



The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Cutler Marsh named 'globally significant'

Cutler Marsh has long held significance to local duck hunters, canoeists and bird watchers. Now the area's status has been confirmed by the United States Important Bird Area Committee as an IBA of Global Significance.

That committee, consisting of members of BirdLife International and National Audubon Society, awarded the designation based on the counts of white-faced ibis conducted by local Audubon members over the past six years. To qualify, an area must host at least 1 percent of a species' Western Hemisphere population at one time, and the Audubon volunteers counted more than 8,000 white-faced ibis (5 percent of the North American population) one day in 2006.

Those numbers fluctuated widely during the six-year counting period — not a single bird was counted in 2007 — but the numbers are back up now and the population appears to be stable, said Bridgerland Audubon Society member Bryan Dixon, one of the volunteers.

"IBAs are a cutting edge example of collaboration between environmentalists and private landowners," Dixon said, "achieving goals they both seek without all the left-wing-right-wing rhetoric."
—Bryan Dixon



The designation carries no management authority and will bring with it no funding — although it may strengthen future grant applications — but has great value in raising the area's profile, according to Wayne Martinson, National Audubon Society's IBA Coordinator for Utah. "It helps people understand their value," Martinson said of the designated zones, "so everyone can work together to protect those areas."

Eve Davies, a principal scientist for hydroresources for PacifiCorp, which controls much of the marshland along the Bear River, applauded the designation. She said her company was involved in reviewing the details of the application, although Martinson and Dixon did most of the leg work on the project. The power company won't make any changes because of the designation because the area is already being carefully managed, Davies added. "We've been managing for wildlife and recreation already, We're proud of having a facility that can meet so many needs so well."

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Dixon said that many other waterfowl also depend on the marsh, although those populations have not been monitored. He said an osprey pair have been nesting near Benson Marina in recent years, and over a dozen long-billed curlew have been making their homes in that area as well.

He also credited the 30-plus volunteer birders “who spent evenings out there staring into the sun, swatting the occasional (mosquito), dodging the occasional lightning storm, and dutifully counting the birds as they came and went around the rookery” with helping the group secure the designation.

“This designation brings world attention to our marsh and valley,” Dixon said. “It highlights the importance of stewardship and actively conserving our natural world. As an IBA of Global Significance, it receives special attention and will receive more visitors.”

By Lance Frazier
Herald-Journal Features Writer
–reprinted courtesy of the Logan Herald-Journal



Wigley Speaks to Audubon and USU

Climate scientist Tom Wigley spoke to about 60 people at Bridgerland Audubon’s November Event on the USU campus. Based at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, Wigley laid out the present state of the climate—not good—and the possibilities for buying ourselves more time to move to a low-carbon economy by using “geoengineering.” Wigley spoke primarily about a short-term strategy called “solar radiation management” and, in particular, one type of SRM that would involve spraying sulfur aerosols in the stratosphere. These would reflect more sunlight back into space, essentially canceling out extra warming due to increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Wigley showed the audience technical charts while at the same time explaining the gist of them to all of us non-technical types. Two crucial points: We could have a window of a few decades—soon—in which SRM of this type might be appropriate, but both the side effects and the social/political context for geoengineering are huge unknowns. Wigley concluded that basic research into geoengineering is needed at this point.

A special thanks to Jack Greene, Val Grant, Dick Mueller and Brad Armstrong for their help.

The presentation is the second of our quarterly events. We continue to experiment with new types of programs and different venues, so please let us know what you think and what you’d like to see and where!

–Christopher Cokinos

Audubon Calendar

December 2010

11 Logan Canyon: Join us as we search Logan Canyon for some of the birds typical of our winter. We will start at First Dam where one can usually find both Barrow's and Common Goldeneyes this time of year, then continue up the canyon stopping at several points to look for waterfowl on the reservoirs and songbirds along the trails. Some species typical of this area include Golden-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Townsend's Solitaires, but we'll also be keeping our eyes and ears out for rarer species like Pine Grosbeaks, Hermit Thrushes, and Winter Wrens. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot between Caffé' Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North). Dress for the weather, as we'll be taking several short walks throughout the morning. We'll be back by about noon. For more information contact trip leader Ryan O'Donnell at Ryan.ODonnell@usu.edu.

18 BAS Christmas Bird Count: For more information or to volunteer to help, contact Bryan Dixon, 752-6830, bdixon@xmission.com.

