The Stilt

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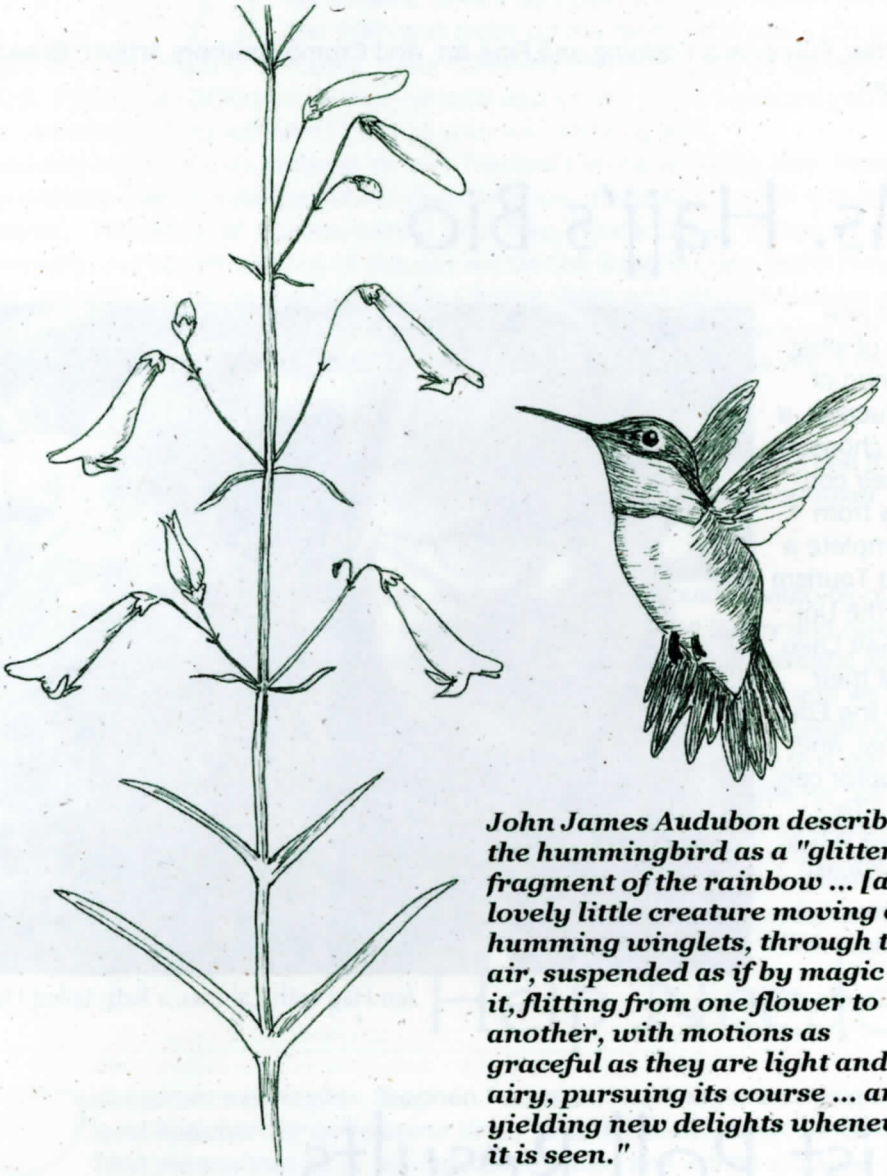
Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Gardening for Hummingbirds



The red-flowered Firecracker or Beardlip penstemon (Penstemon barbatus) is native to canyons and mountains of southern Utah. Like many species with tubular, red flowers, Firecracker penstemon is pollinated by hummingbirds, such as this Rufous hummingbird, (Selasphorus rufus). Five hummingbird species regularly occur in Utah. Illustration by Walter Fertig.

