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The Stilt

Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Bridgerland's 50th Christmas Bird Count December 19th

One thing we know: it'll be cold. Other things we know: it'll be fun and there will be surprises. Oh, and something else: our data will help others understand global patterns in ecology.

We're talking about the Christmas Bird Count, the largest citizen science effort ever undertaken. Some readers will recall that the CBC was begun in 1900 by Frank Chapman and friends as an alternative to the Christmas Side Hunt, a misguided recreational pursuit where good old boys ventured afield after Christmas Dinner to see how many birds they could kill. In these more enlightened times—beginning over a century ago—we have moved to a more ecological activity—counting our avian partners on this planet.

The CBC is a hemispheric effort, with participants from Prudhoe Bay to Antarctica. In 2008 there were over 2124 count circles, each precisely 15 miles in diameter, centered on the same point every year. Almost 50,000 observers took to the field and another 9,400 watched feeders to count every bird they could find within the count circle during a 24-hour period between December 14 and January 5. The total: 65,596,663 birds. In the good ol' U.S. of A. and Canada, we collectively identified 661 species. Not bad, considering there are only 800-some species known to frequent this part of the globe. Of course, species diversity is somewhat higher in Central and northern South America, and the lucky guys in Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador racked up 420 species. For the first time in his-

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Other CBCs in Northern Utah

For updated information on all CBCs in Utah, visit <http://www.utahbirds.org/cbc/cbc.html>.

13 December, Sunday - Evanston WY and UT

One-half of the circle is in Utah, much of which is on the Deseret Land and Livestock Ranch. Those interested in participating please meet at the Horner's Nest, 8 miles north of Evanston on Highway 89, at 7:00 a.m. Contact: Tim Gorman at wyogoob@allwest.net or (307)679-0656.

16 December, Wednesday - Bear River Refuge

Meet at McDonald's (1838W. 2700N., Farr West - just east of I-15 exit 349) at 8:00 a.m. for breakfast or at 8:30 a.m. to carpool.

28 December, Monday - Bear Lake

Contact Dennis Austin for more information at (435)245-4177. Snow machines and skiers welcome; some needed.

30 December, Wednesday - Morgan

Meet at Utah DWR (515E. 5300S., South Ogden) at 7:30 a.m. to carpool to breakfast at the Spring Chicken Inn in Morgan, or meet at the inn at 8:00 a.m.

1 January, Friday - Antelope Island

Meet in the parking lot outside the Antelope Island State Park entrance kiosk at 8:00 a.m.

Coordinator: John Bellmon, (801)444-3704, bellmonj@comcast.net.

4 January, Monday - Montpelier, ID

Contact Dennis Austin for more information at (435)245-4177. Snow machines and skiers welcome; some needed.

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Local Bird Spotlight

"Top of the world, Ma!"
– was the famous line
by Jimmy Cagney in

the movie *White Heat*. Mr. Cagney may have been channeling a young Black Rosy-finch, for rosy-finches indeed live at the top of the world, in Utah anyway. This tough little guy (the rosy-finch, not Cagney) nests on sheer north-facing cliffs in the alpine zone of some of the tallest mountains in Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. They're the first birds in behind the retreating snowfields in the spring, and they're the last birds to leave when the winter storms march across the high mountains.

Utah is a stronghold for Black Rosy-finches both in summer and winter. William Behle, Utah's premier ornithologist, and his student Norman French recorded summering Black Rosy-finches in the Raft River Mountains, the Wasatch Range, the Uintas, the Tushars, and the La Sals. The best place to see them in the summer is Bald Mountain Pass on the Mirror Lake highway. But bring your oxygen tank, the pass is at 10,600 feet and the peak is a breath-taking mile-long hike to nearly 12,000 feet.

In winter, Black Rosy-finches can be found almost anywhere in Utah. They are primarily altitudinal mi-

grants – they move from the high mountains to lower elevation basins and valleys. In some years

sional Gray-crowned Rosy-finch. These winter flocks feed on seeds in windblown openings, roadsides, areas where plants protrude above snow, and occasionally at winter feeders.

Black Rosy-finches start nesting in mid June while there's still plenty of snow on the breeding grounds. Their cup nests are made grass, moss, hair, feathers and are protected from rain and hail by a rocky roof or overhang.

During the nesting period, the female does pretty much all the work. She selects the nest site (while the male fights off other males); she builds the nest (while the male fights off other males); she lays the eggs (while the male fights ...you get the idea).

Norman French observed "The male may attempt to gather material, but after carrying it from one place to another it is eventually dropped". Big help, huh!

