

THE STILT

BRIDGERLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

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WINTER SILENCE

Once when the din of a classroom of young students was pushing the limits of my sanity, I led my charges across the street from the school and placed them each twenty paces apart in a nearby alfalfa field. I asked them to remain absolutely silent for ten minutes and to note on paper what they saw, heard, thought or felt. One child wrote, "At first I couldn't hear anything. Then something weird happened. I heard everything." Another wrote, "I feel like I'm coming home."

What these children heard were the rustlings of grasshoppers climbing dried grasses, birds singing in the far field, children playing in the distant gym, and the beating of their own hearts. What they heard was the voice of the world they live in.

Nature is always speaking to us. Now, in the depth of winter, her voice can be heard most clearly. Nature's words are spoken within her silences. Silence echoes the crackle of snowflakes as they touch the ground. The quiet yuletide warmth of family and friends is framed in silence. The long, dark silence of mid-winter's night sets the stars themselves to singing. Inasmuch as we too are nature we cannot help but hear.

Winter is silence. Of all the seasons it most reflects calm, quiet and peace. We turn introspective like the season. Winter calls us to thoughtfulness. We think of a new year, of beginnings and fresh resolve.

It is easy to think of silence as a dull, empty nothingness. An end. An abyss. But there is a silence that is

active, full and ripe with meaning. It is the inspiration and renewal that comes with relaxed calm. It is the bonding and warmth that grows between friends doing "nothing" together. It is the spaces between the notes which gives music texture and feel. It is the passing of that electric glance of empathy between two humans. It is a living silence that moves us deeper than the best of words.

I believe that we all tend to talk and do too much. We fill up and crowd silence with sound, space with things, and stillness with activity. The question is always, "What are we going to do about it?" Seldom do we ask what we are now doing too much of. Much of our incredible penchant for busy-ness, activity and progress seems merely an outlet for an uneasy nervousness, machine-paced, with no place to rest. We know activity, but we seem largely ignorant of how much is enough, or when to quit. There is precious little quiet, stillness or peace within our design of the world.

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February Calendar

Meetings

Thursday, February 3, 7:00 p.m. Board of Trustees Meeting at the home of Bryan Dixon, 10 Heritage Cove in Logan. This month we continue our discussion on conservation and begin planning for spring outings. All BAS members are invited to join us as we review ongoing projects, priorities and issues.

Tuesday, February 8, 7:00 p.m. Audubon Council of Utah Legislative Update meeting at the Ogden Nature Center. This meeting will review the status of pending legislation that affects our environment in Utah. Carpooling will be available, leaving from Logan at 6:00 p.m. Call Bryan Dixon, 752-6830, for more information.

Thursday, February 10, 7:00 p.m. General Meeting, 2nd Floor of Chapter Two Books, 130 N 100 E, Logan: The Practical Side of Owling. Dick Hurren, BAS Trustee and director of our nesting box program, will share the real poop about how and where to find owls right here in Cache Valley and the Bear River Range. He'll show us photos of our local owls, play their calls and tell us about local owl hangouts in our valley and mountains. We'll get to take apart some owl pellets from different species to see what they've been eating. January through March are prime courtship months for our owls, and Dick's presentation will help us understand and appreciate these special raptors. The public is invited (bring your friends!); refreshments following.

Advance Notice: Saturday-Sunday, April 29-30, Audubon Council Retreat, The Amalga Barrens – A Place Misunderstood. The spring retreat of the Audubon Council of Utah will be held in Smithfield, Utah to focus on the Amalga Barrens. We will be offering field trips during the day and a panel discussion Saturday night. Saturday night will feature a potluck dinner and BAS will treat everyone to a pancake breakfast Sunday morning. We're expecting a number of visitors from out-of-town, and would like to offer Saturday night accommodations in the homes of BAS members. If you'd like to volunteer a bed in your home to our visitors or if you'd like to help organize this retreat, please contact Bryan, 752-6830 or bdixon@xmission.com. The Council is a fun group of dedicated environmentalists – come get to know them and join in the discussions.

Field Trips

All BAS trips are open to the public. For more information, call the trip leader listed at the end of each description.

