



# The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

## CBC Hits an All-time High

**D**ark, almost midnight, running out of time and karma. Surely, the police will show up any minute. Isn't this park closed at dusk? Is that the watchman over there in that official-looking pickup? Does a wood duck count if it's in the zoo, but it flies? Pull the car over to the fence to shine the headlights in the duck pen. Where are those bloody things? There. Yeah, but are they pinioned? Can't count it if it's pinioned so it can't fly - that's cheating. Dang, why don't they trim these shrubs? No use, we're not going to get one here.

Two doctors and a 50 year-old look furtively around. It'd be a helluva note to call home from the police station. Yeah, but all we need is ONE more species to break our all time CBC record.

Right. Head over to the race track pond, they're usually there. Park across the street, look both ways, wait for that

car to go around the corner. Slip through the fence, trying to look like we're supposed to be there. Memories of teen years at summer camp trying to avoid the streetlights. Reach the pond and shine a light across the surface using our best light-gathering binoculars. Mallards. Ack! Don't need no stinking mallards. Back to the cars.

The other pond west of Willow Park is no good, either. Not even mallards there. Maybe 20/20? No chance, we'd never see a wood duck across that distance with this light.

Hey! There's a small - miniscule - trap of water on the road between here and the golf course. Might as well. Sighing relief at not being "caught" (yet), we roll onto public streets. Slow, slow, it's right up here. Don't get out of the car. Stop. Roll down the window quietly. Give me the light, you take the binocs. There, see 'em? Move the light to the right. No, back to the

center. THERE! See it? YEAH! A male - beautiful (as always)! YEESS!!! NINETY-NINE species, and a new record for the Logan CBC!

My wife didn't even ask when I got home. But the next morning, she couldn't stand it any longer. "Did you see it?" Yep.

With all the recent warm weather, we thought we just might break our previous record this year. November had set records for cold, but December had stayed warm. A storm front was due on Sunday, but Saturday looked promising if the wind would just hold off. It did; temps ranged from 28-48°F and the wind was calm all day with broken and partly cloudy skies. It was a lovely day to be birding.

Over 60 Auduboners took to the field December 14th for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Christmas Bird Count here in Logan.

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## CBC

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We figured there were 115 species possible, but the warm weather worked both for and against us. On the one hand, migrants such as gulls hadn't been pushed out yet. On the other hand, species from the north, such as ferruginous hawk and northern shrike hadn't been forced south. We've been trying to

### New Records

Species	2002 Count	Previous High	Year of Previous Record
Ring-necked duck	1,080	568	2000
Lesser scaup	414	228	2000
Long-tailed duck	1	—	—
Common goldeneye	1,382	367	1998
Bufflehead	54	26	2001
Ruddy duck	118	105	1983
California gull	1,324	220	1995
Herring gull	3	1	1983
Townsend's solitaire	281	148	1994
European starling	66,273	9,741	1986
Savannah sparrow	1	—	—

break 100 species ever since we got really serious about this CBC in 1975. The best we'd

been able to do was 98, but that was almost 15 years ago. Recent years hovered around 90. Maybe this was the year.

The rumors were flying at the compilation potluck dinner Saturday night. It seemed every team had a good day and almost every team had a story to tell. When the data were compiled, we had 98 species to tie the record and 85,054 individuals (that's not a typo, folks). A late night foray added the record-breaking 99<sup>th</sup> species. So, here's the analysis by group.

Waterfowl were up as a group, as the records (at left) show. Very probably, they were bunched up, feeling the urge to migrate but not yet committed, some perhaps pushed here by the incoming storm fronts to the north. Other high counts included canvasback, northern pintail, greater scaup and our first-ever long-tailed duck (formerly old-squaw). The only daytime "miss" was wood duck (apparently because that team was unwilling to resort to the, shall we say, questionable tactics of certain individuals at the zoo).

No new records for raptors, but numbers were strong. It was the second highest year for northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, rough-

legged hawk, and merlin. These are meadow vole-eaters, and any hiker in the valley knows we have a good crop of the little furry beasties. One sharp-eyed group also found a northern goshawk out in the valley.

"Chicken-birds" were well represented, though not by big numbers. We did find blue grouse for only the third time in our history.

Rail numbers were unremarkable, though it's always haunting to hear these secretive animals in the winter.

