



The *Stilt*

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Bridgerland Audubon Scores a Grant for Signage Along The Logan River Golf Course Trail!

We are BIG winners!

Bridgerland Audubon has been awarded a \$673 National Audubon grant. It will go toward the production of interpretive signage for the Logan River Golf Course Trail. The signs will feature information about birds and wildlife (mammals, herps, butterflies), along with emphasizing the value of healthy riparian/wetland habitat.



“We owe Jack Greene a debt of thanks for taking the lead on the grant application,” said Val Grant, chapter president. “He did this during an extraordinarily busy time, in the midst of Bioneers and Sustainability Week.”

Barbara Middleton and her Utah State University students will be doing the interpretation work.

“When I met with the golf course board, they were very excited for the project, even suggesting the naming of each of their 18 holes after a different common bird species (excluding Canada Geese, the golfers and management’s nemesis),” Jack Greene said.

“Further, we will be looking at an optional golfer’s score card that will have a common birds checklist on one side of the card so they can add more "birdies" to their score,” Jack said.

He emphasized how enthused the Logan River Golf Course Board is not only about this project but about getting habitat management advice from the chapter.

In December, the chapter board voted to spend \$400 to round out the grant. This will help cover the costs of developing the signs and producing them.

Logan City Parks and Recreation, which owns the course, will be providing posts and installation—so they deserve our thanks as well.

—Christopher Cokinos

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Chapter Conservation Activities: The Year in Review

Bridgerland Audubon Society's mission statement reflects our commitment to conservation: "To conserve, enhance, and enjoy the natural environment with special emphasis on birds and their habitats for the benefit and education of humanity and for the biological diversity of the Earth." Our chapter is different from many others in that we own habitat in our Amalga Barrens Wetlands Sanctuary and manage another parcel, the Bear River Bottoms, through a conservation easement with PacifiCorp. We have a statewide reputation for thoughtful and effective conservation action. These actions vary from "boots on the ground" habitat improvement in Cache Valley to financial and letter-writing support for issues such as protection of the Great Salt Lake. It's been a full year. Here's a review of issues and accomplishments from 2010:

Bear River Bottoms: Since the signing of the conservation easement on 500 acres of Bear River bottomlands, this has been by far our biggest effort in terms of time and financial commitment. We have secured funding from federal grants and donations from BAS members, and dozens of volunteers have given thousands of hours of effort. In the 20 months since we obtained the easement, we have accomplished more than 70 acres of weed and tamarisk removal, installed more than a mile of fencing to control cattle, removed trash and conducted both vegetation and bird surveys. The Utah Department of Transportation and environmental consulting firm Bio/West are planning new wetland areas in the Bear River Bottoms in the coming months to offset losses associated with future construction on 10th West in Logan.

Cutler Marsh: In addition to the designation of this area as an Important Bird Area of Global Significance for the White-faced Ibis, two Audubon members serve on an advisory board working to improve water quality in this waterway. We are concerned about motorized boating's negative effect on birds, macroinvertebrates and vegetation. We are also concerned about low concentrations of dissolved oxygen, resulting from the discharge of effluent containing high phosphorous concentrations from Logan's sewage lagoons and other industrial facilities. High phosphorous concentrations lead to excessive algae growth that results in low-oxygen conditions, which harms other vegetation and fish and, therefore, has a negative cascade effect up the food chain. We have expressed these concerns to the Division of Water Quality and the State Wildlife Board.

Riverside Trail: Led by BAS members Debi and Ted Evans and with approval of the Forest Service, volunteers spent many hours removing invasive weeds from this beautiful and heavily used trail up Logan Canyon. The houndstongue and burdock fear us!

UDOT: Our chapter has asked to be included in planning for a preliminary proposed expansion of passing lanes for Highway 89 in the upper part of Logan Canyon. We will advocate for minimal habitat loss and preservation of viewsapes through this process. We have joined Dan Miller and the Bear River Watershed Council in this effort.

The Great Salt Lake: We have written or joined letters supporting protection efforts by the Friends of the Great Salt Lake and the Coalition to Keep the Lake Great. Issues include: proposed expansion of the Great Salt Lake Minerals' evaporation ponds that could endanger White Pelican breeding grounds and affect other wildlife; revision of the comprehensive management plan to ensure that conservation values are protected and the public trust secured; and expansion of a sewage plant that could dump pollutants into Willard Bay. We have also provided financial support to a study of the economic value of non-consumptive uses of the GSL such as birding.

