The next step was to take patches of greenhouse-grown biocrust to a site on the Colorado Plateau and plant them, like skin grafts. It didn’t work.

Undeterred, joined by organizations like TNC, and funded with a new grant, Dr. Reed and her collaborator, Dr. Colin Tucker, are trying a bold new approach. They ditched the greenhouse, preferring to try for larger yields and theorizing that the move from greenhouse to desert had been too great a shock to their biocrust transplants. They led a team into Mojave and Sonoran Desert sites

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## *Spotlight on Laura Johnston*



My adventures with nature began as early as I can remember. My family lived in a 1950's suburban area in Ohio. That long ago, there were still cow pastures, small woods and a creek (well, at least a storm creek that we called the crick) surrounding our house. As a young child, I played in the creek, finding pretty rocks, salamanders, tadpoles, etc. There was a low spot in the woods (the pond) that produced so many "tadpoles" that we proudly brought home in a jar, only to be told they were mosquito larvae. I looked forward to seeing the wild Violets and Dutchman's Breeches come up in the spring woods. As a teenager, I enjoyed camping all over the Midwest in the pop up camper my dad built. These experiences provided a foundation for later adventures in the outdoors.

Then adulthood came along, with a degree in Special Education from the University of Cincinnati and a teaching career of 34 years. Teaching children and adults with a variety of special needs was the best job ever. I retired a few years ago, but I loved almost every minute of that job.

When Dan and I got married in 1992, my love of the outdoors expanded. We backpacked, camped, looked for birds and built a yard for birds. I have learned a lot about birds (being a perennial Audubon president's partner) and am happy to be able to identify many birds by sound. My favorite place to look for birds is in this area, because they feel like neighbors and friends. I look forward to the Orioles

scolding me in the summer, the Juncos clicking and whistling in the winter, and the sound of the Flicker as a sign of fall. I like hearing the Sandhills burbling high overhead, and the Crows chattering about their day as they fly south on winter evenings. I look forward to enjoying these things as long as I can.

I have been a member of Wasatch Audubon since 1992. I am currently participating in Audubon by organizing the bird feeding program and editing the Chickadee, this newsletter.

### **President's Pipeline**

by Dan Johnston

I hope everyone had a chance to enjoy the search for your bane bird. This time I want to introduce you to a new bird name, the HOOK bird. Your hook bird is that special bird that inspired you to become a birder. I'm sure we all can remember it.

My hook bird came in January 1982. I had always been interested in birds and wild animals. But never noticed much more than that most birds are little and brown.

I was invited to go on a Bald Eagle survey on Antelope Island. The State had just acquired the land south of the big fence and we had the key to the gate. It was an amazing trip. The road dirt snowdrifts provided an added driving challenge. The wind had blown ice sheets up on the shore of the Great Salt Lake. We could have been in the Arctic.

I saw a large flock of little brown birds; but it was pointed out to me that there was more to them than that. They had a cute yellow face, black bib and a black mask. But best of all, they had little horns. Yes, I was hooked by the Horned Lark! I was also able to see two

*Continued on Pg. 6*

#### **CONTACTS FOR WALKS AND TRIPS**

**Wednesday walks - Paul Lombardi:**

**pslombard@gmail.com**

**Field trips - Dan Johnston 801-645-8633**

**John Bellmon 801-444-3704**

**CALENDAR**

*Please note: For the time being, we will NOT be meeting for breakfast at the Wednesday bird walks. We will meet at the trailheads at the time indicated. At all events we will observe social distancing and wear face masks and drive separate cars. Bird themed masks will be available for \$5.00.*

**JANUARY****6 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**Bountiful Pond:** Meet at the pond, located at 1275 W 1600 N just south of the Bountiful City Landfill. Take Legacy Highway South, exit #4. Turn right onto Frontage Road. In 2.1 miles, turn left onto Bountiful Pond Access Road. Pond is in .1 mile.

**13 Wednesday 9:00 am walk**

**Fort Buenaventura Park:** Located on A Avenue in Ogden. Meet at the entrance to the park.

**19 Tuesday 7:00 pm WAS Meeting**

Join us on Zoom for a showing of "What Color Is a Bluebird?" This is a slide show illustrating Bluebirds' range, appearance, habits and much more. Jay Stretch will send the link for the Zoom meeting to members via email a couple of days prior.

**20 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**South Ogden Nature Park:** Located at 1175 E 5875 S. Meet at the trailhead for the Nature Walk.

**23 Saturday 9:00 am field trip**

**Farmington Bay:** Meet at parking lot outside of the Eccles Wildlife Education Center at Farmington Bay Wildlife Management Area (at approximately 1700 W Glovers Lane, Farmington, UT). We will explore the Bay and ponds. Target birds are Bald Eagle, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, and Lesser Black-backed Gull. Trip leader - Dan Johnston.

