



The Stilt

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February 2010

Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Take a Mid-Winter Nature Break With the Great Backyard-Bird Count February 12-15, 2010

Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

Each checklist submitted by these "citizen scientists" helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

"Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way to get outside with family and friends, have fun, and help birds—all at the same time. Anyone who can identify even a few species can provide important information that enables scientists to learn more about how the environment is changing and how that affects our conservation priorities," said Audubon Education Vice President, Judy Braus. "Everyone who participates in the GBBC—families, teachers, and young people—will get a chance to hone their observation skills, learn more about birds, and make a great contribution to the future!"

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings

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Logan's 2009 CBC Wrap-up

When I looked out the window on the morning of December 19th, I expected the worst. It was the morning of Logan's 50th Christmas Bird Count, and the view down my street was shrouded in fog, fog that could keep us from finding the birds that waited in the valley to be counted. The early risers among the sixty-two volunteers had already begun their day. Up in the mountains, birders on snowshoes and skis had already tallied most of what would end up as a sweep of the owls – we detected every owl species expected in the area this time of year. Several tough-to-find mountain species had also already been found, like Clark's Nutcrackers and Steller's Jays. The first of the Golden-crowned Kinglets and Red-breasted Nuthatches had also been counted, on the way to above-average numbers of both of these conifer-dwelling species.

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Local Bird Spotlight

—by Nancy Williams

First, a confession: I've never been terribly interested in knowing one gull from another. (Apocryphal, I know.) Other birds — owls, hawks, warblers, ducks, long-legged waders, even sparrows — I can be positively obsessive about, but gulls? Eh. Go figure. So when Stilt editor Brandon Spencer suggested I might like to focus on local gulls in this column, I did my best to work up some enthusiasm.



Here's how it all went down.

I managed to forget the column deadline until last week. Come Friday night, the first week of the new semester at Utah State was in the rear-view mirror. I suddenly had an itch to clean house, not something that hits me with any kind of regularity, but I also had to write something about gulls by Sunday. And believe me, I was singularly uninspired on the gull thing, toying with the idea of getting half snookered on wine and then just sort of free-writing gull thoughts and sleeping on it. Then, of course, acting like a grown-up and consulting Uncle Google and my astounding personal library of bird books, adding a fac-

toid or two to my freewheeling gull thing, and voila! Assignment done.

But as luck would have it, I did something unknown to make my ankle shriek and moan, and then forgot to take my once-a-day always-in-the-morning super-doooper pain pill, and by the time I remembered it was too late to pop it that day. So I had to sit down in a recliner with plain old Tylenol and ice packs, and read facts about gulls from my impressive stack of actual books.

Here's what I know now: Our sturdy regulars are California and Ring-billed gulls, with a lovely influx of Franklin's gulls long about May. Of these, the California is the largest. Franklin's gulls are smaller than the other two and the adults have black heads. I like them best because they're cuter — it's those black heads that make them easy to ID from a distance. Honest, that's the only reason.

Gulls are big, beautiful, mostly white birds, sailing on the air currents or feeding in cultivated fields, often swirling in large flocks behind tractors tilling and harvesting. Gulls are omnivores; they eat fishes, insects, worms, rodents, and grains. As opportunists, gulls will steal food from other birds, including members of their own species, according to the state Division of Wildlife Resources.

The California gull is the state bird of Utah, and our state tree is the Colorado Blue Spruce. Some people say we just like to borrow other states' names and slap our bumper sticker over them. But the California gull won the state bird

honor with cause: huge flocks of them saved the Mormon pioneers' bacon back in summer of 1848 when they first settled the Salt Lake valley. Rocky Mountain crickets were eating all their crops that first year, devouring the harvest before it could be brought in.

Orson F. Whitney wrote that in the midst of the plague of the crickets, "when it seemed that nothing could stay the devastation, great flocks of gulls appeared, filling the air with their white wings and plaintive cries, and settled down upon the half-ruined fields. All day long they gorged themselves, and when full, disgorged and feasted again, the white gulls upon the black crickets, list hosts of heaven and hell contending, until the pests were van-



California Gull — image from
Whatbird.com

quished and the people were saved." After devouring the crickets, the gulls returned "to the lake islands whence they came." Saved by the birds, they were. A monument with two sculptured gulls, built in

Local Bird Spotlight

1913, stands in the heart of Salt Lake City, in tribute.

