



# The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

## Legislature in Session: Audubon is there too!

Utah Audubon Council policy advocate Steve Erickson is tracking bills, talking with legislators and keeping up with all the madcap wackiness that is a legislative session. Steve is Audubon's voice of reason in Salt Lake City. He works for the chapters—that means you too—and through guidance from the Council offers positions on bills in public testimony and, sometimes more important, conversations with our representatives.

Let Council president Chris Cokinos know if you want to receive e-mail updates during the session. The most important items, ones that might call for public comments, will be shared with members in as timely a fashion as possible. The separate Econet list, run by the tireless Bryan Dixon, is one venue that such public comment alerts are shared. If you want to join Econet, let Bryan know. Econet is not an official part of BAS, but a mutual effort to help protect the environment.

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### *Week One Highlights from the able Steve Erickson:*

Adjusting to a newly elected Governor, new House Speaker and leadership, many new and very conservative legislators, and reorganized appropriations subcommittees was nearly overshadowed by the rancor caused by the removal of Rep. Craig Frank, who was found to not be living in his district. Fed bashing and budget slashing dominated the discourse. Still, action on bills moved along at a reasonable pace, particularly in the Senate.

There are substantially fewer wildlife-related bills filed so far this Session than last year, and more bills pertaining to the state/federal relationship, though those are mostly "message" bills. As usual, there are quite a few water bills, but nearly all are not controversial, were endorsed by the Natural Resources Interim Committee, and are moving swiftly through the process.

Also as usual, there are a number of bills still being drafted, some with titles suggesting they may be controversial. And, of course, we can expect more bills to emerge after the filing deadline (2/11) and maybe some "boxcar" bills right up until end.

### *Budget News:*

2012 Budget: Republican legislative leadership rejected Governor Herbert's budget recommendations to fill projected revenue gaps for the fiscal year starting July 1 by tapping the Rainy Day Fund and requiring quarterly tax (withholding) payments by small businesses and independent contractors. Leadership identifies what they consider a \$313 million "structural deficit," which they define as on-going budget commitments above on-going revenue. This equals 7% of the General and Education Funds revenues, so Executive Appropriations Committee has instructed all appropriations subcommittees to cut 7% from the base budgets of all departments in their portfolio.

The subcommittees have struggled to make these cuts, but have done so and the base budget bills have been prepared for floor action. Some of the more draconian cuts suggested have been avoided, and in most cases the departments have been given the discretion to identify and make those cuts. The NRAEQ Appropriations has recommended \$4,770,000 in cuts, \$443,000 above the 7% target. Remarkably, the Divisions of Wildlife and Water Rights have escaped these cuts. State Parks took the biggest hit—\$3,000,000—which almost surely will not stand, as it would require closures. The Division of Environmental Quality may see a reduction of \$747,900, and Agriculture is slated for \$1.3 million less.

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## Week One Highlights - Continued

All of this is preliminary, and adjustments will be made as the Session unfolds.

### What's Ahead?

The House and Senate will debate and approve the base budget bills for FY 2012 this week (first week in February). The Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environmental Quality Appropriations base budget bill will start in the Senate (SB 8, sponsored by Sen. David Hinkins).

These budgets will be adjusted based upon a number of factors including potential new revenue when the mid-February projections are factored in and the political pull and tug within the Legislature and between it and the Governor.

### Resources:

A brief but excellent resource for daily committee agendas and floor action is the Utah League of Women Voters: <http://www.lwvutah/legislative-updates.htm>. For more details, visit the Legislative website – [www.le.utah.gov](http://www.le.utah.gov).

