The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Wasatch Audubon Society
Volume 45, Number 6 ~ November / December 2026

President's Corner

by Jen Hitt

Hello and Happy Autumn from Wasatch Audubon Society! As I'm writing this letter, the weather is shifting from record-breaking warm temperatures to more seasonally appropriate conditions. A storm system sent in some incredible birds, leading to one of the most unbelievable weeks in Utah birding. Multiple species of storm petrels were reported at several Utah reservoirs. An arctic tern was seen at East Canyon State Park, and a tropical kingbird was reported in Utah county, among other sightings. I hope you were able to get out and see some of these rare visitors.

Our chapter has been busy this fall! In early October, eight volunteers visited Monte Cristo for the annual bluebird nesting box clean-out. In the pleasantly warm weather, we removed all nesting material from the boxes so they would be ready for use in the spring. We were rewarded with incredible views of beautiful fall foliage up the canyon. A big thank you to those who helped us with this!

In mid-October, 16 members gathered at the Eccles Wildlife Education Center in Farmington for the annual Big Sit fundraiser. Despite strong winds, intermittent rain, and thunderstorms, we were still able to count 36 species. Thanks to everyone who came out to join us and to those who made a donation. It's not too late to donate. Funds received from the Big Sit will be used to continue our education, bird feeder, and other programs. Checks should be made out to Wasatch Audubon Society and sent to P.O. Box 3211 Ogden, UT 84409-1211.

We have some exciting events in coming months. In addition to our weekly Wednesday bird walks, we will have a Saturday field trip to Antelope Island in November. In December, we will again be leading five Christmas bird counts. I encourage everyone to join us for at least one of these. You don't need to be an expert birder to sign up. For each count, we will divide into teams, and the more eyes we have in each team, the more birds we will find. See dates and details in the Future Events section.

As 2026 ends, so will my time as Wasatch Audubon President. Thank you so much to everyone for working so kindly and patiently with me as I learned the role. I have very much enjoyed getting to know many of you.

Best wishes for a happy holiday season,

Jen



Yellow-Crowned Night Heron at San Diego near Mission Bay, July 31, 2026. Photo; Ben A. Johnson.

Wasatch Audubon Society

	Officers	
President	Jen Hitt	801-540-5091
Vice President	Dallin Henderson	801-309-7285
Secretary	Sharen Perry	801-392-9554
Treasurer	Joan Miller	717-448-5480
Past President	John Bellmon	801-814-7544
Board		
2026/2027	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
2026/2027	George Muller	801-745-4035
2026/2027	Ruth Carmona-Murray	703-258-2652
2025/2026	Abigail Johnson	
2025/2026	Leah Johnson	
2025/2026	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
2025/2026	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
Committee Chairpersons		
Conservation	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Conservation	John Bellmon	801-444-3704
Education	Ruth Carmona-Murray	703-258-2652
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		
Historian	Ruth Davis	801-309-0425
Publicity	Arnold Smith	801-829-3383
Hospitality		
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. You might also want to visit our website at: http://www.wasatchaudubon.org

Bird Safe Utah: Growing a Network to Save Birds

by Punita Koustubhan

Bird Safe Windows Network, Great Salt Lake Audubon

Bird Safe Utah is a window collision prevention program hatched by Great Salt Lake Audubon. This summer, our interns and volunteers helped homeowners turn concern for bird collisions into action by installing bird-safe window treatments at 54 homes, bringing our program total to 68 since 2025.

The same features that make our yards welcoming to birds can also place them directly in the path of reflective or transparent glass, creating a "fly-through illusion." Scientists call this an ecological trap: without effective window treatments, we may unknowingly invite birds into spaces that put them at risk. This impact isn't small: over 1 billion birds die per year in North America from window collisions, with residential homes accounting for nearly half. Bird Safe Utah is working to reduce the danger and make our communities safer for birds using science-based mitigation strategies approved by the American Bird Conservancy, including Acopian BirdSavers and Feather Friendly products. These treatments break up reflections of habitat and help prevent birds from striking windows.

Our community surveys show why hands-on help is so important. Of the homeowners surveyed before installation this year, over half said that not knowing what to do had prevented them from taking action. Others faced cost, access, or installation challenges. Bird Safe Utah helps close that gap by bringing materials, guidance, and effective solutions directly to homeowners.