Amalga Barrens Sanctuary: We have continued to experiment with native grasses and forbs to restore this rare (for Cache Valley) salt playa habitat to a more natural condition.

Bear River Conservation Action Plan: This project is a long-term effort spearheaded by The Nature Conservancy and federal and state and local agencies to improve the ecosystem health of the river in Wyoming Idaho and Utah. We offer advice and comments related to habitat improvement in the lower Bear through Cache Valley and into the GSL.

Utah Audubon Council: The chapter continues to support the council by providing funds for Audubon's policy advocate, Steve Erickson, in Salt Lake City. Steve did a great job last legislative session.

Please contact any one of us if you wish to find out more or get involved in these activities.

BAS Conservation Committee:
Dick Mueller, chair and BAS Trustee
Frank Howe, BAS trustee
Jim Cane, Barrens Sanctuary manager
Bryan Dixon, Bear River Bottoms manger



FCC Taking Comments on How to Lessen Bird Deaths at Communication Towers

Communications towers, which are generally registered at the Federal Communications Commission, with no environmental review, kill migratory and other bird species. To stop the senseless killing of birds, members of the public must tell the FCC that they care about birds, especially birds flying in their local area, and want an evaluation of the full scope of impacts and alternatives to the current Antenna Structure Registration (“ASR”) Program.

The FCC recently announced plans to prepare a programmatic environmental assessment (EA) to address the issue of bird collisions with towers. This decision results from successful litigation brought by conservation groups following years of delay by the FCC to address the problem. However, it is a real disappointment because an EA may not fully analyze the problem or provide adequate alternatives for the public to consider. Given the well-documented mortality to birds, the FCC should be doing the more thorough programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS).

Requested Action: We ask all bird conservation groups and concerned citizens to weigh in and make the case to the FCC that it should conduct an EIS rather than an EA.

Talking Points:

A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (“PEIS”) is required. While the FCC has announced the beginning of a process - a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (“PEA”), it should quickly decide to undertake a comprehensive PEIS, scoped to consider all impacts (individual, cumulative, direct, and indirect) and alternatives. Numerous government studies of bird kills at towers and other materials on file at the FCC for more than a decade document significant environment impacts from towers that must be studied in a PEIS.

An evaluation of the full scope of impacts must include at a minimum:

- * A nationwide assessment of bird kills at communications towers. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that at least 4-5 million birds are killed at communications towers every year. Impacts are affecting population levels for some species according to a recent study of the data.
- * Data on tower location, lighting, height and guy wires, which are key factors causing bird kills. Data on migratory flyways should be included.
- * Assessment of the full range of significant impacts, such as: whether tower placement violates federal law, including the Endangered Species Act; uncertain and unique risks; cumulatively significant impacts (direct and indirect), particularly in light of the ongoing broadband buildout and other threats to bird migration such as climate change.

An evaluation of alternatives must include at a minimum:

- * Alternative regulatory approaches to minimize bird impacts, such as a presumption for collocation of antennas on existing towers, justification for towers over 350 feet and guy wires, and a prohibition on towers in flyways of endangered and threatened birds.
- * FCC personnel to identify and evaluate environmental effects of towers rather than letting tower registration applicants do it.
- * Input from state and other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (including its guidance on tower siting and operation) and the Federal Aviation Administration (regarding changes for aircraft warning lights).
- * Instead of wholesale, categorical exclusion of towers from NEPA review, require documentation of minimal impacts that generally can be excluded from environmental review because they individually and cumulatively have only insignificant impacts. Include a list of extraordinary circumstances requiring review of otherwise excluded projects.

The Commission seeks written comments to assist it in preparing the PEA. Interested parties may file comments on or before January 14, 2011. Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the Commission’s Electronic Comment Filing System: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/> through a link on the PEA website: <http://www.fcc.gov/pea>

—Courtesy of the American Bird Conservancy

Local Bird Spotlight

Hollywood Finches

We put our feeders out about a week before the first Arctic blast of the season ended our beautiful, lingering fall and switched us into instant, full-blown winter. A few chickadees were the first to drop in for a bite, but it wasn't long (maybe an hour) before the usual hoard of House Finches showed up and descended upon the scene. They're baaaaack. At first there were about 20, then 40 and by the end of the first day there must have been 60 or 70 of the little buggers flitting, calling, chasing and loafing in the trees around the feeders, devouring black oil sunflower seed at an astonishing rate. As the finches gathered and began roosting in nearby trees, their activities attracted a lot of other bird species to our backyard and by the end of the day we had doves, blackbirds, siskins, juncos and goldfinches joining in the feast. By the second day we had a Sharp-shinned Hawk working the flocks, creating even more excitement. Our feeders quickly became a smorgasbord with sunflower seed and House Finch as the main courses.