28 Bear Lake Christmas Bird Count: For more information or to volunteer to help, contact Dennis at 435-245-4177 or 435-245-5261 or ddaustin03@msn.com.

Ruinous Headwaters Dam Approaches Decision

The Bureau of Reclamation has resuscitated plans for a destructive diversion dam on the headwaters of the Price River. Fish Creek and Gooseberry Creek face construction of a \$43 million taxpayer funded dam and reservoir.

In an attempt to snatch public resources for private gain, Sanpete Water District seeks to divert Colorado River basin water for a handful of Sanpete irrigators. This outdated project should have been scrapped at the end of the 20th century dam building spree but remains a holdout for federal handouts.

This wasteful transbasin diversion would divert 5,600 acre feet of water out of the Colorado River Basin from small high-elevation brooks in the Wasatch Plateau. Over 100 acres of pristine meadows and miles of alpine trout streams would be destroyed. Countless acres of riparian habitat will be lost impacting beaver, bear, deer, elk, fox and 54 species of birds. The spectacular Price River Gorge near the Green River would dry up including spawning beds for endangered Colorado River pikeminnow. This amazing native fish depends upon warm tributaries like the Price for refuge from the cold flows of the Green.

The diversion would lower water levels in Scofield Reservoir thereby impacting water quality forever. Lower reservoir levels reduce dissolved oxygen in this Blue Ribbon fishery and impact much-needed recreation and tourism dollars. Since the Price River is the main water source for Carbon County, lower flows mean higher bacterial loads, potentially leading to outbreaks of water-borne gastrointestinal illness in Helper and Price.

A final environmental impact statement on this ill-advised undertaking is expected to be released in December. It is imperative that everyone who cares about the Price, Gooseberry and Fish Creeks and Scofield Reservoir take action now – this may be our last chance.

Please write a letter urging Senator Hatch to condemn the dam and help stop this horrible project once and for all. Ask him why he supports this \$43 million federal handout while claiming to be fiscally conservative. Please send your letter to the URC as well. The Senator's address:

Senator Orrin Hatch
8402 Federal Building
125 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84138

–courtesy of Utah Rivers Council

EPA rejects Ban on Toxic Lead Fishing Gear

Agency Refuses to Address Preventable Poisoning That Kills Millions of Birds, Wildlife Every Year

WASHINGTON— Ignoring long-established science on the dangers of lead poisoning in the wild, the Environmental Protection Agency today denied a petition to ban toxic lead fishing sinkers that frequently kill loons, swans, cranes and other wildlife. A coalition of conservation, hunting and veterinary groups had petitioned EPA in August to ban lead in fishing tackle and in bullets and shot for hunting. The agency issued a partial denial of the portion of the petition dealing with regulation of lead ammunition in September and has now issued its final determination which also denies the portion of the petition on fishing sinkers.

Spent lead from ammunition and lost fishing tackle needlessly poisons, kills and harms millions of wild birds and other animals every year and endangers public health.

“Under the Obama administration, the EPA seems to have lost its will to regulate toxic substances, even in the face of overwhelming scientific information about the harm to wildlife and threats to human health,” said Michael Fry, director of conservation advocacy at the American Bird Conservancy.

“The EPA’s failure to act is inexcusable, given what we know about how toxic lead is to wildlife and the extensive science linking lead poisoning in wildlife to ammunition and fishing weights,” said Jeff Miller, conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity. “There are plenty of safe and available alternatives to lead products for these outdoor sports, so there’s no good reason for this poisoning to continue.”

In August the Center for Biological Diversity, American Bird Conservancy and other groups formally petitioned the EPA under the Toxic Substances Control Act to ban lead in bullets and shot for hunting, as well as lead in fishing tackle. The petition referenced nearly 500 peer-reviewed scientific papers illustrating the widespread dangers of lead poisoning from these sources. More than 70 organizations in 27 states are supporting the lead ban, including groups representing birders, hunters, zoologists, scientists, American Indians, physicians, veterinarians and public employees. Cranes, ducks, swans, loons, geese and other waterfowl ingest lead fishing sinkers lost in lakes and rivers, mistaking them for food or grit, and thousands are poisoned each year.