The results point to a meaningful opportunity. Using collision reports from 48 homes in our 2025 and 2026 records, we estimate that these

treatments could prevent approximately 2,200 collisions each year. That could mean nearly 12,000 birds saved over the six-year warranty period, or as many as 39,000 over a potential 20-year installation lifespan. These projections account for missed strikes by multiplying reported collisions by three, assuming a 90% mortality rate, and depending on treatments to remain effective over time.

Homeowners have reported collisions involving Lazuli Buntings, Western Tanagers, goldfinches, hummingbirds, Mourning Doves, and even Cooper's Hawks. These are birds we watch, welcome, and work to protect. Making windows visible to them is one of the most practical ways we can make our yards safer.

Through our Bird Safe Windows Network, we share installation protocols, homeowner surveys, volunteer training, and practical resources to help chapters launch their own residential programs. Whether you enjoy working with your hands, talking with neighbors, collecting data, coordinating installations, supporting conservation projects, engaging in policy work, or organizing volunteers, there is a place for you in this growing network. A small team can begin with a few homes, learn together, and grow into a community-wide effort.

We invite Wasatch Audubon members and other community partners to join us. Visit birdsafeutah.org to learn more, to connect with the Bird Safe Windows Network, to explore our broader conservation and policy work, or to discover how you can help bring bird-safe window treatments to homes in your neighborhood. Together, we can create safe flight paths for birds!

Conservation Corner

Utah's Data Center Boom: A New Threat to Great Salt Lake

by Faith Greenwood

With thanks to Lynn Carroll for her article on data centers in the March/April 2025 issue.

Box Elder County is home to my family. It's also home to millions of migratory birds that depend on Great Salt Lake and its surrounding wetlands.

So when I learned that a massive hyperscale data center called Stratos was proposed for our community, my first reaction was disbelief. Then came the questions, concerns, and sinking feeling that something monstrous is happening in our own backyard.

The news broke just days before the county commissioners' May 4th meeting. My family joined thousands of concerned residents hoping to be heard. Instead, the proposal was voted through with no public comment, leaving us completely shut out of a critical decision affecting our community.

Backed by billionaire celebrity Kevin O'Leary, West GenCo, and Utah's Military Installation Development Authority (MIDA), the 40,000 acre project would court tech giants like Amazon, Microsoft, Meta and Apple. MIDA, originally established to facilitate development connected to military installations, played a central role in fast-tracking Stratos. MIDA's involvement presents one of the biggest controversies, as its governance gives unchecked power to state-appointed boards and development interests while limiting public oversight.

Meanwhile, Great Salt Lake is in crisis from pressures of water diversions, drought, and climate change. As ever more lake bed is exposed, arsenic-laced dust threatens 2.5 million Utahns downwind. Our top priority should be restoring this fragile ecosystem, not fast-tracking massive data centers that can only put an even more enormous strain on it.

Water is one of the biggest unanswered questions. Here, in the Great Salt Lake basin, every drop counts. Stratos developers have promoted low or "net zero" water use through proposed cooling technology, but where is the independent analysis demonstrating what the project would actually consume? Even closed-loop systems lose water through evaporation and require maintenance and flushing. We need clear information about water sources, total consumption, wastewater treatment, and where discharged water would go.

A 500-megawatt data center proposed for Tooele County is also unnerving residents, whose well water levels are already dropping. The project, sitting just south of I-80 next to Great Salt Lake, would include a giant truck stop and a power plant. The proposal to discharge up to 250,000 gallons of saline wastewater daily into the playa essential to shorebirds and into Gilbert Bay alarms Audubon staff. Concerns only rise with the potential of PFAS (forever chemicals) further polluting the wastewater from data center cooling systems, flushes, and the truck stop run off.

Energy and heat raise additional questions. Stratos has been described as requiring up to 9 gigawatts of electricity at full build-out, more than double the entire state's current average of 4 gigawatts, generated by on-site natural gas power plants. That extraordinary demand has enormous implications for emissions.

At a public forum sponsored by Grow the Flow that I attended, USU physics professor Rob Davies discussed his preliminary analysis of Stratos. His estimates suggested daytime temperatures could rise 2–5°F and nighttime temperatures 8–12°F across Hansel Valley. These projections suggest harmful effects on nearby wildlife and habitat. Noise, nighttime lighting, air pollution, and associated infrastructure only add to the concerns.