John James Audubon described the hummingbird as a "glittering fragment of the rainbow ... [a] lovely little creature moving on humming winglets, through the air, suspended as if by magic in it, flitting from one flower to another, with motions as graceful as they are light and airy, pursuing its course ... and yielding new delights whenever it is seen."

This article was written and originally published in the March isuue of the Sego Lily, the newsletter for the Utah Native Plant Society. The author of the article, Walter Fertig, and the photographer of the flowers, Bill Gray, have both given BAS permission to reprint the article in this issue of the Stilt.

by Walter Fertig

It is hard to find anyone who doesn't like hummingbirds. What isn't there to like about a tiny, iridescent green, orange, red, or purple bird that can hover in mid-air or even fly backwards? Or that lays the smallest eggs of any bird and has, proportionally, the largest heart? Or that pollinates some of our prettiest wildflowers and consumes large quantities of pesky mosquitoes

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Inside this Issue

Spring Banquet

Bridgerland Audubon's Spring Banquet will be held Wednesday, April 22nd at the Copper Mill Restaurant, 55 N. Main. Social hour with cash bar will begin at 6:00 p.m. followed by dinner and a presentation by Ms. Jen Hajj entitled "What We Learn from Raptors." Jen's presentation will focus on the practice of hawkwatching, especially in reference to the project at the Wellsvilles, and how it relates to a larger body of scientific work which informs policy and law.

Tickets are $25 and available at Caffe Ibis, Fuhrimans Framing and Fine Art, and Crumb Brothers Artisan Bread, or any Bridgerland Audubon Board member.

Ms. Hajj's Bio

When invited to describe what she does, Jen Hajj is never sure of what to say. She is indeed a woman of many talents and interests. She is an educator, a social scientist, a singer/songwriter, and chooses to devote much of her life to birds and their conservation. She received her BS in Biology from Westminster College in 1992 and will complete a Master's Degree in Parks, Recreation and Tourism in 2009. She teaches birding classes at the University of Utah and volunteers for Great Salt Lake Audubon, currently serving as the chair of their board of directors. In 2005, Jen became the Education Director of HawkWatch International, and performs programs and lectures about raptor conservation in venues throughout the West. Tonight's program will be about the work that HawkWatch International has performed in the Wellsville Mountains (our own backyard) and how it relates to the larger picture of living in harmony with all life in our shared environment.

Jen Hajj with Calurus, a Red-tailed Hawk

Lifelist Poll Results

The date don't lie! Bridgerland Audubon Society members must be some of the best in the world when it comes to number of North American species seen! Last month, I asked readers to email me with their lifelist numbers. The results were astounding! Our average lifelist number is 562.5 bird species. That is an amazing number!

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Audubon Calendar
April 2009

2 **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.

10-11 **Sage Grouse by Hardware Ranch** This will be an either/or opportunity for a variety of valley birders. BAS's very own Reinhard Jockel will be leading a camping trip beginning on the 10th and meet up the morning of the 11th with those who aren't quite as committed. If you are interested in camping, meet Reinhard in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 E. 150 N.) at 3:00 p.m. It may be cold and snowy (have I enticed you enough yet?!) so bring gear suitable for the conditions. You will need to bring your own food as well.
If you are interested in meeting up with Reinhard in the morning only, Reinhard will be waiting for you at the campground less than a mile east of Hardware Ranch. Hardware Ranch is located east of Hyrum up Blacksmith Fork Canyon. The lek is an approximate 2 mile hike, mostly uphill. It may be very muddy, so bring boots.
Obviously, our target species of the day will be the Sage Grouse performing their mating dances at their lek. However, we will also be on the lookout for Canyon Wren and other mountain specialties. After viewing the lek, we will make our way down Blacksmith Fork Canyon to Hyrum Dam where we will try to spot migrating ducks and perhaps a Virginia Rail. We plan on being home by about 4:00 p.m. For more information, please contact Jim Kingsland at 760-5049.

22 **Bridgerland Audubon Society Annual Banquet** Please see the announcement on page 2 for further information regarding the banquet and the keynote speaker.