Coots, killdeer, and Wilson's snipe (formerly common snipe) were remarkable in their relative absence (16, 8 and 2, respectively), surprising considering the warmth of the day. Could it be due to weak breeding success as a result of the drought?

Gull numbers were more consistent with our expectations. In past years, we'd watch gull populations shrink to zero almost overnight when the first severe December cold front blows through. But, with no bitter cold this year, the gulls are taking advantage of the Landfill Café. We had very high numbers of California and ring-billed gulls and

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# Audubon Calendar

January 2003

**8 BAS Board of Trustees Meeting.** The BAS Board of Trustees holds its regular monthly meeting Wednesday night at 7 p.m. at the offices of Bio-Resources, 135 E. Center, Logan. All interested are invited to attend.

**9 Burrowing Owls: Clowns of the Desert.** Jim and Bonnie Messinger will be the featured speakers this Thursday at our January general meeting. They are self-described "desert rats." For the past three years they have spent virtually every weekend from mid-March until mid-July observing and recording the life of burrowing owls, the "clowns of the desert." They have compiled a video presentation that provides a unique up-close and personal look into the lives and behavior of burrowing owls. The meeting will be held at the Logan City Meeting Room, 255 N. Main at 7 p.m.

**11 Another Visit to Some Special Bird Feeding Set-ups.** A number of those who participated in our visit to some fancy feeder set-ups in late November 2002 requested that we do another one. Therefore, come with us and see the various types of feeders, seeds, and water devices in use locally. We will visit some of the same fantastic places we visited last time, but will add some new ones also. Bring binoculars and dress warmly; most of the observing will be done outdoors. Leave at 8:30 a.m. from the parking lot between Café Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) in Logan. Carpooling will be available; beginning birders are welcome. We will try to finish up by about 1 p.m. For more information call Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653.

**18 Birds and Big Game.** Join trip leaders Bryan Dixon and Jean Lown as we ski and showshoe around Blind Hollow in Logan Canyon. There should be some good winter birding as well as possible viewings of big game, particularly moose. Meet at the parking lot between Café Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) at 8:30 a.m. Bring your own equipment, dress warmly, and bring binoculars and a lunch—we may not be back until late afternoon. For further information call Bryan or Jean, 752-6830.

**25 Winter Birding in Box Elder County.** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Café Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) or at Dick Hurren's place in Brigham City at 8:45 (call Dick for directions) for a tour of some winter birding hot spots in Box Elder County. Carpooling will be available. Dick will, of course, try to have some owls spotted in advance. Itinerary will vary according to the weather, open water, etc. Dress warmly and bring a lunch because the trip may last into mid-afternoon. We don't want to make promises in advance, but there are almost always some bird species in Box Elder County that are not in Cache Valley. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. For more information call Dick Hurren, (435) 734-2653.



*If you'd like to come along on a field trip but do not have binoculars, call Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653. He'll try to find a pair for you to use.*

## CBC

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even three herring gulls. (The last time the latter made a CBC appearance was 1983!)

Rock doves were high, but they're year round residents so probably just had a good breeding year. Mourning doves were the second highest record, which we can only attribute to the weather as these birds migrate to California and Arizona for the winter.

Small owls were generally scarce – only one western screech and one northern saw-whet, and no northern pygmy owls. Perhaps the intense cold last February resulted in severe mortality? Large owls fared somewhat better, particularly vole-eaters such as great horned and short-eared owls.

Indeed, there appear to be so many voles about that we wonder whether, if the winter turns severe to the north, there's some chance of a snowy owl making an appearance here in Cache Valley.

Woodpeckers were about normal; northern flickers were a little higher than average.

Horned lark counts were very low. We've often found hundreds of

these in past years, though this may have been due to snow cover pushing them closer to roads where the snow is blown away and they are more visible. They're probably out there, but just dispersed over the thousands of acres of harvested grain fields.

Corvid numbers were also unremarkable, though there was a lucky sighting of a western scrub-jay along the canal east of 1600 East.

Small passerines yielded no discernable pattern. Chickadees, nuthatches and wrens were seen in normal numbers; canyon wrens were heard to be singing complete songs in Green Canyon rather than just call notes. The only low count involved golden-crowned kinglets – only one of these little guys, whereas we usually find a dozen or more. Yellow-rumped warblers on the other hand were the second highest count on record. This was also only the second time in 37 years we've seen savannah sparrow. Another sharp-eyed sighting was a white-winged crossbill in the Smithfield area.