The female incubates her 3-6 eggs (while the male fights off other males) for 11-14 days; she then tends the young hatchlings and, lo and behold, look who shows up to help when the young are about 5 days old...the male Black Rosy-finch. Then, he actually helps feed the young until they're ready to leave the nest at around 20 days (a long nestling period for a bird this



they don't wander far from the mountains and may even stay at moderate elevations during light winters. In other years, they may wander well south and west of the mountains. They've been seen from Wendover to Jensen, and from Bridgerland to Dixie. I've seen wintering rosy-finches in Cedar Valley (Utah County) at 4800 feet and at over 8800 feet in Bryce Canyon National Park. Black Rosy-finches are not uncommon winter birds in Cache valley where they're often seen in mixed flocks with Horned Larks, longspurs, and the occa-

size). As the young fledglings learn to fly in August, they stay with both parents and their siblings for about 2 weeks; then the entire family moves into larger flocks (sometimes over 100 birds).

Until recently, Black Rosy-finches faced few threats on their remote tundra breeding grounds. However, an ominous threat has emerged that may seriously threaten this species throughout its range – Global warming. As the climate warms, plants and animals are predicted to move northward and/or upward (i.e., to higher elevations). But, the Black Rosy-finch is already as high as it gets. Will they be able to find some small refuges in Utah's alpine tundra? Will shrubs and trees take over the tundra? Will the birds' food (plants and insects) be able to survive? Will lower-elevation species move up and compete for food and space?

It's nearly impossible to predict the future for Black Rosy-finches since we know so little about them now. Almost all of our information comes from a few observations made in the 1950s! Virtually nothing is known about rosy-finch population sizes or trends, survival rates or causes of mortality, or what regulates populations (predation, starvation, disease, etc.).

We will not be able to conserve this species if we don't learn more about it. Research on Black Rosy-finches will not stop global warming, but it may give us some clues as to how to preserve this species despite climate change.

You may recall what happened to Jimmy Cagney when he was "on the top of the world" - he went up in flames. Let's not let that happen to our tough little Black Rosy-finch.

— by Frank Howe



Photos of Black Rosy-Finches are by Glen Tepke, all rights reserved. They are copyrighted and reprinted with his permission. These and other photos can be viewed in color at his website: pbase.com/gtepke.

Continued-from page 1

tory, there was also a count circle in Antarctica, where they found five species (two of them penguins). And, for the twentieth year in a row, the poor blokes at Prudhoe Bay, try as they might, found but one species—common raven.

Scientists find CBC data for various studies. In these times of global weirding, CBC data provide an invaluable tool for answering broad geographical questions. For example, Niven, Butcher, and Bancroft published a recent article in the summary of last year's CBC where they used CBC data to calculate that, as global temperatures have risen from 1966 to 2005, over 305 species have moved their winter ranges northward, with some groups having shifted by as much as 50-100 miles.

As in much of the U.S. the weather was fickle here in Cache Valley last year. It was so warm and lovely for much of December, we knew we were "in for it."

And, sure enough, just a couple of days before the count, the snows came and on count morning it was a chattering 2 degrees. Brrrrr! So, instead of breaking our record of 103 species, we were jubilant to find 92. Still, it was a grand time to be out, judging from the stories at the compilation potluck that evening.

So, as a consolation prize for last year, I hear Mother Nature is arranging for it to be warm and sunny (despite the fact that it's snowing as I sit here writing this in mid-November...) and we'll have lots of lingering migrants to find. Our count circle is divided into 11

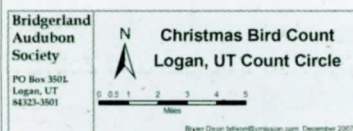
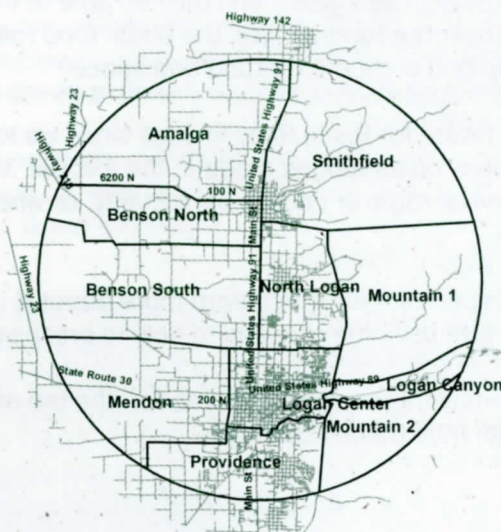
"sectors" each with a leader who assembles a crew and points them to the most productive spots. A 15 mile CBC circle is a lot of ground to cover, so we need help from all kinds of birders—expert and beginner alike. Anyone with an interest in birds and a pair of

eyeballs can make a real difference. We especially need folks to ski and snowshoe high on the mountains looking for Pine Grosbeaks. We need kids to help count the thousands of starlings and house sparrows. We need people patiently watching the feeders for the possible Harris' or White-throated Sparrow. We need people "not from these parts" who might identify unusual birds that are common where they come from. We need hikers, canoeists, and people in cars.