–Chris Cokinos and Steve Erickson

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## Assault on Clean Air Act Takes Center Stage: Stay Tuned

Recently, members of Congress who favor polluting special interests like the oil, gas, and coal industries unveiled a radical agenda to gut the President's authority under one of America's most successful bedrock environmental laws, the Clean Air Act. New chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, Fred Upton (R-MI) met in a closed-door session with energy industry interests last week to work on a strategy to undercut the Obama Administration's efforts to control power plant pollution like mercury and carbon dioxide. Congressman Upton is expected to unveil a new bill as soon as this week that will include a sweeping curtailment of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) authority to regulate power plant pollution. In the Senate, Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) is planning to introduce similar legislation to block the Obama administration and states from imposing restrictions on pollution. These radical legislative proposals favor big polluters over public health and hamstring EPA's efforts to control global warming pollution. Stay tuned for action alerts that will be a critical part of Audubon's full force opposition of this gutting of fundamental environmental law that protects our air and public health.

–Audubon Advisory

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## No Child Left Inside Resolution Proposed in Utah Legislature

Jack Greene reports that State Representative Jack Draxler is "confident" that a No Child Left Inside Resolution will pass both chambers of the Utah statehouse and be signed by Gov. Gary Herbert. Take time to read this important proclamation by going to <http://www.usee.org/> and click on the link hcr007.pdf. For more information on this effort—and how you can help - contact Jack Greene or go to [www.cachevalleynccli.org](http://www.cachevalleynccli.org).

## From The Perch, *Audubon Magazine's* blog

By Alisa Opar

Professional-grade fireworks probably caused the deaths of thousands of red-winged blackbirds in Beebe, Arkansas, on New Year's Eve. The loud noises, combined with birds' poor night vision and large winter gathering, likely led 4,000 to 5,000 birds to crash to their deaths.

That's the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's "strong working hypothesis," Karen Rowe, a Commission ornithologist.

Here's what officials have pieced together:

At 10 p.m., residents heard several extremely loud, "window-shaking" noises that are believed to have come from professional-grade fireworks, which no one had permission to set off. The blasts came from an area near the birds' winter roost.

About 15 minutes later several folks went outside when they heard the whooshing wings of a blackbird flock flying at its normal fast speed. "But when they looked up, instead of the birds being above treetop level, like they usually are, they were at rooftop level," says Rowe. "They crashed into houses, cars, trees, mailboxes, shrubbery. Everything around."

Blackbirds don't usually fly at night. The big booms apparently flushed the birds from their roost, and then poor eyesight and disorientation stymied them from making it back safely.

"Necropsy report shows trauma primarily to the chest," says Rowe. "Hemorrhaging in the body cavity, bruised skulls, blood clots in brain. It's consistent with crashing into something rather than falling."

Toxins don't appear to be a factor, says Rowe, adding that the death toll is difficult to estimate because feral cats, raccoons, and other scavengers likely made a meal out of the fallen creatures.

The loss of any animals is regrettable, says Rowe. "I don't want to see it again, but I especially hope we don't see it with any declining species like cerulean warblers."

Beebe residents aren't likely to see a repeat of the freak event on the Fourth of July, the only other day the city allows fireworks. Blackbirds will be spread out on their individual nests then, instead of congregating in their winter roost.

It appears that similarly mysterious bird deaths in Louisiana around the same time are unrelated. "Initial findings indicate that these are isolated incidents that were probably caused by disturbance and disorientation," says Greg Butcher, Audubon's director of bird conservation.

The birds—red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds and European starlings—are abundant species that flock together in large nighttime roosts during the winter months. Roosts can contain from tens of thousands to 20 million individuals or more.

Blackbirds are so prolific that during the Christmas Bird Count this year, Rowe says she and another biologist commented that they spent so much time counting blackbirds that they didn't get to search out more rare species. "This will teach us," she says wryly.