Saturday, February 12. Wetlands in Winter. Take an easy walk among the reeds and rushes of the Cutler Marsh to look for tracks and signs of wildlife in winter. Meadow voles, beaver, and muskrats, cattails, rushes, and willows; all try to make it through the winter somehow. Their tracks and trails tell the tales of their life – and death – in the marsh. Depending on the

weather, we may venture into the Bud Phelps Wildlife Management Area or the marshes near Benson. Either way, we'll enjoy a winter day in the Valley. Meet 9:00 a.m. at the parking lot north of the Straw Ibis at 150 North 50 East, Logan. Dress warmly; back by noon. For more information, call Kayo, 563-8272.

Saturday, March 11. Bald Eagles in Willard Canyon. This is a perfect trip to chase away cabin fever and get some exercise for spring. This is an annual outing to observe Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, and other raptors from a vantage point *above*. We leave at 10:00 a.m. from the parking lot north of the Straw Ibis (150 North 50 East, Logan) and carpool to Willard Bay State Park about 10 miles south of Brigham City. From there the group will drive to the Willard gravel pit and climb up the slopes to a breathtaking (literally) overlook of Willard Canyon. For a change, we'll have the vantage point from above the eagles (which probably makes them really nervous, don't you think?) and we'll look for others roosting in the conifers across the canyon. We may even see some wildflowers poking up toward the spring. It's a strenuous hike, so bring good boots, warm clothes and lunch. Return by late afternoon.

Saturday, March 25. Birding the Sewage Lagoons. Ah, sewage . . . Covering 200+ acres of our valley floor, the Logan Sewage Lagoons are known affectionately as the Square Lakes, an endearment coined by those who've climbed the surrounding mountains and looked down on their unnatural shape. But though unnatural, they are a haven for waterfowl, a refuge of open water isolated from hominids where they can mingle in relative peace. "Relative," because late March and early April is the peak of the waterfowl migration, and these birds are on their way north with lusty hearts and ambitions for new families. They'll find nesting sites in the lakes and streams of Idaho, Montana and Canada where they find swarms of insects and rich plant life to feed their young. They pause in Cache Valley for a bit of R&R. We'll see thousands of them chasing each other, trying to impress the opposite gender, and strutting their avian abilities. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the parking lot north of the Straw Ibis (150 North 50 East, Logan) to carpool to the lagoons; we return by lunch. For more information, contact Keith Archibald, 752-8258.

Friday night and Saturday, tentatively for April 7-8. Grouse Courtship Camping Trip. Visit the Curlew National Grassland in southern Idaho to observe Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse strutting their stuff. We'll camp Friday night at the Curlew Campground north of Snowville at the south end of Stone Reservoir and get together at 7 p.m. around the campfire to listen to Ken Timothy, Forest Service biologist, discuss the grouse mating rituals. Saturday, we'll get up before dawn to watch the birds on their leks, and then return to camp for breakfast. Afterward, we'll visit other places at the grasslands to look for other birds and creatures. We may even get to hear a loon! Return Saturday afternoon. Carpools encouraged; reservations required; call LeRoy Beasley at 753-7491.

Board Stuff (as opposed to bored stiff . . .)

Environmental Education – Hot news on another Jack Greene project! Pacificorp has just announced a \$2000 GreenCorps grant awarded to the Stokes Nature Center for a Bear River Watershed Education Project, "A River Runs Through Us." The grant will be used to purchase monitoring equipment for the ongoing project that continues to gain momentum. The Bear is finally getting its due!

Five sets of equipment will be shared by the 10 neighboring school districts that are participating in the project. The mission is to link teachers, students, and field professionals throughout the 500 mile Bear River watershed for the purpose of monitoring the chemistry, biological and physical parameters of the watershed to determine its health and problems. Considerable monitoring activity has already begun. Schools will also participate in restoration projects, presentations of their data to decision makers, and celebrate the Bear River resource by writing a chapter about the Bear that runs through their school district (county). A web site is nearly completed, so the field data collected by students can be compiled and shared, along with project updates and narratives on the Bear.

Robes Parish, a USU grad student, is coordinating the project and doing an excellent job. There's a strong steering committee, and they're establishing volunteer coordinators and mentors whom will assist schools in their region. They are pursuing additional funding to expand participation and assure continuation of the effort over time. Congratulations, Jack!