If there is any species that could be considered a fixture at feeders it is the House Finch. They are right up there with starlings, rock doves and house sparrows in their ability to coexist with humans and are one of the most common birds in and around urban and suburban areas of North America. Originally they were only found in the western U.S. but in 1940s, they were released on the East coast after being illegally marketed as caged birds called "Hollywood finches." Within 50 years they had spread and become common throughout the eastern U.S. They are now present in most states in the U.S., southern Canada, Mexico and also occur in all the islands of Hawaii, where they were introduced in the late 1800's. In many places (including my backyard) they are very abundant with some total population estimates in North America as high as 1.4 billion birds!

In 1994, a respiratory virus commonly called House Finch eye disease began to spread through the eastern U.S. significantly reducing the eastern population. The disease is so named based on the swollen, watery, red



appearance of one or both eyes in affected individuals. It can kill birds directly or predispose them to other mortality factors. In 2004 the disease had spread and reached epidemic proportions in the Northwest. It is likely that the disease has spread throughout most of the species range now and may also affect other species like goldfinches. The disease is contagious and can easily be spread at feeders. This is a good reason to keep your feeders clean and disinfected using a 10% chlorine bleach solution. Make sure to rinse your feeders after using chlorine disinfectants.

Adult male House Finches usually have red around their head, breast and rump, while the females are an indistinct brown and tan with blurry stripes on their breasts. Some males appear more orange or yellow in color due to differences in diet. Apparently red pigment cannot be directly produced by birds and must be obtained in food. It is thought that the redder the plumage of the male the higher chances it has for successful mating.

A fun, kind of "Where's Waldo?" winter feeder watching activity is to hone your bird I.D. skills by looking for other species of birds among a large flock of House Finches. One species seen mixed in with House Finch at feeders are Cassin's Finch. The male Cassin's Finch has an all red head that sometimes shows a small crest while the male House Finch has a brown patch of feathers on its head that reminds me of a small, brown cap. The Cassin's has fewer and finer streaks on its breast and flank and has a longer, narrower bill than the House Finch. The tail notch is noticeably deeper on the Cassin's Finch. Female House and Cassin's Finches are very similar, but can be told apart by differences in bill shape, facial markings and breast streaking. The Pine Siskin, a common feeder bird in Cache Valley, also resembles a female House Finch but is smaller in size, has a much smaller beak and has indistinct yellow markings on its wings. With a little patience and practice it gets easier to tell the species apart.

Because of their propensity to live among people and utilize feeders the House Finch is a popular bird in urban areas. They will readily nest on and around buildings, often taking advantage of arbors, vents, ledges, hanging planters and other objects in addition to an assortment of trees, shrubs and other natural substrates. Interestingly, the House Finch feeds its nestlings a diet of exclusively plant matter, different from many other plant-eating birds that supplement the diet of their chicks with animal protein.



House Finches are a very social and gregarious species, with some even remaining in flocks throughout the breeding season. They are year-round residents within their range and appear to move only short distances, often from feeder to feeder within a small territory. House Finches are great to have around if you have children because they are so active and abundant and the males sing year-round, adding notes of joy to the cold winter days.

In the end, if you feed birds you will probably feed your share of House Finches. We like to have them around—but the “Hollywood” label...I’m still trying to figure that one out. They are from the West. They do like to socialize and enjoy the easy life around the feeder. They can be entertaining. They do like living in the nicer digs provided by people. But they seem to lack the glitz and glamour of other birds that strike me more of Hollywood types. They seem more like a working-man type of bird to me, but somehow I don’t think that “blue collar finches” or “common man finches” would have had quite the same appeal in the bird market.