25 **8th Annual Birdie Day** we have been graciously invited by our great rancher friends, the Selmans, to visit their property in extreme southern Cache Valley and observe Sharp-tailed Grouse doing their courting ritual. Following the grouse viewing, the Selmans will provide us with a wonderful ranchers' breakfast. Past participants on this trip have given it rave reviews and we are very grateful to the Selmans for affording us this opportunity. In addition to viewing the birds, it is an opportunity to see how truly responsible stewards of the land (the Selmans) carry out their ranching operations in a way that makes the land more and more productive and beautiful for both man and wildlife. This trip is suitable for both novice and experienced birders. Meet at 5 a.m. at the McDonalds parking lot in Hyrum. Carpooling will be available and mandatory from there. We plan to be back about 1 p.m. You must let Val Grant know in advance if you plan to attend (435) 752-7572.

Help Needed

Our current webmaster, Stephen Peterson, has been a very diligent and dedicated webmaster for Bridgerland Audubon for quite some time. Unfortunately, for us, he is moving on to the next chapter in his life. That means that he is leaving Cache Valley and will be engaged in other activities that will keep him from continuing to update and troubleshoot our website. Therefore, we are making a call to our general membership for anyone with web design or website upkeep experience to fill this necessary position. If you are interested, or if you know of anybody who might be interested in this position, please contact the BAS president, Val Grant, at (435) 752-7572.

Thank you, Stephen. Good luck to you in your new endeavors. You will be missed.

and gnats – all for free? Best of all, hummingbirds are not especially shy of people and will readily visit our suburban landscapes, so long as we provide for their basic needs.

Like all wildlife, hummingbirds need three basic things to survive: food, water, and a secure place to rest and nest. In nature, hummingbirds derive much of their sustenance from nectar. Produced by flowers as a bribe to attract pollinators to pick up and unload pollen, nectar is like a high-energy sports drink – loaded with carbohydrates. These carbs help power a hummingbird's rapid daytime metabolism and bursts of speed (in flight, a hummingbird strokes its wings up to 90 times per second and can attain top speeds of 66 miles per hour).

A well-balanced hummingbird diet also includes protein, which comes in the form of small insects and spiders. Hummingbirds perch on branches in wait of flying insects, much like a flycatcher, then take off to snatch their prey in mid-air. Slow motion photography shows that hummingbirds can spread their slender beaks open at a broad angle to create a larger-than-expected gape, perfect for sucking in bugs (not unlike their distant relatives, the swifts).

Hummingbirds have almost no sense of smell, relying instead on their exceptional vision to locate flowers for feeding. They are especially fond of red or orange flowers, but will also visit blue, pink, or white blooms (though they tend to avoid yellow). Flowers adapted to hummingbird pollination typically have elongate, cylindrical floral tubes and secrete precious nectar at its base or in a terminal spur or sac. Hummingbirds use their long beaks and tongues to lap up the nectar reward, and in the process get their heads liberally dowsed with pollen from anthers borne near the rim of the flower tube. This pollen then gets deposited on receptive stigmas of another flower when the hummingbird repeats the process. Hummingbirds may visit 1500 flowers in a day, so a lot of pollen is getting moved around.

Above: Red columbine (Aquilegia formosa) *is a typical hummingbird-pollinated flower with protruding anthers to deliver pollen to the bird's head as it probes for nectar deep in the five reddish-orange spurs. Photo by Bill Gray.*

To supplement their nectar diet, hummingbirds will also feed on sugar-water in specially designed hummingbird feeders. Some older gardening books recommend using a honey-water mix, but honey ferments quickly and can grow a fungus that is harmful to hummers. A four parts water to one part table sugar mixture that is either boiled or stirred until the sugar is completely dissolved works best. In hot weather, hummingbird juice can also go bad, so it is best to wash the feeder and refresh the fluid frequently to prevent spreading disease.