“The EPA has the clear authority under the Toxic Substances Control Act to regulate lead in any way it sees fit and it is not up to the petitioners to formulate the ‘least burdensome’ regulation,” said Fry. “The scientific data in the petition demonstrated the need for regulation to prevent poisoning of wildlife, and it is up to the EPA to formulate the proper regulations.”

Ironically, the EPA declared last week “National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week” to raise awareness about the dangers of lead exposure to humans. Major efforts to control lead in paint, gasoline and other products have reduced lead in the environment, but spent lead from hunting and fishing is still a widespread wildlife killer.

“We don’t need public relations stunts like ‘Lead Poisoning Prevention Week’ from the nation’s Environmental Protection Agency; we must have substantive action to prevent the known, widespread, unnecessary and ongoing lead poisoning of bald eagles, condors, loons and other wildlife cherished by all Americans,” said Miller. “The agency has attempted to punt on this issue, but we’re not going to let it walk away from taking action on the preventable poisoning of birds and other animals.”

Lead is an extremely toxic substance that is dangerous to people and wildlife even at low levels. Exposure can cause a range of health effects, from acute poisoning and death to long-term problems such as reduced reproduction, inhibition of growth and damage to neurological development. Wildlife is poisoned when animals scavenge on carcasses shot and contaminated with lead-bullet fragments or pick up and eat spent lead-shot pellets or lost fishing weights, mistaking them for food or grit. Animals can die a painful death from lead poisoning or suffer for years from its debilitating effects.

An estimated 10 million to 20 million birds and other animals die each year from lead poisoning in the United States.

For more information, read about the Center’s Get the Lead Out campaign: http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/get_the_lead_out/index.html.

The Center for Biological Diversity (www.biologicaldiversity.org) is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 315,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org) conserves native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas by safeguarding the rarest species, conserving and restoring habitats, and reducing threats while building capacity of the bird conservation movement.

—courtesy of the American Bird Conservancy

Bridgerland's 51st Christmas Bird Count December 18th

BAS will conduct our 51st CBC since 1955 on Saturday, December 18 in the traditional count circle 15 miles in diameter centered in Hyde Park. Last year, 61 of you helped count birds from before dawn until after dusk. And then a sizeable portion chowed down during the compilation potluck at CVUU.

Hemispherically, this will be the 111th CBC. Last year, counts were conducted in 2,160 circles by 60,753 observers, tallying 55,951,707 birds of 2,319 species. In the U.S., 654 species were found across 1,671 counts. There were 58 counts with over 100 participants, the highest participation at 483 individuals in Edmonton, AB. (What else are you gonna do in the deepest dark of winter up there?) Once again, the record number of species counted was in Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh (things are always bigger in Texas), with 231 species. In Utah, there were 24 counts, with the highest number of species – 108 – found in the Silver Reef count in Washington County.

The CBC is the single largest citizen science effort ever undertaken, and its data is proving essential to understanding our changing world. Just recently, NAS published a report on northward migration of wintering birds based on CBC data. More than 58 percent of wintering species – 177 of 305 – have moved significantly north, with 60 of those species moving more than 100 miles. Eighteen of the species that frequent Cache Valley – ring-necked duck, bufflehead, red-breasted merganser, western grebe, Virginia rail, Bonaparte's gull, ring-billed gull, short-eared owl, American three-toed woodpecker, Stellar's jay, red-breasted nuthatch, American robin, rufous-sided towhee, fox sparrow, house finch, pine siskin, American goldfinch – have moved more than 200 miles. As they go, will they find food and shelter?

It remains to be seen how well our own species will adapt to the new information – whether we'll get it in time to prevent catastrophic disruptions from occurring to our own species as well as others.

In the meantime, however, it is critical to continue collecting collect high-quality data in our own backyard, and here is where you come in. A 15-mile CBC circle is a lot of ground to cover, so we need help from everyone—expert and beginner alike. We need anyone with an interest in birds and eyeballs. We especially need skiers and snowshoers, kids to help count the thousands of starlings and house sparrows, and feeder watchers searching for possible Harris' or white-throated sparrows. We need “strangers” who might identify unusual birds that are common where they come from. We need hikers, canoeists, and people in cars and dirigibles.

So, if you can dedicate a day to science and have a hankering to spend that day in the out-of-doors with like-minded nature lovers, join us on our Christmas Bird Count. Contact Bryan Dixon, 752-6830 or bdixon@xmission.com, to find out where you're needed.

