



The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Wasatch Audubon Society
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President's Message

by John Bellmon

Wishing everyone a very Happy New Year! As the year 2024 begins, we have many things for which to be thankful. As I write this (just before Christmas) we are in the middle of the five Christmas Bird Counts that are sponsored by Wasatch Audubon. Because of our mild weather, we have not seen anything really special, just normal bird species for this time of the year. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone's reports, in case there are some surprises. There was a first time record in the state of Utah of a Hepatic Tanager reported in West Valley. Some of our members were able to find and photograph it. That is always an exciting experience for a birder. A big thank you to all who participated in our various Christmas Bird Counts. This is our chapter's heritage. It is how we got started back in 1980.

We held our election of officers for this new year: Jen Hitt as Vice President, Sharen Perry as Secretary, Jay Stretch as Treasurer. Members of the Board of Directors include: Ben Johnson, Lynn Carroll, and Dan Johnston. Filling the one year of Jen Hitt's term on the Board of Directors is Laura Johnston. Thank you to all that serve as officers and members of the Board of Directors and all of the committee chairs for our chapter. Thanks also

to Nancy Arnett for serving as our chapter treasurer for the last four years. This is a huge responsibility and she did a great job for our chapter. Thank you, Nancy!

In 2024, we will continue our normal Wednesday Morning Bird Walks and our monthly field trips. During the winter, birding can be fantastic, with occasional winter vagrants. The other exciting thing that will be happening is the Great Backyard Bird Count from February 16 – 20. This is the largest wildlife survey in the world now. You can count birds in your backyard or out on a birding trip. Then enter your results on the Audubon or Cornell Lab of Ornithology web sites. There are checklists sent in from all over the world for this four-day count. It is really amazing how big and popular this count has become in the last 25 years! It can take as little as 15 minutes or you can devote an entire day if you wish. Please participate and help with this world-wide bird survey, "birding with a purpose." It helps keep track of bird populations throughout the world.

I am looking forward to a new year and many exciting times birding and being outdoors with all the faithful members of Wasatch Audubon. Good birding to everyone!

Conservation Corner**Lithium from Great Salt Lake**

by Lynn Carroll

Great Salt Lake (GSL) is so important to birds, and keeping water on the lake bed is so important to people's health, that water for the lake is our greatest local conservation concern. The U.S. and the world need lithium to combat the warming that is killing birds and people. Should any of that lithium come from Great Salt Lake? Not if that means depleting more water.

The mineral companies already operating on GSL hold massive water rights, enabling them to extract their products from the water by evaporation. They lease the land where they work and pay royalties under agreements with the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (DFFSL). Regulations by various other agencies apply to the industry.

DFFSL and the Division of Water Quality are currently drafting new regulations required by HB 513, which passed the Utah legislature in 2023. These new, stronger rules mandate use of extraction methods that minimize use of GSL water and replacing the water that is consumed. The agencies "must also ensure any new material extraction doesn't impact the lake's chemistry or its unique but fragile ecosystem." [1] HB 513 and the new regulations apply to companies that didn't already have leases and royalty agreements for extraction of a given mineral. No royalty agreements for lithium mining were already in place. (US Magnesium has temporary approval to produce lithium from its existing waste piles, but not directly from the lake's brine). [1]

Compass Minerals currently produces potassium sulfate for fertilizer and other salts from the brine of GSL via evaporation, and in

May they announced a plan to supply lithium to Ford from the same brine. That plan was shelved when regulators and legislators objected.

Now a new company, Waterleaf Resources, has applied for a right to 225,000 acre-feet of GSL water annually from which to extract lithium. Their new process would run brine past material that absorbs lithium and use acid to release and collect the lithium, add alkaline products to neutralize the water, and discharge the water back into the Lake. They would use some fresh water they own to rinse the apparatus, so there shouldn't be a net loss to the lake. Waterleaf plans to build a pilot plant on the North Arm of GSL to test the viability of the process.