Then there is the financial arrangement. Publicly reported incentives include an 80% rebate of project-generated property tax revenue and a sharply reduced energy tax rate. What public benefits justify incentives of this scale, and who bears the environmental and infrastructure costs?

For my family, Box Elder County is home. For millions of migratory birds, Great Salt Lake is an essential stop along journeys that span continents. These places have value that can't be measured in megawatts, tax revenue, or computing capacity. We owe the lake, its wildlife, and future generations transparency, credible environmental studies, and a meaningful voice in decisions that shape their future.

To learn more and get involved, follow B.E.A.R., the citizens' referendum effort opposing Stratos, and Grow the Flow, the citizen-led movement dedicated to saving Great Salt Lake.



Long-tailed Jaeger, Rockport Reservoir, 22 August, 2026. Photo: Ben A. Johnson



Mountain Bluebird sentry: Trespassers will be ~~prosecuted~~ bird-pecked? Photo: Joan Miller.

Bluebird Nest Box Cleanup

by John Bellmon

On October 10th, Wasatch Audubon had its annual bluebird nest box cleanup at Monte Cristo. The weather was fantastic and the view was spectacular! Seven volunteers participated. Some repairs and replacements were necessary, as always. It was a perfect day for this effort and the colors on the mountains took your breath away. We thank all of the participants.



Above: John Bellmon and Don Miller upgrade one of the WAS rental properties. Photo: Joan Miller.
Below: Bluebird nest box clean-out volunteers, Linda, Dan, Amanda, and Kathy, with the beautiful fall colors of Monte Cristo behind. Photo: Jen Hitt.





Fall colors at Monte Cristo. Photo: Joan Miller.

Ogden Nature Center Bird Feeding

by Laura Johnston

Wasatch Audubon will begin its annual bird feeding project at the Ogden Nature Center on November 13. This involves daily filling of the seven feeders provided by WAS. Seed and feeding gear, also provided by WAS, are available on site. This is a wonderful opportunity to be outside in a beautiful environment during the winter season. If you're lucky, it may snow on the day you feed! Please contact Laura at lauraj51@comcast.net or 801-458-9558 if you would like to volunteer.

New and Renewed Members

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

Gary Arave
Ann Barker
Terry Chisholm
Auzzie Gentry
Renee Hoke
P. Karner
Barbara Madsen
Ericka Ortega
Nancy Youngdahl

Future Events

Wednesday Bird Walks

November 4 - **Woodland Park, Farmington:**
7:00 AM Meet at Dylan's in Kaysville Kaysville, 185 N. Main St., Kaysville
8:00 AM 300 South 200 East in Farmington **R P/U L B**

November 11 - **Farmington Bay WMA:** to enter, birders must have valid DWR fishing or combination permit or you can obtain a free digital access permit here
8:00 AM Meet at Dylan's in Kaysville Kaysville, 185 N. Main St., Kaysville
9:00 AM Meet at 1325 West Glovers Lane, Farmington 84025 **R U L**

November 18 - Powder Mountain Feeders and Surrounding Area:
7:30 AM Meet at Dylan's in Ogden, 981 12th St., Ogden
9:00 AM Meet at Powder Mountain to view feeders and surrounding area

November 25 - Bountiful Pond:
8:00 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 544 W. 400 N., Bountiful
9:00 AM 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**

December 2 - GSL Nature Center:
8:00 AM Breakfast at Dylan's in Kaysville, 185 N. Main St., Kaysville
9:00 AM Meet in the parking lot. 1157 S. Waterfowl Way (1100 W Glovers Lane) Farmington. **R U L B**

December 9 - **Ogden Bay WMA:** to enter, birders must have valid DWR fishing or combination permit or you can obtain a free digital access permit here
8:00 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 1720 W. 12th St., Ogden
9:00 AM Meet at the North Parking area off of 7500 West. 2357 S 7500 W St, Ogden, UT 84404

December 16 - No Bird Walk due to the Bear Refuge CBC.

December 23 - No Bird Walk due to the Morgan CBC on December 22.

December 30 - No Bird Walk due to the Antelope Island CBC on 1 January 2027.

January 6 - Mueller Park:
8:00 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 544 W. 400 N., Bountiful
9:00 AM Meet at the Gates to Mueller Park, taking Mueller Park Rd east until you reach parking area or park on the street if parking lot full. **U**

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

December Field Trip

There will be no December Field Trip due to Christmas Bird Counts.