**27 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**Kay's Creek Parkway:** Located at 2370 Canyon View Dr., Layton. Meet at the parking lot which can be reached off Hwy. 193.

**FEBRUARY****2 Tuesday 7:00 pm WAS Board Meeting.**

Held remotely.

**3 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**Riverdale Trail (South):** Meet at the trailhead, off Riverdale Road at 700 W.

**10 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**West Haven Hiking and Biking Trail (west of I-15):** Meet in front of Stevens-Henager College, north of 21st Street.

**16 Tuesday 7:00 pm WAS Meeting**

Join us for yet another online Zoom meeting where we will explore love in nature by playing a trivia game. To clarify, the love featured is that of animals with an emphasis on birds. The link for that meeting will be sent out in the same manner as November.

**17 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**Two Rivers Trail:** Meet at the parking area under the 21st Street overpass, east of the Flying J Plaza.

**20 Saturday 8:30 am field trip**

**Annual Morgan County Bald Eagle Trip:** Meet at DWR office (515 E 5300 S in South Ogden) at 8:30 am. We will caravan from there. This is an all day trip (until about 4 pm) so bring water and lunch. Target birds are Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Wild Turkey, American Dipper and Rough-legged Hawk. Trip leader - John Bellmon.

**24 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk**

**Beus Pond:** Located at 1576 Country hills Drive. Meet in the parking area at the pond. To reach the pond, take Country Hills Dr. east off of Harrison Blvd. at 4200 S.

**MARCH****3 Wednesday 9:00 am bird walk****Antelope Island Causeway and Fielding Garr Ranch:**

Meet at the parking lot just prior to the toll booth. Remember this is a fee area.

*Continued from pg. 3 Conservation Corner*

to harvest biocrust that would have been destroyed by infrastructure projects. This biocrust should already be adapted to the warmer, drier conditions that the Colorado Plateau will face in the future. It was planted in an outdoor nursery and tended for about two years, by which time 1.7 acres of healthy biocrust was ready for transplant.

Another innovative process was used for this step. Biocrust was gathered in more or less continuous strips like sod and rolled out at the study sites in southern Utah by a corps of volunteers. This happened in October 2019, and the sites must be monitored for several years, but in the summer webinar, Dr. Reed was optimistic that this process will prove useful for revitalizing arid lands.

### Feeder Projects News

By Laura Johnston and Kris Purdy

Wasatch Audubon is currently supporting two bird feeding projects, one at Ogden Nature Center and one at Powder Ridge Village.



#### OGDEN NATURE CENTER

At left is a common sight at one of Wasatch Audubon's birdfeeders at the Ogden Nature Center. More birds seem to feed on the ground than the feeders! The largest bird is a Spotted Towhee, others on the ground are typically White Crowned Sparrows and Juncos. We see those regularly and all the other common suspects (Chickadees, Robins, Magpies, Starlings, Goldfinches, Flickers, Canada Geese, Mallards), in addition to the occasional Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Kinglet, Song Sparrow, House Finch, and other surprises. We've gone through a few bags of black oil sunflower seeds and a couple bags of millet. It's a great help to our area birds during these cold months.

#### POWDER RIDGE

The first five Gray-crowned Rosy-finches of the season appeared at the Powder Ridge Village wooden hopper feeder on November 1; this was right on time. The amazing thing about the November 1 sighting is that one of the birds was wearing a fashionable pink RFID band around one of its legs. This color indicates the bird is part of the rosy-finch study and was banded at Powder Ridge last year. As rosy-finch numbers grew, so did band colors and numbers. The research feeder went up earlier than planned due to these sightings and the technology in the feeder began detecting the microchips in the colored bands to see who was visiting.

As of December 16, the feeder recorded seventeen Gray-crowned Rosy-finches, five Mountain Chickadees and one Black-capped Chickadee that were banded at Powder Ridge Village last winter and spring. This is a phenomenal band return so early in the season ... or at all! Seventeen represents 15.7 percent of the total number (108) of Gray-crowned Rosy-finches banded at Powder Ridge last year. Considering these birds have made a round trip of as long as thousands of miles since we saw them last, this high number of bands speaks to their toughness. All of the banded birds recorded so far were banded at Powder Ridge Village.

The Powder Ridge feeders are also supporting Clark's Nutcrackers, Steller's Jays, and Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers.

*Continued from Pg. 4 President's Pipeline*

other birds that are often bane birds for many - Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur. By the way, our Bald Eagle count on our Bald Eagle Survey was zero.

As this is my last Pipeline, I would like to thank all those who have helped make Wasatch Audubon Society work for the last five years. We have had many changes in positions, but someone has always stepped up and done a great job. Let's all keep supporting WAS in the years to come.