The California gull, *Larus californicus*, was named the state bird of Utah by the Legislature on Feb. 14, 1955.

According to Pioneer, Utah's official online library, this gull is "about two feet long and pearly-blue in color. It is sometimes barred or streaked with blackish gray. Aeronautic wizards, gulls are gymnasts of the sky, making the seemingly impossible appear effortless. They can appear motionless in midair by catching wind currents with perfect timing and precision while positioning their bodies at just the right angle. They are quiet birds, considered quite beneficial by agriculturalists, and are usually gentle creatures, exhibiting neither antagonism to nor fondness for man." A less romantic description would say they are



Ring-billed Gull — photo by
Brandon Spencer

mainly white with grey backs and upper wings. They have black primaries with white tips. During breeding season, many adults have a noticeable red spot on the bottom tip of the bill.

The Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*, is frequently seen in areas such as beaches, estuaries, water bodies, fields, parking lots, and garbage dumps. According to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, it is a common winter resident in northern Utah, and an occasional transient in other parts of the state. Although nesting colonies have been observed in northern Utah, there is insufficient evidence to believe that breeding occurs there.

The DWR describes the Ring-billed as a "medium-sized, white-headed gull that looks much like the California gull. It is slightly smaller, with a shorter bill that has a broad, black ring around it. The white body and tail, slate-gray back and wings, and black wingtips with large, white spots (windows), typical of most gulls, are all present on the Ring-billed Gull. Juveniles are mottled brown mixed with adult plumage characteristics, pink legs and a pink bill with a dark tip. As the bird matures, the legs turn yellow, and the bill becomes yellow with a black ring. The adult's eye is also yellow. The adult in non-breeding plumage has brown streaking on its head."

Franklin's Gull, *Larus pipixcan*, breeds in colonies on the east side of Great Salt Lake during the summer months. Following breeding, according to the DWR, Franklin's gulls will "wander" extensively throughout the prairie regions of



Franklin's Gull — photo by
Bill Schmoker

the United States before heading south to their wintering grounds along the west coast of South America and the Gulf coast of the United States. "Transients may be seen throughout Utah. During migration, as well as during the breeding season, Franklin's gulls feed on earthworms, seeds in recently cultivated fields, and grasshoppers. When near water, they catch flying insects during flight or pluck insects from the water's surface. Franklin's gulls are very sensitive to human disturbance, and entire colonies will readily abandon nesting sites if bothered. Colonies shift locations yearly as water levels in marshes rise and fall."

So there you have it - profiles of Cache Valley's resident gulls. We also have some exciting strays, and if you take yourself out on a birding daytrip to Great Salt Lake or Antelope Island you may find yourself in gull heaven. Last year sightings were reported of Bonapartes, Little, Lesser Black-backed, Western and Mew gulls in that area, all the way north to Farmington Bay.

Good birding!

Latinos and Birds

One of my most memorable birding experiences occurred many years ago near McAllen, TX at the Santa Anna NWR on the Rio Grande River. Completely confused and exasperated by strange bird song and vibrant plumage, I stumbled on to a bunch of Latino college students who were participating in a field ornithology course. I told the Anglo instructor of my deep consternation from being a fledgling birder in this subtropical paradise and in desperate need of some crash tutelage. He invited me to join them for which I'm deeply grateful to this day. I added over 50 new birds to my life list in a few hours of beating the bushes with this very unusual collection of novice birders.

To witness our Latin American neighbor's excitement that matched my own for our feathered ambassadors left a deep impression on me. I finally had the good fortune of reconnecting with them in our own Valley through two new programs. As the program director for Latino Adventures Outdoors and in my first year of teaching at Cache High, I've introduced many young Latinos to the world of birding and botany. Their interest and excitement is testimony that birds are indeed cross-cultural and provide a wonderful medium for bridging language and cultural barriers. Weather from El Salvador, Mexico, or Venezuela, I've found no difference in their desire to learn about and connect with our natural landscapes and the wonderful fauna and flora they support.

On a recent fieldtrip up Little Cottonwood Canyon we were amused and entertained by two parents who spent their earlier years as citizens of Mexico. There was a continuous flow of stories from their youth of wildlife adventures. As we worked our way up into meadows flooded with blue camas lily, they wanted to learn every bird and flower along the way, as did the youth ranging from middle school to USU students. We ate our lunch beneath aspen and Douglas Fir where we were serenaded by warbling vireos, black headed grosbeak, and lazuli buntings. I introduced them to many edible plants under our feet- water leaf, sweet anise, minor's lettuce, violet, and glacier lily, and a lovely, but non-edible orchid called striped coralroot.