Water and secure nesting and foraging habitat can also be provided by the careful hummingbird gardener. Hummers will enjoy a birdbath, especially if there is somewhere they can perch with their ridiculously undersized feet. Alternatively, a mister or waterfall will allow them to drink while on the wing. Hummingbirds prefer relatively open areas for feeding, but also like a few scattered trees and shrubs for perching and nest-building (too much brushy cover, however, encourages their predators). Willows, thistles, dandelions, milkweeds, and other plants that produce fluffy or fuzzy down provide raw materials for hummingbird nests.

Even a modest yard can become a beacon for neighborhood hummingbirds, if the three basics of good habitat are provided. A number of native western wildflowers are especially well-suited for attracting hummers. These include (in no particular order):

Columbine (*Aquilegia* spp.). Columbine flowers are specially built for hummingbirds, with their 5 nectar-packing spurs. Several red-flowered species occur in Utah, of

*Above: Arizona thistle (*Cirsium arizonicum*), a showy, native thistle with carmine-colored disk flowers. Besides nectar, thistles provide nesting material for hummingbirds from their cottony pappus. Photo by Bill Gray.*

which *A. formosa* is the most widespread. Some forms are available as nursery stock, or columbines can be grown from seed sown in shallow, well-drained soil in the fall (allowing for at least 60 days of cold stratification). Wild plants transplant poorly, so should be left alone. Most columbines flower from late spring to late summer.

Arizona Thistle (*Cirsium arizonicum*). It might sound crazy for a native plant society to advocate planting thistles, but bear in mind that the vast majority of thistle species are actually native and not invasive. Thistles have large flower heads consisting of small, pinkish, tubular disk flowers that can be copious nectar producers. Hummingbirds also like thistles for the cottony pappus on each seed that can be used for lining nests. The carmine-flowered Arizona thistle occurs primarily in canyon country of southern Utah, though it is hardy in low elevation gardens over much of the state. It can be grown from seed in sunny, well-drained soils.

Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja* spp.). The corolla of an Indian paintbrush is typically green, but is enclosed by brightly colored sepals or leafy bracts that have assumed the role of attracting pollinators. Paintbrushes are hemi-parasitic, meaning that they derive some (though not all) of their nutrition by parasitizing the roots of other plants. This can make them difficult to transplant from the wild (which we shouldn't do under normal circumstances anyway), though they can be grown from seed provided they are planted next to a potential host plant, such as sagebrush or rabbitbrush. Seeds require at least 30 days of cold stratification, and are best planted in the fall on the soil surface to facilitate light exposure. Wyoming paintbrush (*C. linarifolia*, the state plant of Wyoming) is an orange-flowered, leggy species that is hardy in a variety of settings and blooms from April to August. Narrowleaf paintbrush (*C. angustifolia* or *C. chromosa*) is considered a more attractive species and flowers from April-July.

Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*). In Utah, Cardinal Flower is restricted to hanging gardens and moist seeps in the souther tier of counties. The brilliant scarlet flowers have an unusual asymmetric shape, with spreading corolla lobes and an erect tubular anther column. This species can be cultivated over much of the state, but requires damp, humus-rich soil and full sun. It is available from nurseries or can be grown from stem cuttings or cold-stratified seed. Flowers are present from mid-summer to fall.

Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*). Desert willow is a shrub with willow-like leaves and clusters of large, pinkish-purple trumpet-shaped flowers. In Utah, it is native only in the Mohave regions of Washington County. *Chilopsis* will thrive in direct sun and is drought tolerant (often shedding its leaves in late summer), but is not especially cold-hardy.

Scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata* or *Gilia aggregata*). This biennial or short-lived perennial has long-flaring tubular flowers that are red, pink, salmon, or white and can grow in a variety of habitats. It can be purchased from a native plant nursery or grown from seed in sunny, well-drained sites. Once established, it readily re-seeds. The related Carmine Gilia (*Gilia sunbuda*

Below: Cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis) *belongs to a sub-family of the Campanulaceae that is more widely distributed in the tropics. Photo by Bill Gray*

or *Aliciella subnuda*) occurs commonly across the Colorado Plateau and blooms in mid spring (May-June) and often again in the fall. In its native habitat, this species prefers rocky, well-drained sites.