On the Bird Front – Reinhard Jockel became the eighth member of the "200 Club," having seen 200 species in Cache County in one year. Yes! Dave Drown has just reached the 225 life milepost and Sue Drown has 237 species identified in Cache Valley.

Changes in the Stilt – Pretty neat issue, huh? We've had several authors volunteer to begin more or less regular columns for our monthly newsletter. Krista McHugh is starting a Kid's Corner to help parents get their kiddos out of the house and into nature – without disowning them (or being disowned). Kayo Robertson is offering a feature describing changes in our local natural world that we might look for in the coming month. Jim Cane and Dick Hurren are publishing information on wildlife and environmentally friendly "yardscapes." If you've found particular plants or landscaping techniques that work well right here in Cache Valley, give them a call (numbers on the back of the *Stilt*). All of these folks will enrich our *Stilt*. Give 'em feedback on how you like their stuff, and I'm sure they'd love to get some new ideas from time to time.

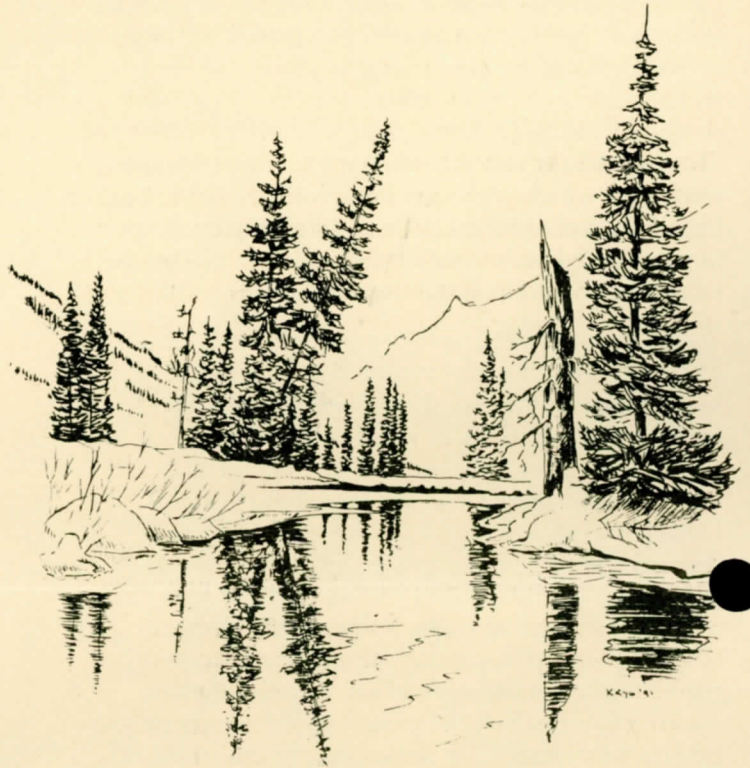
A pretty bizarre winter, I know. Look for nature to be a little different this winter, and take note. It's the change that's often most interesting.

— Bryan Dixon, President

Winter Silence

Continued from page 1.

Thoreau once wrote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world." Wild country is quiet country, it's fundamental features, space and silence. Wild creatures spend most of their lives in a state of silent, aware watchfulness. Whether hunted or hunter their survival depends upon it. Although we need no longer fear the quiet tread of wild predators, our survival may well still pivot upon our ability to listen to the world.



Beyond our towns, farms and fields, now mantled with snow, we still have the fortune of some measure of wild country. My New Year's wish is that we all might go there, turn off our engines and listen. This beautiful planet of ours, spinning so silently in an ocean of space, stillness and peace, is saying some wonderful and frightening things. We need to hear them.

— Kayo Robertson

Bird Friendly, Water Miserly Landscaping for Cache Valley and Northern Utah

Most of us are busy stocking our feeders this time of year, but we could be growing feeders for those species that like seeds or fruits. As a relative new-comer to Utah, I find that our area is rather complex in terms of soils and climate, and not at all like Alabama where I was before this! Moreover, many of our landscaping plants are chosen as though water were an unlimited resource in our converted sagebrush desert. We can't simultaneously ask the Wasatch Front to rein in their

water use (rather than building the Amalga reservoir) and then water our own properties profligately (or when we do, then it should be to gain a specific benefit).