–Bill Masslich

Just in case chapter members are interested, here is a link to a new report about the impacts of feral cats on birds:
<http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/101208.html>

–Ryan P. O'Donnell

Audubon Calendar

January 2011

1 Two-hundred Club. Is it possible to see 200 species of birds in Cache County in the calendar year? It is not only possible, but several local birders do it every year. This trip will be led by local birding expert Reinhard Jockel, who is not only good with visual birding, but also a gifted birding-by-ear expert. Anyone is welcome to attend the field trip, especially those who want to set a New Year resolution to get out of the house and see 200 of the great, natural beauties in Cache Valley. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffè Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East, 150 North). Bring something to munch on, because the trip will run into the early afternoon. Those ambitious souls will undoubtedly want to continue, perhaps into the evening. Be prepared for whatever weather conditions are forecast for that day.

8 Bryan Dixon will be leading a snowshoe trip in conjunction with the Stokes Nature Center. There may be a snowshoe rental attached to this, but there may also be treats! Check the website or contact SNC for details.

22 Logan's Arctic Tundra. This time of year, Cache County can feel like arctic tundra. While we pile on extra layers and crank up the heat, many birds that breed on the arctic tundra are spending the winter feeling quite cozy in the snow and ice that covers our valley floor. This trip, led by Ryan O'Donnell, will focus on finding these winter visitors from the arctic, possibly including Cackling Geese, Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, Merlins, Rough-legged Hawks, and Glaucous Gulls, depending on conditions. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffè Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East, 150 North). Come prepared to stand outside or take short walks, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. All skill levels are welcome. We will be back by about noon.

February

10 Hold the date for our Winter Quarter Program. We'll have a "far out expedition to discover Utah's original residents" with Vaughn Haydenfelt, owner and operator of Far Out Expeditions. Check out his website at www.faroutexpeditions.com. More details forthcoming on time and place!

Around the Valley

The Logan City Renewable Energy and Conservation Advisory Board meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30 a.m. in the Environmental Department Classroom at 450 N 1000 W in Logan. The January 5th agenda will include a lecture from Danny Macfarlane of Civil Solutions Group in Providence. His presentation will address a micro-hydro turbine project installed in Smithfield. Is micro-hydro a good sustainable energy solution? Come find out. The public is welcome at all meetings. For more information, contact: Emily Malik, Conservation Coordinator, City of Logan, Environmental Department at 716-9792 or

Don't Forget! The Birds in Your Yard Need This!

Local black oil sunflower seed in a 50-pound bag for \$25—and personally delivered with a smile. Call Allen Christensen 258-5018. The quality is really high again this year. The birdseed sale on Nov 20, 2010, went very well, despite the bad weather. A big thank-you to all those who helped out and to all those who purchased seed.

—Allen Christensen

HawkWatch International Presents World-Renowned Ornithologist Dr. Ian Newton

Join us Saturday, January 8th at 7:00 p.m. for an evening with world famous ornithologist, Dr. Ian Newton! Like many of us, Ian developed a love of birds as a child. His childhood passion grew into a distinguished professional career. Throughout his career, he has been instrumental in indicating threats facing raptors and habitats, including work that illuminated the impact of DDT on raptor populations. He is the author of nearly 300 scientific papers and many books including *The Sparrowhawk* (1986) and *The Migration Ecology of Birds* (2008). Dr. Newton is the recipient of many distinguished awards, including the Order of the British Empire (1999), Fellow of the Royal Society (1994), the Union Medal of the British Ornithologists' Union, and the Elliot Coues Award of the American Ornithologists' Union.

The evening's discussion will focus on soaring raptor migration and the constraints these birds face during their seasonal flights. How do feeding habits affect migration choices? What happens when so many birds redistribute themselves throughout the world during migration? Come get a peek into the secrets of raptor migration. This lecture is free and open to the public! Space is limited, so arrive early. The Foster/Carleson Lot has the most convenient parking.

*Gore Auditorium
Westminster College
1840 South 1300 East
Salt Lake City, Utah*

—courtesy Nikki Price

Thanks To All Our 2010 BAS Members and Supporters!

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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To the Memory of Jim Sinclair

We lost a real friend of the environment recently. Jim Sinclair died November 15, 2010 of virulent pulmonary disorder. A chemist by training, Jim gave his heart to the wildlands and his help to those of us who seek them. One of his most valuable contributions to nature locally was Cache Valley Trails, which he edited and updated just a few years ago. He was very active in Cache Hikers and led trips for the Bridgerland Audubon Society.

It saddens us to lose friends and loved ones, but their lives have enriched our own and it's our job to fully appreciate the joy they have given us so that we might pass it on to those who follow. I suggest we all get outside, find a grin and thereby remember Jim's smiles and encouraging words.

–Bryan Dixon