Hummingbird flower or California fuchsia (*Zauschneria latifolia* or *Epilobium canum*). With its inch-long, tubular, scarlet flowers and preference for dry, rocky cliffs and talus, most people will be excused for missing the similarity between *Zauschneria* and the common willow-herbs or fireweeds of the genus *Epilobium*, but the two genera share fruit traits and have recently been lumped together. This aptly named species is available from nurseries or grown from seed in the fall. It is well-suited for rock gardens and can grow in full sun, though does best with partial shade.

Penstemon or Beardtongue (*Penstemon* spp.). Though usually blue or purple flowered, four penstemons from Utah are red to scarlet-colored and very attractive to hummingbirds. Eaton's penstemon (*P. eatonii*) occurs widely across Utah and displays its red-orange flowers in late May through July. It can grow in full sun to light shade and on a variety of droughty or alkaline soils. Because of its size (growing to 3 feet tall) it makes a good background planting. Utah penstemon (*P. utahensis*) is a low-growing Colorado Plateau species that flowers in early to late spring (April-June). Bridges' penstemon (*P. rostriflorus* or *P. bridgesii*) occurs in basin and foothills habitats across the southern half of the state. It closely resembles Firecracker penstemon (*P. barbatus*) in having drooping, tubular flowers with the lower lip curved backwards instead of protruding as in most penstemons (this shape denies a ready landing platform for other pollinators). Firecracker is native to mountains and canyons of southern Utah, but is widely grown in cultivation.

Above: The aptly named Hummingbird flower (Zauschneria latifolia *or* Epilobium canum) *has the red color, long, tubular shape, and ample nectar rewards that are irresistible to hummingbirds. Photo by Bill Gray.*

One non-native of note is the Trumpet-creeper (*Campsis radicans*), a vine native to the southeastern US from the same family as the Desert willow (Bignon-iaceae). Trumpet-creeper prefers deep, rich soil and requires a structure for support. It blooms over most of the summer and into fall. In Utah, Trumpet-creeper is found mostly in gardens at low elevations (below 5200 feet). Other non-native and cultivated species commonly grown in Utah that are attractive to hummingbirds include Red-hot poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*) from South Africa, several red-flowered sages (*Salvia*), and Balsam (*Impatiens balsamina*).

Ideally, a hummingbird garden should include a mix of species that flower over the course of spring and summer to provide an uninterrupted food supply.

For their size, hummingbirds are remarkably intelligent and can quickly learn where good habitat is located and return to the same spots year after year. Some gardeners worry that setting out sugar water and attractive plants may entice the birds to stay too long in the fall, putting them at risk from unseasonably cool weather. But not to worry – hummingbird brains are hard-wired to day-length clues, prompting them to begin winter migration well in advance of the first signs of bad weather. Brains and beauty: just two more admirable qualities of these tiny little birds. It really is impossible not to like hummingbirds!

Above: Bridges' penstemon (Penstemon rostriflorus) *is one of four red-flowered beardtongues native to Utah. Its tubular, drooping flowers are specially adapted for hummingbird pollination. Photo by Bill Gray.*

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Kress, S.W. 1995. *The Bird Garden*. DK Publishing, NY. 176 pp.

Kress, S.W. 2000. *Hummingbird Gardens, Turning your Yard into Hummingbird Heaven*. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, NY. 112 pp.

Tufts, C. and P. Loewer. 1995. *The National Wildlife Federation's Guide to Gardening for Wildlife*. Rodale Press, Emmaus PA, 192 pp.

Wish you could see the *Sego Lily* in color? Want to read more on native plant society news and chapter events? Need to buy a UNPS wildflower poster or cd-rom for that special someone? Go to www.unps.org. right away!