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# Local Bird Spotlight

## Bird Spotlight: Kingfisher

The rattling call of the Belted Kingfisher is a primal sound along the Logan River. When you hear this call, pause and keep your eyes fixed in the air space 20 or 30 feet above the river for a few moments. If you are lucky, a kingfisher may cruise by, patrolling its stretch of river. Its rowing style of wing beats will be deep and powerful. Sometimes, the bird will suddenly stop in the air, hovering, intently eyeing a patch of water. Then it will dip its head, pull its wings until it looks like a feathered spearhead and dive into the river. A second later the kingfisher will explode from the water, often with a fish tightly grasped in its beak. Sometimes the birds will do these dives into what appears to me to be very shallow water. I have often wondered how they don't end up like a dart in the bottom of the creek, but they manage to make it look easy.



If you spend much time around rivers and streams of Cache Valley you have almost certainly encountered this bird and have hopefully been witness to some of its antics. When they are around, they are fairly conspicuous, perching on prominent branches and wires above a river, pond or lake. Their rapid rattling and trills can be heard from quite a distance and are often made on the move. When they are perched, they exhibit a prominent shaggy, blue crest, especially on the females. The Belted Kingfisher is one of a few species of birds where the female is more colorful than the male, exhibiting a lot more rufous-colored feathers on the flanks and a complete rufous-colored band across their white chest just below a blue band seen in both sexes.

Kingfishers nest in cavities dug into steep, dirt-faced cliffs, often associated with the outside of river bends or along lee-side lakeshores where waves have cut into a hillside. They have also been observed using dirt cliffs created by road cuts and gravel pit operations. If good fish populations exist along a lake or river, the number of breeding kingfishers in an area is likely to be limited by the amount of nesting habitat.

Kingfishers are year-round residents of Cache Valley. They winter along streams and reservoirs when there is open water available. The Logan River is a reliable place to see them when ice covers the reservoirs and ponds in winter. If you see them consistently hunting a body of water it's a good sign that there are plenty of fish living there, although they also eat insects and other invertebrates. Belted Kingfishers tend to be solitary or hang out in pairs but if you ever see a group of kingfishers you have seen a rattle.

—Bill Masslich

### Did you know?

The Audubon Online Bird Guide is a convenient online guide that features 750 species. Search and identify hundreds of North American birds with text, photos, sounds, range maps and more. [www.audubonbirds.org](http://www.audubonbirds.org)

# Audubon Calendar

## March

**12** Wild Goose Chase. Mid-march is when the spring migration first becomes clearly evident in Cache County, especially as migrating waterfowl start feeding on the waste grain exposed by the melting snow in the fields and on the fish that have been slowly growing under the ice of our reservoirs all winter. Join us as we search Cache Valley for early migrant waterfowl, especially focusing on the flocks of geese. We will expect to see lots of Canada Geese (think they're easy to identify? Try taking them down to subspecies!), and will be searching for migrating Red-breasted Mergansers and Tundra Swans. If we're lucky, we might find a rare Cackling Goose, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, White-fronted Goose or even a Brant in the mix. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe 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.

## April

**21** Hold the date! We have the chapter banquet set for April 21 at 6 p.m. social hour, dinner at 7 p.m., cash bar at the Copper Mill. Please come to this fun, annual event. Speaker to be announced.

## Youth Art Contest Planned, Deadline Looms

It's not too early to start planning community activities for Endangered Species Day, May 20, 2011. A fun feature of Endangered Species Day is the Youth Art Contest. Organized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Endangered Species Coalition, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art/ University of New Orleans, teachers can include the Endangered Species Day Youth Art Contest as a featured activity for Youth Art Month in March. Entries are due March 15. For more information on how to enter, download this fact sheet: <http://www.audubonaction.org/site/DocServer/ESDay2011DayArtContest.pdf?docID=181>

—Audubon Advisory

## Great Salt Lake Audubon in the News...

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/neighborhood/50925463-85/river-jordan-lake-salt.html.csp>

# Rusty Blackbird and Mexican Crow Get Some Help

Following comments by American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the nation's leading bird conservation organization, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has announced that the Rusty Blackbird and the Mexican Crow can now only be deliberately killed as a nuisance species following approval and issuance of a specific permit.