A highlight came near the end of our hike when a 4 foot Great Basin gopher snake was sighted in a shrub by the creek. We soon had it in our clutches and it charmed us all with its large size and beautiful colors and patterns. One of the younger boys tried the constrictor on for size. It enjoyed the warmth of his neck, but got a bit over-constrictive so we wrestled him free and returned the magnificent serpent to its rightful place from whence it came.

As the population of Latinos continues to surge in our valley and nation, they are becoming a major part of our cultural diversity and in many areas, integrated into the political and economic fabric of our nation. It is my mission to assist them to do the same in our valley, along with an appreciation and stewardship for our amazing biological diversity, beginning with birds of course!

—by Jack Greene

Upcoming Events at the BRMBR

February 6	Outdoor Skills Day
February 13	Bald Eagle Day
February 27	Water Day
March 13	Tundra Swan Day
March 20	Sense of Wonder Day — Celebrating Rachel Carson



For more information, visit the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge's website at <http://www.fws.gov/bearriver/>.

Audubon Calendar

February 2010

4 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.

11 General Meeting: Join us at our same great location, the Cache Valley Learning Center (75 S. 400 West), as Robert Schmidt will lead a discussion and screen the film LORDS OF NATURE: Life in a Land of Great Predators. Given the Utah Legislature is considering S.B. 36, requiring the state to kill or remove all wolves found in the state, the film may be appropriate. Questions and discussions will continue after the film (60 min.). 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!

13 Northern Cache Valley Birding: Join local birding expert Reinhard Jockel as he leads a field trip to northern Cache Valley. He will be making stops in Smithfield at Mack Park and the cemetery in search of songbirds, Red Crossbills and Brown Creepers. Then, it's off to the West, into the fields of Amalga to spot raptors. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring binoculars and dress for the season. Beginning birders are welcome. Carpooling will be available. We will finish up around noon.

A Message to the Members

The Trustees of Bridgerland Audubon Society in our regularly scheduled board meeting January 7th, 2010, approved a motion to modify the by-laws of the corporation and add one more trustee to the board of trustees.

With the departure of our vice-president in April, we had 3 officers and 11 trustees. In September, the board decided to fill the position with a new trustee, but not require that the new trustee replace the vice-president. The board decided to distribute the tasks of the vice-president to the members of the board and elect a vice-president from the board at a later date. In December, when the board added a vice-president from outside, the board found it exceeded by one the prescribed board membership contained in the by-laws: 4 officers and 11 trustees.

The board decided to increase the number rather than ask a board member to resign. The decision was made to make this change permanent. This addition allows the corporation to elect 4 trustees each year, instead of four trustees two years and three trustees every third year. Even though the added number creates an even number of trustees and officers, the added benefit of another trustee was believed to be more important. Discussion reflected appreciation for the individual contributions from each board member for the benefit of Bridgerland Audubon Society and its members.

The secretary will redraft the by-laws for the signature of the President and Vice-president at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. Changes will be reviewed and approval received from the board before the by-laws are submitted to the Utah Division of Corporations. If you have comments for the board, please send them to bridgerlandaudubon@gmail.com before the next meeting scheduled for February 4, 2010, 7:00 pm at the Cache Valley Learning Center.

— Lyle W. Bingham, Secretary, Bridgerland Audubon Society

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Down in the valley, though, the morning got off to a slow start. Fog kept us from seeing many of the birds that do not allow close approach, or which occupy open areas that can normally be scanned with a spotting scope from great distance. On top of that, very low temperatures in the preceding week or two had frozen up much of the water that is usually still open at this time of year. The frozen edges of most of the water bodies may have been responsible for a shortage of dabbling ducks and geese this year, as Canada Geese, Mallards, Northern Pintail, and Northern Shoveler were all abnormally low, and others were also below average. American Coots, although not closely related to the dabbling ducks, have a similar feeding behavior and were likewise very low this year; we found only four, compared to our 20-year average of 123. We did find a few rare waterfowl that helped increase our final total, including two Cinnamon Teal, which have been recorded only three times on our count in the last 30 years, and four Cackling Geese. Cackling Geese were only split from Canada Geese in 2004 and may have been present but overlooked in previous years, but this year's count of four set a new record. The deep freeze also limited our numbers and diversity of gulls. Ring-billed Gulls were at about half of the 20-year average, and we found only 7 California Gulls, compared to an average of 142. One Herring Gull was the best we could do in the rare gull department, but we have found at least one in most recent years.