To cap off the day, we'll meet at 6:00 p.m. that evening at the Cache Valley Unitarian Universalists building at 596 East 900 North, Logan for the traditional potluck and compilation. The cost to participate is a mere \$5 (under 18 free) to cover NAS's cost of compiling the results. Everyone is invited. Bring your friends. Bring your family. Be a continuing part of history.

Bear Lake CBC Information

Dennis Austin has set the Utah Bear Lake Count for December 28 with the 27th as the alternative date in the event of a major storm on the 28. Dennis has slightly altered the map, which is now divided into 6 sub-units rather than the 11 that have been used almost since the beginning of the count. “Over the years I have observed that the 6 sub-units have worked better, and I can usually find 6 leaders to cover the areas. I am working on putting together the data sets for the 6 new areas, using all the past data,” Dennis says.

The date for the Idaho Bear Lake count in the Montpelier area is not yet set, but Dennis is leaning toward December 30. This count circle has just 5 areas, and he will probably need at least one additional sub-unit leader and some extra eyes.

Want to help? Contact Dennis at 435-245-4177 or 435-245-5261 or ddaustin03@msn.com.

Local Bird Spotlight

My Little Chickadee

As W.C. Fields put it in his 1940 movie, “Ah, yes, my little chickadee.” He, of course, was referring to the incomparable Mae West, but his famous line does hint at the fondness that many people feel about chickadees. Who doesn’t love these curious, little, feathered blobs with their bulbous head, tiny little beak and stylish black cap? They always seem to be the first to show up at our feeders in the fall, then they entertain us all year long with their acrobatic antics and distinctive calls.

There are seven species of chickadees that occur in the North America. They are sometimes divided into two groups, black-capped and brown-capped. The black-capped chickadees include the Black-Capped, Mountain, Carolina and Mexican Chickadees, while brown-caps include the Boreal and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. The seventh species is the Grey-headed Chickadee (often referred to as the Siberia Tit), whose range extends just into North America in northern Alaska from Eurasia. The Black-capped Chickadee is the most widely distributed of the seven species and is very common in Cache Valley. They can be found all across the northern tier of North America, from Alaska to Nova Scotia, but are absent in the extreme northern portion of Canada and the southern U.S. The Mountain Chickadee, also a resident of our area, occurs more at higher elevations in the mountainous areas of western North America. The Boreal Chickadee replaces the other species in the far north, while in California and the Pacific Northwest the Chestnut-backed Chickadee becomes common. The Carolina Chickadee occurs in the southeastern portions of the U.S.

Black-capped chickadees are year-round residents in their range, utilizing small insects, seeds and berries as food. It’s fun



to watch chickadees climbing around on a tree, often hanging upside down while looking for insects to eat. Sometimes they will take short flights and even hover briefly trying to catch insects in the air. They will visit feeders all year round and particularly love black oil sunflower seed. Their behavior at feeders is very distinctive and fun to watch when they quickly fly to the feeder, grab one seed and fly off into cover to eat it. You can often see them in a tree, close to the feeder, hammering away on a sunflower seed grasped in their feet or bill. Once consumed, they fly in, grab one more seed, and fly off again to eat their meal in solitude. I have never seen a chickadee actually sit at the feeder and eat.

Chickadees are cavity nesters and will use nest boxes if they are lined with sawdust. They will often excavate their own nest in rotten or decaying trees or sometimes use cavities created by other birds such as flickers. Nests are built out of a coarse material lined with soft hair or fur, where 6-8 eggs are usually laid. They hatch in 12-13 days and, after being cared for by both parents, the young leave the nest about 16 days later.

Unfortunately, chickadees seem unable to defend their nest sites from competing species like house wrens and can actually incur substantial egg predation. People trying to encourage chickadees to use nest boxes can discourage house wrens

from taking over chickadee nests by placing a shingle or piece of cardboard so that it blocks the view of the cavity opening.

In the winter chickadees travel in small flocks, often accompanied by other species such as juncos and nuthatches. These small flocks vocalize a lot, making them more conspicuous to bird watchers. They are fun birds for children and novice bird watchers because of their friendly nature. And, with patience, you can get chickadees to feed out of your hands. Their familiar “chick a dee dee” call is easy to recognize and brightens anyone’s day. The chickadee’s song is a simple 2-tone whistle, “fee bee,” often repeating the second tone twice.