"In our comments, we cited a variety of evidence that demonstrated that the Rusty Blackbird has suffered a stunning population decline, losing perhaps 90 percent of its numbers, over the last 200 years. FWS has now issued final regulations that reflect that This is a real victory for the conservation of the species," said Dr. Moira McKernan, Director of the Birds Pesticide Program for ABC.

In addition, ABC has sent a letter to the EPA asking that Rusty Blackbirds be taken off their list of target birds for the pesticide Avitrol.

A standing depredation order is a regulation that allows the blanket killing or "take" of species of birds, at specific locations, and for specific purposes without the need for individual depredation permits on each occasion. The depredation order for blackbirds, cowbirds, grackles, crows, and magpies allows take when individuals are found committing or about to commit depredations upon ornamental or shade trees, agricultural crops, livestock, or wildlife, or when concentrated in such numbers and manner as to constitute a health hazard or other nuisance."

The Rusty Blackbird breeds across northern North America from Alaska to eastern Canada, farther north than any other blackbird species. It nests near streams, bogs, muskeg swamps, and beaver ponds, generally in remote areas. It winters in flocks in the southeastern and Midwestern U.S. Data from 90 Breeding Bird Survey routes indicate it has declined over 10% annually from 1966 to 2001. Recent survey work in the Northwest Territories detected only a few birds in areas where it was common 50 years ago. The causes of its decline are unknown but speculation points to poisoning due to spraying of blackbird roosts where the Rusty roosts with other blackbird species during the winter. Also, destruction and degradation of wetlands are a threat to the species, particularly of swamp and bottomland forests in the wintering range.

The Mexican Crow was also removed from the FWS depredation order because of its very limited distribution in the United States as well as its apparent rapid decline in numbers. The Mexican Crow is a little known, small glossy crow, all black, including bill and feet. It is a sociable bird often forming large flocks, moving together in close groups. It nests low in shrubs and native tree species like the mesquite and feeds on a great variety of items, including seeds, grains, fruits, meat, carrion, and insects. Unknown north of the U.S.-Mexico border before the 1960s, it has in recent years become a regular visitor to southern Texas.

This new FWS regulation was effective on January 3, 2011.

—American Bird Conservancy

# Welcome to BAS

New Members	Rejoining Members	Renewing Members	
Madeline Sortor	Brandon Spencer Family	Lila P. Bommer	Steve & Jeanna Livingston
	Michael L. Wolfe	Star Coulbrooke	Jaron Livingston
	Lori & Robert Jenkins	Keith L. Dixon	Mary McWhorter
	William Masslich	Susan Gibson	Lisa Michaels
		Molly Hysell	Robert Perry
		Theodore J. Kindred	Craig Reger
		Wayne Wurtsbaugh	Allison Robyhill
			Robert Young

## 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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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 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. Send to [chris.cokinos@usu.edu](mailto: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:**  
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 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](mailto: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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## News from the Bear River Watershed Council

The Bear River Watershed Council has announced the release of its new website.

Drawing on experience from their Motorized Use Data Project, BRWC has presented, in a concise manner, the types of impacts they've discovered from illegal motorized recreation on public lands in northern Utah. The website also offers simple actions average citizens can perform to make a difference to offset the impacts and promote responsible recreation of all kinds.

“We hope this site design will stand up for many years to provide easy access to useable information,” said BRWC’s Executive Director, Dan Miller.

To visit the site click on: [www.brwcouncil.org](http://www.brwcouncil.org)

**Make a Difference**  
Learn how you can help

In 2002 BRWC embarked on a major initiative to monitor motorized impacts in Utah's Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. Severe damage caused by a minority of motorized users continue to threaten forest health and we believe our [Motorized Use Data Project \(MUO\)](#) will make a visible and lasting difference.

Welcome to our new website. We hope you enjoy the new format and information it provides. If you find any errors, please let us know.