We found a few limited attempts to list some of the local landscaping possibilities for our area and circumstances, but I think that vastly more expertise, observations, and personal experience can be tapped through many of you, our Audubon membership. After all, who knows birds better and watches them more? And among you I know there to be some avid gardeners and landscapers. A compilation of what trees, shrubs and herbaceous garden plants feed or shelter our native birds will be very useful to share, not only among each other, but with the local nurseries and community at large. If the plant is native or tolerant of drought, then so much the better for our yards. If it feeds native pollinators *and* bees, well, those of you that know me know that I will be highlighting these species in particular! If it is invasive and exotic (e.g. Russian olive), we should note that too and avoid it.

Where do we start? The logistics of efficiently reporting and compiling this information is still being developed by your Board; interested members should definitely express that interest to any one of us during a meeting or by mail (my address is 1710 E 1140 N, Logan UT 84341). Please note if you use the Internet or not. During the coming month, as you page longingly through the new seed catalogs, list down the locally-grown plants you know to shelter birds, or feed birds with their seeds and fruits. You can skip the more obvious plants (for instance, spruces and junipers for winter shelter) unless you know varieties that are superior (for instance, *which* crabapple's fruits are eaten first by waxwings?). We are especially interested in plants that you grow (or have seen grown locally) that are attractive, water miserly, feed or shelter birds, may be native, and seem to be overlooked by the local nurseries and homeowners. If you are an apartment dweller, keep your eyes open for which birds eat from which plants when. For instance, birds other than waxwings and robins that dine on fruits here during the winter months. As a start, what can you tell us about any of these:

- Evergreen shrubs with fruits attractive to birds.
- Winter fruits taken by birds other than waxwings and robins.
- Seed-producing trees that are attractive to winter birds (e.g. siskins) but use less water than birch.
- Shrubs or trees whose fruit is taken by birds early in the winter.
- Attractive, reliable sunflower varieties with seeds appealing to birds like gold finch. What about other members of the sunflower family (e.g. *Gaillardia*, *Echinacea*)?
- Any thistles that are not invasive but are popular with siskins and gold finch?
- Crabapple-variety names with smaller fruit sought out by birds.

Hackberry (*Celtis*)—*C. reticulata* is native. Which birds eat the fruits?

Hawthorn (*Crataegus*)—desirable species and varieties whose fruit attracts birds.

Other fruits: What is your experience with cultivation and avian benefits of: serviceberry (*Amelanchier*), elderberry (*Sambucus*), buffaloberry (e.g. *Shepherdia argentata*, *rotundifolia*, more?), silverberry (*Elaeagnus commutata*), currants (esp. golden currant—*Ribes aureum*), sumacs (*Rhus*), aronia and more?

— Jim Cane

Nominations Needed

Bridgerland Audubon Society is seeking nominations for officers and members of its board of trustees. A slate of candidates must be presented to the membership by our annual banquet, in mid-April. Consequently, the nominations committee (Bruce Pendery, Val Grant, and Allen Christensen) is seeking nominations from you, our members. We need nominees for president, vice-president, and secretary. These are two-year terms. We also need two (or more) nominees for the board of trustees. These are three-year terms.

If you would like to nominate someone for one of these positions, please call Bruce, Val, or Allen (see phone numbers on back of the *Stilt*). Or you can e-mail Bruce at bruce@mail.nl.net. Don't be bashful—nominate yourself! It's a great way to get involved in many interesting and worthwhile activities and to meet many interesting people. All nominations will be kept confidential.

— Bruce Pendery

Third Great Salt Lake Issues Forum

Scheduled for Friday and Saturday, February 25-26. The Third GSL Issues Forum has a slate of notable speakers on science and public policy. The forum takes place at the Quality Inn Downtown at 14 West 600 South in Salt Lake City, beginning at 1:00 p.m. on the 25th and continuing until Saturday about 5:00 p.m. Some of the speakers include: Charles F. Wilkinson; Moses Lasky, Professor of Law at the University of Colorado; Bob Adler, Professor of Law at the University of Utah; Genevieve Atwood, Chief Education Officer at the Earth Science Foundation; Cameron Davis, Lake Michigan Federation; Mike Hirshfield, Chesapeake Bay Foundation; Jim Corven, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences at the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network; and others.