December Meeting

Our December meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 15 at 7:00 pm, and will be the annual Wasatch Audubon slideshow. Please email photos from bird trips, photos of neat birds you saw this year, or Wasatch Audubon outings, to Jen Hitt at jenhitt@hotmail.com. Join us in person at the Ogden Nature Center located at 966 W 12th Street in Ogden or attend virtually via Zoom.

Christmas Bird Counts

For questions regarding accessibility, please contact the appropriate CBC leader.

Wednesday, December 16, 9:00am, Bear River Refuge Christmas Bird Count
Meet at the Bear River Refuge Headquarters parking lot at 9:00am. We will divide into three teams to cover different areas. This is an all-day trip, so bring water and lunch.
John Bellmon: bellmonj@comcast.net

Saturday, December 19, 7:00am, Ogden Christmas Bird Count
Meet at Denny's (take 21st Street to 1100 West, on the north side by the Flying J Plaza, Ogden) for breakfast and to get your assignment. This is an all-day trip, so bring water and lunch.
John Bellmon: bellmonj@comcast.net

Tuesday, December 22, 7:30/8:00am, Morgan Christmas Bird Count
Meet at the Utah DWR (515 E. 5300 S., South Ogden to carpool at 7:30am. Or meet Weston Smith at McDonald's in Morgan, 297 E. 300 N., at 8:00am. There will be three or four teams depending on how many people can help. This is an all-day trip so bring water and lunch.
Weston Smith: weston73@hotmail.com

Saturday, December 26, Ogden Valley Christmas Bird Count
This will cover Ogden Valley in different teams for different areas. To sign up, individuals should contact Leslie Loeffel.
Leslie Loeffel: leslieloeffel@gmail.com

Friday, January 1, Antelope Island Christmas Bird Count
Antelope Island State Park, meet in the parking lot at the entrance to the park. We will divide into teams to cover the area. It is an all-day trip, so bring water and lunch.

Hope to see everyone on the Christmas Bird Counts that Wasatch Audubon sponsors.



Cooper's Hawk along the Antelope Island Causeway, 19 August 2026. Photo: Joan Chapman.

How to Get a Wildlife Management Area Digital Access Permit

As most of you are aware, the 2026 Legislature passed a new law regarding access to Wildlife Management Areas in Utah. As of the beginning of July, a paid permit, i.e. hunting or fishing license, is no longer required to enter WMAs for the purpose of wildlife viewing. Instead, DWR requires that you fill out and sign a form after viewing a short educational video. Here's the link:

Wildlife Management Area Digital Access

You may want to take a photo of your permit once it is issued and have it available on your phone in case you get asked to show it.

You will also note that there is now a mechanism for donating toward the management of WMAs (something that was previously unavailable). A donation link can be found on the same form. It appears that the tool is not capable of processing both a permit application and a donation in the same transaction. After you finish applying for a permit, you need to exit and then start a new session to make a donation.

I think that as the number of birders making donations grows, we will have a better chance of having a voice in future discussions about wildlife and habitat management.

Heather Dove

Conservation, Great Salt Lake Audubon



Spotted Sandpiper, Antelope Island Causeway, 19 August 2026. Photo: Joan Miller.



A pair of Clark's grebes at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. Photo: Jordan Martell.



Chukar, Antelope Island Causeway, 19 August 2026. Photo: Joan Miller.



Northern Flicker, Pineview North Arm, 7 October 2026. Photo: Joan Miller.

Dark Sky Monitoring Progress

Weber County Sky Monitoring Project continues to collect data in an area wide effort to keep our night skies dark. Wasatch Audubon Society does this in conjunction with Audubon Rockies and DarkSky Utah. Once each season, we observe the night sky to measure the darkness. We then report this data to scientists who track darkness over time. They use this data to influence cities, businesses and others to use best policy in adopting lighting standards that promote dark skies. If you're interested in learning more or volunteering to join us, use this link: Dark Sky Project





Owl Pellets

Thanks to all who collected owl pellets for me 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

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 each year. Six issues of our chapter newsletter, *The Mountain Chickadee*, are on our website. To join as a new member with an introductory fee of $20, please go to the following website:

Audubon Membership