Local Bird Spotlight

Accipiters

by Val Grant

For the classification geeks, all our "raptors" belong to the Order Falconiformes which divides into three Families, Falconidae, Cathartidae, and Accipitridae.

Believe it or not, the falcons and one caracara make up the first family, Falconidae. The vultures make up the second family with its not too subtle implication of catharsis, which means purging, purification or cleansing — quite a nice touch actually.

The third and final Family, Accipitridae, has 19 genera and 34 species and includes eagles, hawks, kites and the Genus *Accipiter* with its three species: the goshawk, *A. gentilis*, the Cooper's hawk, *A. cooperii*, and the smallest of the three, the sharp-shinned hawk, *A. striatus*.

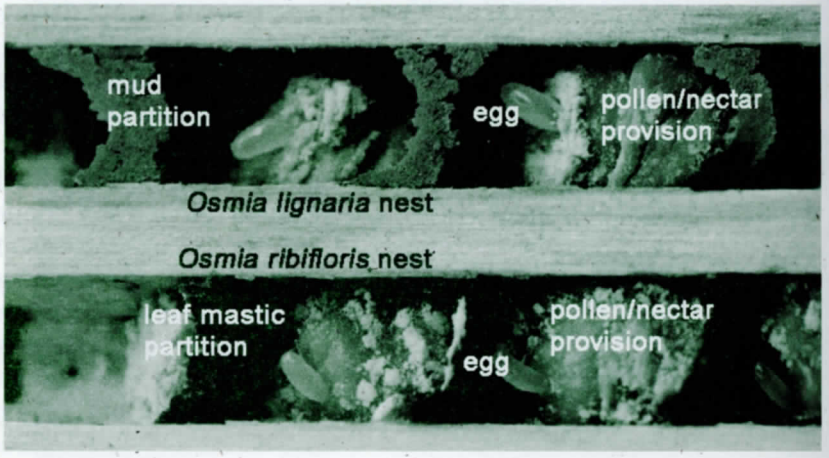
All three accipiter species are present in Cache County, the Goshawk in the mountain forests, the Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks in riparian habitat, deciduous and coniferous trees in the valley and foraging in our backyards for unsuspecting passerines. All of these "septors" prey on birds from grouse to siskins. Being opportunists, they won't turn down a mammal. One Cooper's captured a small cottontail one day on the White River and could barely haul it away. While out one day here in the valley with Scott Sawby and his female goshawk, Heccety (sp?), Scott released her when a black-tailed jackrabbit flushed. We saw Heccety drop onto the ground some 500 feet away and went running over to see how she'd done. But no Heccety. Scott called and whistled and spun the lure but still no goshawk. As we stood there in silence we heard some rustling sound down a rabbit hole; and, lo, there was Heccety dragging the jackrabbit back to the surface. We gave her five gold stars for dedication and strength and as we strolled back to the truck, Scott released her and she hopped down the path with us. Impressed? For sure! And more so watching her take a pheasant on another day; she flew beneath the pheasant, then did a backward summersault in the air and grabbed the prey in her talons. She wasn't always successful like the time a bittern flushed right in front of us and Heccety jumped from Scott's wrist and was about to strike when the bittern landed, and pointed its oh-so-sharp beak right at Heccety midsection. She banked away from the danger and then flew about 500 feet away, perched on a fence post and was reluctant to rejoin us. And should you get too close to a nesting goshawk, protect your eyes and face; they do attack as more than one scarred and blinded human can attest.

But enough about a bird described as *gentilis* (Linnaeus must have been toying with us when he classified this bird). Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks are amazing aerial acrobats. They will fly into a tree's or bush's branches on the quest for a tasty junco, or hover — looked like dancing — on top of a small tree until the junco tried to escape and was snatched out of the air. This is not to imply that juncos are inept. These hawks are equal opportunity. Sometimes they will perch in an inauspicious part of the yard and hope some inexperienced youngster will fly in for a sunflower seed or twenty. This is not to imply that a hungry adult will not make the same mistake (I sometimes take a stab at being politically correct). So if your yard is bereft of birds, thank the accipiters for your savings on bird seed. And what about cats? Cats can clear a yard for 10-15 minutes; a Cooper's or sharp-shinned for hours. And if someone knows, where did sharp-shin come from?