Larger passerines proved more numerous. The number of Townsend's solitaires shattered the previous record, while hermit thrushes were found on the Canal Trail below USU and there was a male eastern bluebird

northeast of the Logan Golf and Country Club along the canal trail. (Interestingly our CBC records of this latter species account for two of the four state records for this bird!)

Blackish birds, however, offered the most impressive display. We had high, though not record numbers of red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds, both of which are migratory.

Then, late in the afternoon at the Barrens, one team had just finished its count, putting away the scopes and tripods after marveling at the numerous soaring harriers, when someone yelled, "Look!" We turned to see the beginning of a 10 minute cloud of black birds. We started counting, 10, 20, 30, ... No, 100, 200, 300, N000, 1000, 2000, 3000... When we finished we had over 60,000 European starlings. Ack!!! Starlings!

Appropriately named *Sturnus vulgaris*, these birds are NOT generally migratory except below the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel. We live at 41° north latitude, so we're just on the edge of that line. So, have these birds come to stay the winter? We certainly hope not! Following release of 80-100 individuals in Central Park of New York City in 1890, their ancestors



fanned out across America. A certain Eugene Schieffelin was trying to introduce all of the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's writings to the United States. (Damned good thing he wasn't into Dr. Seuss, I say.) By 1950, they had reached the western edge of the U.S., and our own CBC listed them in the hundreds as early as 1956. However, though past counts have reached almost 10,000, we've never seen a mass such as this. This was a sinuous stream of birds, awesome even considering their makeup.

And, why the bad rap? Mainly because their populations are out of control; they breed so successfully that their sheer numbers magnify the damage they cause as individuals to intolerable levels. European starlings spread disease among other birds, take over nest holes preventing other species from breeding, and cause untold damage to crops. Farmers even suffer economic loss from the animal feed lost to these voracious birds. On the other hand, they have served as a bounteous and interesting source for research. The Birds of North America monograph on European starlings lists over 100 references and acknowledges findings gleaned from studies on these birds including "flight

mechanics, energy metabolism, endocrinology, renal function, and sensory perception." They are sometimes even kept as pets because of their intelligence and "personality." If there just weren't so many of them. Needless to say, the announcement at the compilation potluck was met with something less than warm enthusiasm.

There were other records, too. We had 67 participants on this count! See below for a list of everyone who helped out. And, oh yeah, the potluck! Once again, Sue and Dave Drown opened their home for the evening. There were great dishes, good stories, and plenty of cheer. Though many of the attendees will learn about us having broken the record only when they read this article, it is because of their diligence, hard work, and tireless enthusiasm that BAS did so.

The most important aspect of the count, however, is our contribution to citizen science. These data will be submitted to the national database where researchers and the lay public can access them on line:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/cbc.html>

This is a unique and important source of infor-

mation on a part of the world around us; thanks to everyone who participated.

The results of our local CBC counts back to 1956 are also available electronically (MS Excel spreadsheet) or by hard copy (\$1.00 to cover postage and printing). Contact Bryan Dixon at [bdixon@xmission.com](mailto:bdixon@xmission.com) or 10 Heritage Cove, Logan, UT 84321.

— Bryan Dixon and  
Keith Archibald

## 2002 CBC Participants

Jamie Anderson, Laurel Anderton, Danny Archibald, Keith Archibald, Bob Atwood, Dennis Austin, Amanda Bakian, John Barnes, Terry Barnes, Pat Bohm-Trostle, Gordon Bosworth, Skyler Bosworth, Jim Cane, Becky Canning, Allen Christensen, Bobbie Cleave, Josh Cooper, Marianne Crawford, Janna Custer, Mary DeByle, Norb DeByle, Bryan Dixon, David Drown, Susan Drown, Audrey Eisenhauer, John Ellerbeck, Barbara Farris, Kay Forsyth, Jack Greene, Adair Holden, Joanne Hughes, Dick Hurren, Mike Jablonski, Glenn Jarrell, Reinhard Jockel, Linda Kervin, Jim Kingsland, David Kotter, Kurt Kotter, Caitlin Laughlin, Eddie Berry, Jon Laughlin, Steve Laughlin, Dean Lester, DeAnn Lester, Jean Lown, Merrilyne Lundahl, Bill Masslich, Jake Masslich, Zane Masslich, Cecelia Melder, Eric Meyer, John Mull, Brian Nicholson, Bruce Pendery, Will Pitkin, Brett Roper, Lawrence Ryel, Ron Ryel, Ann Shifrer, Brian Spykerman, Alice Stokes, Kim Sullivan, Glen Trostle, Steve Walker, Dennis Welker, Martin Welker.