The raptors presented a mix of ups and downs. The numbers of immature Bald and Golden Eagles were both unusually high, although the total of adults and immatures was about average. American Kestrels and were both down for the third year in a row, and Northern Harriers, Prairie Falcons, and Rough-legged Hawks were also below average. The low numbers of many of these raptors could be due to the morning fog that prevented detection of distant birds, increased development of agricultural areas in our circle, or both. In contrast, our count of six Cooper's Hawks set a new record for the count circle.

In the category of introduced species, we found a mix of good news and bad news. Ring-necked Pheasants and Wild Turkeys were lower than average and we detected no Gray Partridge, but the three California Quails we found marked only the third time they've been detected on the count. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase: one individual was first detected on our count in 2004 and they have increased fairly steadily since then. This year we found 88. In contrast, Rock Pigeons were a little lower than average and

about the same as last year. House Sparrows and European Starlings were both lower than average, although we still had more than a thousand House Sparrows and Starlings still made up over half our total count of just under 20,000 total birds.

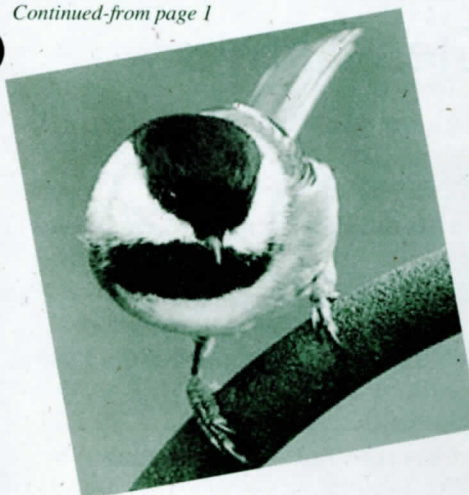
Several other individual findings were particularly noteworthy. We found one Sora, only the second ever seen on our count. We also had one Sandhill Crane, only the third time that species has been seen on our count. The Greater Yellowlegs that was found at the Logan Fish Hatchery may be the same individual that has been counted there for the two previous counts, as no other Greater Yellowlegs has ever been counted in our circle. One Snow Bunting found near Amalga was the first found on the count since 1985. Three Lesser Goldfinches found at a feeder in Logan represented only the second time this species has been detected on the count, and a record high number, perhaps reflecting a northward shift in their distribution as they've also become more common in summer here lately.

By the time we gathered at the Cache Valley Unitarian Church to compile our results, warm our bones, and fill our bellies, we had seen a total of 19,988 birds of 99 species. Thirteen of those species were represented by individual birds, which is a pretty typical proportion of rarities for recent years. The only glaring miss of the count was Cassin's Finch, a species we have seen each previous year since 2002, but a Winter Wren would have also been a nice find. Winter Wrens have also been seen each year since 2002, but never more than three individuals and often only one. Any year that we come so close to 100 species without going over can be a heartbreaker, and the inevitable "what-if's" spring to mind. I don't know about you, but I'm already looking forward to giving it another shot next year.

For more information on our count and on the Christmas Bird Count in general, see the Audubon Society's webpage: <http://www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc>. Thanks to the Cache Valley Unitarian Church for providing our post-count meeting spot, to the count organizer and compiler Bryan Dixon, to all the landowners who let us access their land to count their birds each December, and to all the participants in this year's count: Robert Atwood, Mike Becker, Eric Bingham, Tim Boschetti, Ember Bradbury, Rebecca Campbell, Jim Cane, Tom Chang, Trenton Chang, Mary Cheney, Scott Cheney, Allen Christensen, Scott Datwyler, Bryan Dixon, John

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online at www.birdcount.org. One 2009 participant said, "Thank you for the opportunity to participate in citizen science. I have had my eyes opened to a whole new interest and I love it!"