Chickadees have an unusual ability to lower their body temperature by 10 or 12 degrees during very cold winter nights in order to save energy. They are also known to hide seed in nooks and spaces of bark and moss and can supposedly remember thousands of locations. In general, chickadees are common, conspicuous and cool birds of our valley. They will stay here with us as the days shorten and the temperatures drop. Hopefully their busy energy and lively chatter will help to brighten your days during the long, cold winter season ahead.

—Bill Masslich



Welcome to BAS

New Members

Leslie Brown
Mike Taylor
Matt Schroer

Rejoining Members

Richard Lamb

Renewing Members

Mara J. Ballard
John Dymerski
Karen Wood
Carl Cheney
Ryan O'Donnell

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

Trustees

2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637
2009-2012 Ron Goede, 752-9650; Frank Howe, 787-1859 Robert Schmidt, 755-9262; Bret Selman, 257-5260
2010-2013 Chris Cokinos, 245-7769; Jack Greene, 563-6816; Reinhard Jockel; Ryan O'Donnell, 232-8146

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Webhost www.xmission.com

Membership in the Bridgerland Audubon Society includes a subscription to *The Stilt*, as well as *Audubon* magazine. The editor of *The Stilt* invites submissions, due on the 10th of each month. Send to chris.cokinos@usu.edu.

National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to contribute to Audubon and receive the Bridgerland Audubon newsletter, *The Stilt*, and the *National AUDUBON* magazine, as a:

New member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.

My check for \$20 is enclosed (this is a special first-year rate).

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____



Please send all checks payable to National Audubon Society with this card to:
National Audubon Society
PO Box 422250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250
Membership Source Code: COZW520Z

National Audubon occasionally makes its membership list available to selected organizations. To have your name omitted from this, please check this box.

Note to new National Audubon members: To get on *The Stilt* newsletter mailing list without the usual 8-week delay, contact Susan Durham, 752-5637, sdurham@cc.usu.edu.

Prefer the local newsletter only? Send \$20 (make checks payable to Bridgerland Audubon Society) and this form to: Bridgerland Audubon Society, PO Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501 for a subscription to *The Stilt*.



The *Stilt*

Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

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Paddling and Birding

On the Ides of October I saw two dozen Wood Ducks while paddling on the Bear River between the Amalga bridge and Benson bridge (the PacifiCorp launch site). Birding from the water is incredibly satisfying and, while it requires a boat and a vehicle to transport it to the launch point, paddling has a lower carbon footprint than miles of stop and go driving. In addition to getting you off the road and away from traffic, boating and birding provides access to some of the best birding experiences in Cache Valley. I'll share a few. An early highlight of the day's paddle was provided by a playful pair of Belted Kingfishers chasing each other in circles above my head (this is fall, not the hormone-fueled spring). They hop-scotched from tree to tree ahead of me as I paddled up river. Another treat was being surprised by two Great Horned Owls on a low branch hanging above the water 15 feet ahead... no need for binoculars. I held my breath, stopped paddling and floated by... leaving them aware of my presence but undisturbed. While I missed them this morning, this stretch of river usually produces a beaver sighting... at least in the evening.

Subsequent late October-early November paddles on this same stretch of the Bear River produced sighting of Barn Owls. They tend to be camouflaged in the dense vegetation but thinning leaves reveal their unmistakable shape and lovely colors.

In late spring this year while paddling in the heat of midday, mostly in search of exercise away from traffic with few expectations of seeing any birds, I launched at the PacifiCorp site on Valley View highway. On a hot, still afternoon I was dumbfounded to watch an American bittern fly across the Little Bear River in full view, so close I didn't even have to raise my binoculars.

Thanks to the Ducks Unlimited/Audubon teams who erected the Wood Duck boxes over the past couple years. I had never seen a Wood Duck on the Amalga to Benson stretch of the Bear River on any previous paddling trip, but on this trip I saw more Wood Ducks than I had seen collectively in more than two decades of birding in Cache Valley. Frank Howe's USU class plans to clean and maintain the boxes.

Leaving the best bird for last, on a September paddle near the south end of Cutler Marsh, I almost gasped out loud as I looked up to see not one but four Long-Eared Owls staring at me from the tree branches. I quietly turned and slipped away to avoid disturbing their roost.

Nothing better than messing about in boats.

-Jean Lown