So, if you can dedicate a day to science and conservation and have a hankering to spend a day in the out-of-doors with like-minded nature lovers, join us on our 50th annual Christmas Bird

Count scheduled for Saturday, December 19th. Contact Bryan Dixon, 752-6830 or bdixon@xmission.com, to find out where you're needed. You can then scout the area in the weeks leading up to the count.

To cap off the day, we'll meet at the Cache Valley Unitarian Universalists building at 596 E. 900 N., Logan at 6:00 p.m. 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 and family. Be a part of history.



Bear Lake CBCs

The Utah Bear Lake CBC will be held on the usual date of December 28, a Monday this year. The Idaho Bear Lake CBC will be held on a later date of January 4, also a Monday.

During the past years, I have usually run about one group too few to adequately cover the circles. As a minimum for adequate coverage the Utah count needs six groups. I am always looking for rugged individuals for skiing or snowshoeing the high country conifer zone and/or a group with snowmobile availability to cover the USFS lands. The Idaho circle requires 5 groups, with 3 of the 5 areas very doable in less than a day. Both counts often turn up species not often found in the Logan count. For either or both counts, contact Dennis Austin at (435) 245-4177 or (435) 245-5261.

Audubon Calendar

December 2009

3 Board of Trustees Meeting: BAS Trustees meet at 7 p.m. at the Cache Valley Learning Center, 75 S. 400 West, Logan. Enter through the building's west doors. All are welcome to attend.

5 Logan Canyon Birding: Join Local birding expert Reinhard Jockel as he leads a field trip up Logan Canyon. Stops will include First Dam, Third Dam, and perhaps other areas as time and desire permits. First Dam is sure to offer up Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes as well as other wintering waterfowl. Third Dam is a fantastic place to find the elusive Winter Wren. Golden-crowned Kinglets, Townsend's Solitaire, and nuthatches will be target species as well. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North). Come prepared for the weather and for some light hiking around Third Dam. The field trip should be finished by early afternoon.

10 General Meeting: Join us at our same great location, the Cache Valley Learning Center (75 S. 400 West), as Candace Hutchinson, a Division of Wildlife Resources' Aquatic Invasive Species Biologist for the Northern Region of Utah, will speak to us and answer any questions or concerns we may have. She will discuss several topics that concern Utah waterways like Quagga and Zebra Mussels, carp, and invasive water plants and the efforts to control them. The meeting will start at 7 p.m. Enter through the building's west doors. All are welcome to attend and refreshments will be provided by Crumb Brothers and Caffe Ibis. We hope to see you there!

19 50th Christmas Bird Count: Come and enjoy good company and good birding while we attempt to break the record of two years ago, 103 species (yeah, right...). Although finding lots of species is a hoot, what's really important is that we carry on this tradition of citizen science, started in 1900. We need your help and extra pair of sharp eyes to be able to accomplish this goal. It does not matter if you are a seasoned veteran or someone who just learned what a bird is. We will be grouped so that we have people who are very good at identifying in every group. If you are interested in attending, please contact Bryan Dixon at 752-6830 or email him at bdixon@xmission.com. The cost for participating is only \$5 (students under 18 are free) to cover compilation and publication of the national data.

January 2010

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 Caffe 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.

Awards and More Awards

The Herald Journal recently announced an award to the Bear River Watershed Council from Patagonia for their work on restoring USFS ground that has been damaged by irresponsible ATV and 4WD users. BRWC will receive a cash award, but the real award is the appreciation of the many people — motorized and non-motorized — who are responsible in how they access public lands. BRWC has been particularly adept at involving a wide spectrum of interests in solving vehicle use problems. Rather than just complain to public land managers, they have organized volunteer efforts in the Bear River and Wellsville Ranges that apply muscle and mind to fix problems.

One of the latest efforts was installing thousands of feet of buck and rail fencing in Smithfield Dry Canyon just east of Smithfield to block vehicles from driving off road and destroying habitat. Other efforts have changed the face of Millville, Providence, and Green Canyon. Good on them!