This forum is sponsored by Friends of the Great Salt Lake. Registration is \$50 (\$60 after February 11). For more information call Lynn de Freitas, 801-583-5593 or 801-582-1496, or idefreitas@earthlink.net.



Birds' Winter Clothes

It's COLD out there! Have you ever thought about how birds stay warm? They don't have clothes and blankets to hold body heat in like we do; they don't have warm fur coats like a cat or dog; they just have feathers... they must be freezing!

Not so! In fact, birds are able to keep warm in some very cold places, thanks to the way their bodies are constructed and the way they behave. Here are some of the ways they keep warm...

Birds' Boots

Birds don't wear shoes like we do. Most of them don't even have feathers on their feet! But they are able to avoid freezing their toes off in several ways. For starters, in cold weather the blood vessels in birds' feet constrict, or become smaller. That reduces the amount of blood that flows to the feet and the amount of heat that's lost. If you see a goose on an icy lake, it's quite possible that her feet are only slightly above freezing, but her body is warm. Our blood vessels can do that too...have you ever sat in a cold place and noticed that your hands were cold while your body was warm?

A bird can also keep its legs and feet warm by standing on one leg and tucking the other into its breast feathers. Sometimes they'll drop down, lay down, and even tuck in their bills to keep their body heat from escaping.

Birds' Coats

Though birds' feathers may not look too warm, anyone who's worn a down coat knows just how cozy feathers can be. When it's cold outside, birds fluff up their feathers. This increases the amount of warm air trapped near their bodies. Have you ever seen a little bird at your feeder that has puffed up its feathers so much that it looks like a round ball?

Birds' feathers can be not only warm, but dry as well! Birds have an oil gland at the base of their tails. They use their beaks (and sometimes feet!) to spread the oily wax over their feathers. Birds that spend lots of time in the water have very large oil glands and regularly spread the waxy stuff on to keep their feathers in good condition and waterproof.

Activities

- If you have a feeder, have your children watch the birds that forage on the ground (like juncos,

sparrows, and other finches). Do they pause, drop down, and cover their legs and feet while looking for food? Are some of them all puffed up in trees or oiling their feathers? See if your child can predict how warm or cold it is outside by how the birds are acting.

- Take a trip to Logan's First Dam, or any other kid-friendly viewing place, to look at wintering waterfowl. See if the kids can identify ways that the birds are keeping warm.
- Take a hike along Logan Canyon's River Trail, or any river or stream that's safe for strolling with kids, to look for wintertime birds and to identify how they're keeping warm. Make sure to look for American Dippers!
- Play "I Spy" for birds that are actively keeping themselves warm anytime you're in the car or on a hike.
- Ask your kids to draw pictures of how they keep warm and compare it to how birds keep warm.

Information Sources:

Ehrlich, P.R., Dobkin, D.S., and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Author's Note:

Part of the fun and frustration about young children is that they have minds, interests, and schedules of their own. Sometimes it's thrilling to have such young humans express their thoughts, other times it can be downright discouraging—like the time you plan an afternoon hike, only to have the kids voice their boredom less than five minutes down the trail.

The purpose of this column is to help parents minimize those painful experiences during family nature outings by sharing information and creative ideas that appeal to kids. Hopefully, this will help open our children's eyes, minds, and hearts to the wonders of the natural environment.

If you have ideas to share, please contact Krista at 258-1232.

Banquet Birding Bonuses

We stated earlier this year that we wanted to reinstitute the BAS awards for listing. In years past, Allen Stokes used to present patches for having seen 150 species in Cache County and hats for reaching the 200 level. Earlier this year we announced a similar program for year lists, but we want to open it up. At this year's banquet, we'll recognize all those members who have identified 100, 150, and 200 total species within Cache County – not just in 1999. We'll be presenting awards, so get your lists in to us as soon as possible. Mail your list to Reinhard Jockel, 127 North Main #10, Logan, or send them to BAS, P.O. Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501 (email: stilt@xmission.com).