Friends of Great Salt Lake has followed all of these developments closely. They filed a protest of Waterleaf's water right application, noting that the company will need a royalty agreement with the state to do the pilot project, and the water right should be considered only after the process has proven to be non-consumptive, economical, and not harmful to GSL. It will be great if it passes those tests.

The 2024 legislative session will undoubtedly include bills pertinent to keeping water in Great Salt Lake, such as a follow-up to HB 513. We'll keep you updated and hope that you take note of developments, so that you can help get the good bills passed.

[1] Salt Lake Tribune Aug. 11, 2023

Most of the information for this article came from the Lithium page on Friends of Great Salt Lake's website and following the links on that page.

Help Make Power Poles and Lines Safer for Birds

by Lynn Carroll

Sherry Liguori, Environmental Manager at Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) gave the program at our November meeting. Here are a few of the facts I gleaned from her presentation, including how you can aid the company's efforts to protect birds.

Power companies have several reasons to care about the interactions between birds and the electrical distribution lines and poles. Two major ones are to avoid interruptions in service to customers and to comply with legal requirements. Did you know that even bird excrement can cause a power outage? One common problem is electrocution of large birds that touch two types of wire at the same time, often when sitting on a crossarm of a pole. The contact must be with the bird's skin, as the feathers insulate. Another danger is collision of the bird with a wire that it doesn't see, which can injure or kill the bird and cause a power outage. Birds building large nests on poles can be a major problem too.

New poles installed by RMP have designs that greatly reduce electrocution risks, and whenever any work on an older pole is done, the crew also retrofits it with items, such as specialized plastic covers, that make it safer for birds and wildlife. To reduce collision risk, they can add markers along the wires with reflective strips on a glow-in-the-dark background, making the lines more visible. While new construction is build 'avian-safe', there are poles that were built decades ago. To identify and prioritize poles for retrofitting, RMP employs biologists to walk lines and assess poles.

You can help by reporting cases of dead birds under power poles or lines, as well as large nests on poles. Do not touch the bird. Rather take a picture of the bird and one of the identification plate on the pole. Report these to the USFWS and/or to Sherry at 801-220-4736 or sherry.liguori@rockymountainpower.net.



RMP coordinates with USFWS on its avian program, and the USFWS may also be involved if the bird is suspected to be illegally shot. A recent study found that more of the raptors found dead along power lines had been shot than electrocuted. *



Plovers Make the Front Page

by Jay Hudson

There is a large gap between the myths associated with birds and the science that came later. Take the golden plover, (rhymes with cover) for instance. Every March 23rd the European golden plover (*Pluvialis apricria*) shows up in Iceland. It's a big deal, and the media all cover the birds' arrival. Icelanders call the plover the "sweet spring herald", as it "sings away the snow." It's Iceland's favorite bird. The plover's arrival is discussed in coffee shops and children learn to appreciate nature. Anyone who kills one is considered barbaric. I suspect that such a matter would also be discussed in the coffee shops, to the detriment of the killer's reputation.

European plovers keep company with lapwings, forming "mixed flocks." Ornithologists term a flock of plovers, a "congregation." While wandering the Shetland Islands above Scotland, I was once invited to find a single plover in a flock of lapwings. It was a rainy, blustery day that taught me how dedicated birders can be. Weather is never a hindrance.

Native North Americans also have myths about the American golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica*). Myths are part of every culture and most have some association with the culture's deity. Iceland is a Lutheran country and Icelandic tradition claims that Jesus waved his hand and brought life to small children's clay plovers after an evil man broke them. Today we have details about plumage, habitat, vocalizations, migrations, and more.



Male Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*). Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Alaska. Photo by [snowmanradio](#)

Editor's note: Pacific golden plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) breed in the Aleutian Islands. After rearing their young, adults depart to overwinter in Okinawa, Japan and other central Pacific islands. Their early departure reduces competition for food so that the young can fatten up better for their migration, a journey that they evidently make without the benefit of adult guides.



Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*). Photo: Mark Chappell.

Further Observations on Japanese Birds

by Steve Aird

As a graduate student at Colorado State University, I was once greatly irritated by a mathematical ecologist who intoned condescendingly that “the days of descriptive biology are over.” In his view, it only remained for people like him to answer the few remaining questions. The rest of us were unneeded.

I had just returned from field work in western Colorado, catching rattlesnakes on a large east-west ridge for two days, and suddenly, the snakes all disappeared. I knew that they must have dispersed into the lush meadows below, but what was the signal? How did they all know that it was time to leave the ridge?

In reality, the days of descriptive biology will never be over. We know too little about nearly all the organisms around us. Birds are no easier to fathom than rattlesnakes, although they are more easily observed. Our observations can potentially unlock many secrets.

We do not feed the birds in the summer, since some of our species are migratory and others prefer their natural foods in warm weather. But I expected that when I again filled the sunflower, suet, and peanut butter feeders in November, the bird traffic would begin immediately, with many returning visitors leading the way. It didn't happen. Instead, we were starting over with all naive birds. Where were last year's visitors? Does this indicate essentially 100% turnover?

The feeders are again thronged with Japanese tits, varied tits, and Japanese grosbeaks, but all had to learn to negotiate the feeders. The Japanese tits love chunky peanut butter. The varied tits won't touch it. Brown-eared bulbuls launch stealth attacks from above my window, hovering like ungainly hummingbirds, just long enough to steal a beak-full of the gooey brown stuff.

Grosbeaks fight continuously over the large roofed sunflower seed feeder. Locking beaks, they flap and wrestle, all the while, exchanging insults. Thankfully, I cannot understand what they are saying in these disputes, because I am sure it must be really ugly language.

Once an innovative combatant grabbed his opponent by the neck, and then they both fell off the feeder. As many as three birds can feed on each side of the feeder, with three or four more waiting on the roof for an opening below. Others that are either satiated or subordinate wait in the oak tree at the edge of the woods, but grosbeaks, varied tits, and Japanese tits are constantly in transit between the oak and the feeder.

This year we see only solitary bramblings instead of last year's flocks of 40-60. There are no Oriental greenfinches, yellow-throated buntings, or meadow buntings, but there are compensations. There are also no mathematical ecologists!



Yellow-throated Bunting (*Emberiza elegans*), Nagoya, Japan. Photo: Takashi Muramatsu.

Upcoming Events

January 16 - Ogden Nature Center, 7 p.m.
Program to be determined. The meeting will also be on Zoom, as usual.

February 20 - Ogden Nature Center, 7 p.m. Darren Parry, Shoshone tribal elder, will talk about indigenous views of the environment. The meeting will also be on Zoom, as usual.

Field Trips

January 20 - **Box Elder County**

8:00 a.m. Meet in Denny’s parking lot on 21st St. off I-15 at 8:00am. We will explore Promontory Point, Howell Valley, etc. Target birds are Gray Partridge, Snow Bunting, Rough-legged Hawk. This is an all-day trip so bring water and lunch. Trip leader – Dan Johnston. **Viewing mostly from cars, can stop for restroom.**

February 24 - **Annual Morgan County Bald Eagle Trip**

8:30 a.m. - Meet at DWR office (515 E 5300 S in South Ogden). We will caravan from there. Target birds are Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Wild Turkey, American Dipper and Rough-legged Hawk. This is an all-day trip so bring water and lunch. Trip leader – John Bellmon. **Viewing mostly from cars. Can stop for restroom breaks.**

Bird Walks

January 10- **Antelope Island Causeway.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at McDonald’s 867 W 1700 S, Syracuse, UT 84075.

9:00 a.m. Meet at the parking lot at the toll booth.

January 17- **Riverdale Trail- South.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at iHop 47 W Riverdale Rd

9:00 a.m. Meet at the trailhead off Riverdale Road at 700 W. 4800 Weber River Dr, Riverdale, UT 84405 **R, P, L**

January 24- **Ogden Bay WMA.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Chick-fil-A 120 S Washington Blvd, Ogden, UT 84404.