*Happy Birding, Dan*

## A Bird Banding Adventure (and Lighthearted Story For These Times)

by Jay Hudson

“It will be fun”, and I believed her. Barbara, my fun-loving wife, convinced me to join a bunch of college students and Audubon volunteers in banding birds at the Ogden Nature Center. I should know by now her various styles of come-on, but I’m getting old and misread occasionally. It was January so I wore lined pants, poly underwear, a wool hat which can double for an igloo and assorted other survival gear. Why should a come-on have so many layers?

We set up the mist nets near the feeders and went inside to divvy up the jobs of recording, measuring, arguing and bloodletting. Zoology students led us volunteers through how to use calipers to measure wings, tail feathers, feet and beaks. We even found out how to stuff a bird in a bag and weigh the little critter on a digital scale. They taught us how to fill out the complicated form and reminded us that we were going to have fun. That was twice I heard about fun and I was still geared up for it.

The first bird arrived in a mesh bag fresh from the mist net. I was taught how you grab a flighty little Dark-eyed Junco thrashing around in a bag. You must get hold of its feet and then snuggle it in the palm of your hand with its legs sticking up and its head poking out between your first and second fingers. It looked easy, and then the little bugger got away, crashed into a window, flew with a wobble up to the top of a cabinet and hunkered down to get its breath. John Cavitt, the ornithologist from Weber University, came in and retrieved it before it could see straight and we all settled down for the next faux pas.

Someone spotted a cricket on the floor, jumped on it and threw it in the Kestrel cage where it landed unceremoniously in the water dish while two well fed birds looked at it with disdain. Then someone spotted a dead Pine Siskin lying on a side table and wondered aloud if we were doing more damage than good. Two volunteers picked it up, gauged its stiffness and looked for evidence of disease, mishandling or just why it was laying on its side with its feet curled up. Finally someone stated she had brought it from home to see if anyone could reason out the cause of its death. Seeing none of us were guilty, we settled down for the next faux pas.

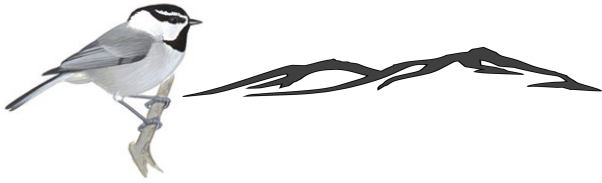
My mentor told me to remove the next leg band from the ring and read off the number. These rings were not for eagles, but for little brown birds and this cannot be done except by very young eyes. I had to look for someone at least one third my age or for a magnifying glass. As I recorded the number, the team next to us were arguing over the shape and coloring of the “lore” of a bird to record the proper sub-species.

We were handed another mesh bag with a sparrow whose heart was beating so fast and hard, you could almost hear it. The poor little thing was so scared it pooped in the bag, on my mentor’s hand and left its calling card smack in the middle of the recording sheet. These sidetracks have no effect on a zoo student and she calmly stuck a millimeter measuring stick up its tail feathers to get a reading. I put the cookie I was eating down.

Down at the other end of the table someone stated a Chickadee was awfully quiet laying in its temporary net prison. This became an immediate concern as John took it out and examined it for shock. He was about to take it outside and release it before any additional handling simply killed it when it burst to life and he stated, “You have to watch them because some of them will play possum on you.” Over at the blood taking table, the newspaper photographer was trying to get the bloodletting on film. A reporter was taking names and I stayed away, thinking I did not want my picture on the front page of the paper with some headline reminiscent of WWII. One of our older volunteers was hyperventilating while blowing feathers away from a Junco’s breast to determine fat level.

Things began to slow as a light wind moved the mist net and the birds could see it to fly over the top. Two volunteers stood in the hallway watching the net while discussing the merits and demerits of the school system. Several people took a walk to the pond to look for the Varied Thrush seen recently and the rest of us waited for more birds to hit the net.

Finally, about two hours after we started, the brass figured it was time to fold up our nets and head for civilization. My first encounter with the scientific side of bird watching was over and it was now time to evaluate what fun I had. Perhaps the best part is seeing the expressions on the faces of the people who get to launch the birds back into the air after the indignities we made them go through.



**Wasatch Audubon Society**

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Ogden Utah, 84409

**AUDUBON**

**Membership Application**

Membership in **Audubon** automatically enrolls you as a member of **Wasatch Audubon**. When you join, you will receive four issues of **Audubon** magazine and six issues of our chapter newsletter, **The Mountain Chickadee**, each year. To join as a new member with an introductory fee of **\$20**, please go to the following website:

<http://action.audubon.org/donate/chapter-membership?chapter=W54>

(By using this special page, you give our chapter credit toward a monetary reward)

Local Chapter: Wasatch Audubon Society – W54

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You can receive the Mountain Chickadee (6 issues) for just \$12, without joining National Audubon. If you would like to support

Wasatch Audubon's education and conservation efforts, please indicate the amount of your contribution and include it in your check. Thank you.

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