# Chapter Notes

Falconer and Wildlife Educator, Luke Smith and three of his most regal birds of prey charmed BAS members at the December general meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Smith became a falconer at age 14, only because the law wouldn't allow him to do so any sooner. He's been around birds of prey his entire life. Smith, now President of the Wildlife Society for students at USU, has worked with the Division of Wildlife here and in the East-



Falconer Luke Smith says the great horned owl is generally people's favorite bird in his presentation because its face is the most human-like.

ern Uinta Basin. His work has also included rehabilitation of injured birds of prey in the Eastern Uintas where he handled up to 25 injured birds at a time.

Of falconry, Smith stated "It's not a hobby...it's a lifestyle." The laws associated with falconry are stringent; requirements include state and federal permits, a two-year apprenticeship for which one must capture their own red tail or kestrel from the wild, a state

exam, and equipment and facilities to meet state and federal standards. In general, Smith discourages getting into falconry, "unless your really serious," simply because of the enormous life commitment these birds require. "But," he added, "once you get started, you'll never stop."

Featured in the presentation were the Harris hawk, gyre falcon, and the great horned owl. The Harris hawk was a hot item to see in this cold climate, as his favorite perch is on top of a cactus. These social birds are the most common to hit the movie screen since they breed well in captivity and are easily trained.

The great horned owl charmed us all with his wide eyes, fluffy feathers, and whimsical calls. Smith informed us that this is generally the people's favorite of the presentation because it is the most human-like—with big, forward eyes and a round, flat face. Ironically, he told us, "Owls are ornery birds." I guess looks can be deceiving.

The gyre falcon is Smith's all-time favorite

bird of prey because of its incredible hunting capabilities. Falconry originated thousands of years ago—in Japan there are records of falconry from 3500 years ago—its purpose to catch birds before guns were invented. It became the sport of choice for royalty. Falcons can dive at speeds of up to 190 mph under normal circumstances to fall on its prey. Recently specially trained falcons have dived from airplanes with professional skydivers at speeds of up to 310 mph. These birds are filmed and then studied for their amazing aerodynamics.

Speaking of falcons, here's a note for your calendar sometime in February: the Falcon Sky Trials where specially bred homing pigeons, trained to outrun falcons, are set loose to race against each other and the falcons. Falconers from far and wide come with their birds to watch the event and show their birds. Smith recommended that any interested Audubon members attend. Watch your email for further information on this event.

-Joyce McMullin

# Welcome to BAS

## New Members

Sara Goeking  
Williams Family

## Renewing Members

John Dymerski  
Rebecca S Echols  
Edward & Deborah  
Evans

Kelly L Fornoff  
Kurt Alan Fornoff  
Douglas A Johnson

Harvey Mohr  
Louise Murch

# Bridgerland Audubon contacts

## Trustees

- 2000-2003 Mae Coover, 752-8871; Ron Goede, 752-9650  
Teri Peery, 753-3249
- 2001-2004 Merr Lundahl, 753-1707; Dave Drown, 752-3797;  
Jack Greene, 563-6816
- 2002-2005 Jim Cane, 713-4668; Joyce McMullin, 713-4399;  
Dick Hurren 435/734-2653; Jamie McEvoy, 753-  
3559

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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 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Send to stiltnews@hotmail.com.

## 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.
- Renewing member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.

My check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed (\$20 membership dues)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make all checks payable to National Audubon Society and send with this card to:  
National Audubon Society  
Membership Data Center  
PO Box 51001  
Boulder, CO 80322-1001  
W-52 Local Chapter Code: 7XCHA

Note to new National Audubon members: To get on *The Stilt* newsletter mailing list without the usual 8 week delay, contact Susan Durham, 753-5637, sdurham@cc.usu.edu.

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

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



# *The Stilt*

*Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society*

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