The 11th Annual Great Salt Lake Bird Festival announced that Bridgerland Audubon will receive \$500 from the Lucky Bird Drawing sponsored by Swarovski Optik as the winner of the bird viewing contest. Names of all of the birds seen at the 2009 Festival were submitted as being eligible. Each field trip comprised a team and all teams that spotted the Lucky Bird, the Vesper Sparrow, during the festival were then entered into the Lucky Bird Drawing. Every field trip team chose one conservation group from a list including Farmington Bay Learning Center, A Utah Audubon Chapter, Ogden Nature Center, and Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. The field trip to 4 Mile Ranch in Cache Valley was the winning team and they chose Bridgerland Audubon to receive the \$500 from Swarovski Optik. Congratulations to Val Grant, field trip leader and thank you to Swarovski Optik for the donation.

Save the date for the 12th Great Salt Lake Bird Festival, May 13-17, 2010. The Festival features guided field trips in Northern Utah and Antelope Island State Park. There are also many activities for youth, artists and vendors, speakers and workshops. For a detailed program visit www.greatsaltlakebirdfest.com or call Neka Roundy at (801) 451-3286. Follow on Twitter@GSLBirdFest or join Great Salt Lake Bird Festival Group on Facebook.



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Barrens Grasses Good and Bad

It seems that there is no lack of non-native plant species that are quite capable of displacing natives at the Barrens Sanctuary. On the one hand, we have made progress with many of the aggressively invasive Eurasian weeds leftover in the two parcels that had previously been planted to dryland barley. This has been accomplished by a year of mechanical and chemical control, followed by seedings of mostly native grasses appropriate to the habitat, with occasional spot treatments in the years after establishment. Their ability to choke out the weeds is most evident on the parcel in the southwest corner of the property. Near the water edge on that parcel, I have had success in virtually eliminating the small beachheads made by teasel (whose populations elsewhere on the property are too massive to otherwise control).

However, on the narrow strip of uplands on the west side of the property, our tiny remnants with native wild-

flowers are being quickly invaded by the tall wheatgrass that was planted as a so-called conservation measure on the neighboring property to the west. It's a tough grass of the Asian steppe. Not a great disperser, but probably voles have been moving and burying the seeds. As you can see to the west of our property (take a walk through it), this grass makes a monoculture every bit as pure as a wheat field. The Australians have dealt with introductions of this grass, and warn users to never ever plant this grass in salty, periodically wet fine valley soils for the very reason that it will take over. Unfortunately, that is just the soil context at the Amalga Barrens. I'd welcome any insights as to its effect on ground-nesting native birds we have at the Barrens. Certainly it won't be doing any favors for the small patches of native wildflowers and shrubs on our property.

— by Jim Cane

Welcome to BAS

New Members

Lisa Michaels
Paul C. Bitters

James A. Aagard
Brian Creutzburg
Mr. T. J. Gordon
Patricia M. Lambert

Renewing Members

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Masako Nakashio
Nordale N. Nervig
O. Newbold
Ivan G. Palmblad
David Wallace
Mr. James L. Woodson

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

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Reinhard Jockel; Ryan O'Donnell, 232-8146
2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759;
Richard Mueller, 752-5637; Brandon Spencer, 753-2790
2009-2012 Ron Goede, 752-9650; Frank Howe, 787-1859
Robert Schmidt, 755-9262; Bret Selman, 257-5260

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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 15th of each month. Send to birdnerdut@gmail.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.

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: C9ZW520Z

☐ 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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As a word, "repurposing" grates a little on my ear, but the concept is laudable. Lately we have found applications with our birdfeeder. It hangs from the trunk of a venerable old apple tree in our backyard. In winter, the apple offers fruits and perches aplenty, but no cover for hungry juncos, chickadees and finches. What they want are the thick boughs of a conifer. After every Christmas, there is just such a tree, all decorated, standing in our living room. Rather than hurling that tree on the municipal heap straightaway – a rather abrupt fall from grace, if you ask me – we prop it up beneath our feeder, giving it new purpose as a shelter for winter feeder birds. Birds duck in and out of its needled boughs all day long, some even roosting there at night. Beneath it, juncos can safely clean up the millet seeds that rain down from the feeder above. A ring of upturned tomato cages beneath the feeder – they otherwise lie idle in our vegetable garden – are given a winter purpose of impeding any stray cats interested in the birds beneath our seed feeder. For no cost and scant effort, we provide our feeder birds with shelter from winter storms and protection from feline predators. To be complete, I suppose the seed feeder should be repurposed for some summertime use, but just what, I do not know. Yet.