Photo by Brandon Spencer

Osmia lignaria

After our long cold winter, April is the month when the birds and the bees once again become a fact of life in Cache Valley. As regards bees, this is good timing, because our fruit trees bloom in April. They all need pollinator visitation — apricots, apples, plums, cherries, and pears. Traditionally, the bee managed for this service has been the European honey bee. Now we know how to pollinate our fruit trees using a managed native bee, the blue orchard bee (*Osmia lignaria*). Wild blue orchard bees (or BOBs) are found all across the US and right here in Cache Valley. Unlike the honey bee, the blue orchard bee is not social; every female is fertile and tends to her own nest. BOBs have one generation annually, in the spring, when adults are active and nesting for only 3-4 weeks. The species makes its nests in linear tunnels in wood. In nature, these would be the holes you find in deadwood that were chewed by large wood-boring beetles. Each female BOB progressively subdivides such a wood tunnel into a series of nest cells, each cell receiving a pea-sized provision of pollen moistened with nectar, followed by a single egg. Nest cells are partitioned, and ultimately capped, with mud, earning this kind of *Osmia* its other common name of "Mason bee".



You can try initiating your own backyard population of blue orchard bees. They prefer a tunnel diameter of 5/16 of an inch, and at least 4 inches deep (6" is ideal). The easiest way to start is with a dry, seasoned round of conifer, cottonwood or aspen log. Drill 20 or more holes toward the center, as deep as you can, on one side of the round. Stand it on end, facing the side with holes southeastward. Females appreciate morning and midday sun so that they can warm in their nest entrance on chilly spring mornings. If female BOBs adopt your drilled nest tunnels, then you will see steely blue bees busily coming and going all day long during fruit tree bloom. They tote their loads of dry yellow pollen in a brush of hair beneath their abdomen, which as you will see, necessitates some charming acrobatics to unload. Once you attract a starting population of BOBs, successive generations will stick around to nest every April for you. Repeated nest reuse eventually leads to disease and parasite problems, which you can remedy using more formal nesting substrates (drilled wooden blocks with paper straw inserts, or cut lengths of fat *Phragmites* reeds, to name two) described at my lab's website:

http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/Services.htm?modecode=54-28-05-00.

There, under "products and service" we have had to cram such information for users. I'd be happy to answer your questions as well. You can contact me at jim.cane@usu.edu.

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Of course, that number is probably more amazing than it should be. I had a grand total of 3 (that's right... that's not a typo... 3) respondents to this poll. In fact, of the three individuals who did respond, two had seen >600 species and the third had seen >700 species! Very impressive for those individuals. Not very impressive when trying to run any statistical analysis on the data. Actually, had it not been for my measly >350 species, the BAS average would have been skewed even further at 633.33! By the way, I'm relatively pleased with my >350 species considering my circumstances. But, yes. My lifelist pales in comparison to the other three who emailed me.

Perhaps Stilt readers thought I may have been joking about the poll. Perhaps we all might be a little too busy to sit down a zip off an email. Perhaps some of us forgot, but had good intentions. And very seriously, perhaps some Stilt readers felt a bit embarrassed knowing some of our friends have lifelist numbers that blow ours out of the water! Whatever the reason may have been, I have decided to run the poll for another month in hopes that more BAS members might speak up and have their numbers included. I promise not to put names with numbers. Who knows?! I may even get some board members and perhaps a couple BAS officers to chime in!

So please. Don't be embarrassed. Even if you've only seen 2 species, let me know so we can have more accurate information. Email me at birdnerdut@gmail.com with "Lifelist" in the title to report the number of species you've seen on your lifelist.

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

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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 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:

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☐ 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

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