9:30 a.m. Meet at the North Parking area off of 7500 West. 2357 S 7500 W St, Ogden, UT 84404

January 31- **Bountiful Pond.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Wendy’s 363 N Marketplace Dr, Centerville, UT 84014

9:00 a.m. Take the 500 South exit off Legacy Highway, turn west; then follow the frontage road around and back to the north. Meet in the parking lot. **R P/U L B**

February 7- Farmington Bay.

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Starbucks in Station Park, 332 W Union Ave, Farmington, UT 84025

9:00 a.m. Meet at 1325 W (entrance to Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area), not GSL Nature Center. **R U L**

February 14- **Kaysville Ponds.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Grannie Annie’s 86 N 400 W, Kaysville, UT 84037

9:00 a.m. Meet at 920 S 50 W, Kaysville, UT 84037 on the Frontage Road (50 West). Meet in the Botanical Center parking lot to walk the trail from there. **P/U M B**

February 21- **Willard Bay.** This is a fee area.

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Subway at the Pilot Flying J Travel Center (600 W 750 N, Willard)

8:30 a.m. Travel to Willard Bay after breakfast. **R P/U L B**

February 28- **Glasmann Pond in Ogden.**

8:00 a.m. Breakfast at Einstein Brothers Bagels at 4387 Harrison Blvd D-2, Ogden, UT 84403.

9:00 a.m. Meet in the parking area by the bathrooms. The pond is adjacent to McKay Dee Hospital and is located off Oakcrest Dr. Turn left towards MKDH and then the first left as if continuing down towards the hospital’s ER. The turn-off for the pond/parking is on the left. **U B M.**

Accessibility Codes for walks and trips

R - Restrooms available

P - Paved trail **U** - Unpaved trail

P/U - Combination

L - Level trail **M** - Moderately level trail

B - benches available

Wasatch Audubon Society

Officers

President	John Bellmon	801-444-3704
Vice President	Jen Hitt	801-540-5091
Secretary	Sharen Perry	801-392-9554
Treasurer	Jay Stretch	801-721-9432
Past President	Jay Stretch	801-721-9432

Board

2024/2025	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
2024/2025	George Muller	801-745-4035
2024/2025	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
2023/2024	Abigail Johnson	
2023/2024	Leah Johnson	
2023/2024	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
2023/2024	Susan Snyder	801-388-4201

Committee Chairpersons

Conservation	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Conservation	John Bellmon	801-444-3704
Education	Dennis Collins	801-393-1115
Feeder Projects	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
Field Trips	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
Bird Walks	Ben Johnson	801-231-7008
Membership	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Programs	Susan Snyder	801-388-4201
Historian	Ruth Davis	801-309-0425
Publicity	Arnold Smith	801-829-3383
Hospitality	Jeane Taylor	801-394-2813
Newsletter	Steve Aird	steven.d.aird@gmail.com

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 outdoors 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. Visit our website at: <http://www.wasatchaudubon.org>

New / Rejoined Members (October, 2023)

Welcome to our new members, and to those who have joined again after an extended absence! We look forward to seeing you at a meeting or on a birding trip.

- Dee Cutrera
- Peggy C Madsen
- John Mijer
- Wes Morton
- Amy Phillips
- Christopher Stone
- Shelley Stratton
- Lynn Templeton
- Gary Bywater
- Anna Cordes
- Paul Forillo
- Lauren Longworth
- Delores Ottley



Owl Pellets

Thanks to all who collected owl pellets during the last school year. I was able to present my owl program in third, fourth, and fifth grade classes in three school districts. I never have enough owl pellets, so please keep them coming. The larger barn and great horned owl pellets are best. If you know of a good location to collect them, please give me a call. Thanks again, and happy birding!

Dennis Collins (801) 393-1115