"The GBBC is a perfect first step toward the sort of intensive monitoring needed to discover how birds are responding to environmental change," said Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab. "Winter is such a vulnerable period for birds, so winter bird distributions are likely to be very sensitive to change. There is only one way—citizen science—to gather data on private lands where people live and doing this across the continent over many years. GBBC has enormous potential both as an early warning system and in capturing and engaging people in more intensive sampling of birds across the landscape."

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website's photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.



For more information about the GBBC, visit the website at www.birdcount.org. Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 or (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473) or gbbc@cornell.edu, or Audubon at citizen-science@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.



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Ellerbeck, Louise Fischman, Mike Fish, Craig Fosdick, Greta Geary, Wayne Geary, Jim Graham, Aseeya Grant, C.Val Grant, Lisa Grant, Allen Hoffmann, Dawn Holzer, Frank Howe, Joanne Hughes, Michelle Jamison, Paul Jamison, Reinhard Jockel, Liz Josephson, Linda Kervin, Jim Kingsland, Caitlin Laughlin, George (Stan) Laughlin, Andy Leidolf, Jean Lown, Bill Masslich, Jake Masslich, Zane Masslich, Ryan O'Donnell, Bruce Pendery, Ian Pendery, Robin Pendery, Stephen Peterson, Dominique Roche, Ron Ryel, Kate Sargent, Linda Sargent, Steve Sargent, Frank Smith, Brandon Spencer, Jeanne Sullivan, Kim Sullivan, Tim Sullivan, Robert and Helen Taylor, Joe Thompson, Dennis Welker, Martin Welker, and Mike Wolfe.

Our data is available in a variety of forms, including paper and electronic. If you'd like a copy, feel free to contact Bryan Dixon, 752-6830 or bdixon@xmission.com.

— by Ryan O'Donnell

Rare Arctic Sea Bird Spotted at Glen Canyon

Bird enthusiasts surveying Glen Canyon National Recreation Area spotted at least one unexpected visitor: a wayward arctic sea bird.

The red-necked grebe was one of 81 species of birds noted during the annual Christmas Bird Count at Glen Canyon.

The survey was done by volunteers on Jan. 5 as part of an annual event across the country.

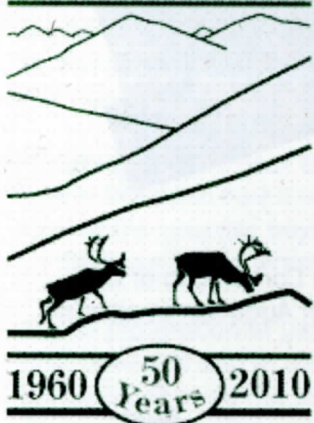
Four teams of volunteers spent the day on Lake Powell, the Colorado River and sites around Page, AZ to identify species and count birds.

They came back with reports of Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, bluebirds, ducks and a record number of Canada Geese, some 825 wintering in and around Page.

The red-necked grebe spotted on the Colorado River was just the third ever recorded in northern Arizona

—The Associated Press

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge



America's Wilderness Refuge

Did You Know?

Celebrating 50 years of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will celebrate its 50th birthday in 2010! But, it's not the only refuge celebrating an important birthday this year — 8 other refuges will celebrate 50 years of wildlife conservation — including the Izembek NWR — and 23 will turn 75 years old!

FYI: White-crowned Sparrows (among other birds) nest and breed in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge during the Summer while making Utah their Winter home.

The West Breaks New Ground for Species Protection

Groundbreaking work in Wyoming to protect critical Sage Grouse habitat from oil drilling and ill-conceived siting of energy transmission lines will serve as a model for other western states. This is the culmination of a long-standing fight to protect Bureau of Land Management lands from exploitation without regard for natural resources and wildlife needs.

In addition, one million acres of state land within core sage grouse population areas was withdrawn from wind energy development after urging from Audubon activists.



A Greater Sage-grouse defends his display territory from another male.

4th Annual Sunflower Seed Sale Continues

Allen Christensen has agreed to continue selling high quality black-oil sunflower seed. The 50 pound bags are still priced at a fantastic \$25! Why would you want to buy this seed? This high quality seed is provided by a local grower and is guaranteed to be cleaner than other seed.

Allen is willing to deliver the bags. Simply call Allen at (435) 258-5018 and stock up on your Winter supply while supporting a local grower!

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

Trustees

- 2007-2010 Chris Cokinos, 245-7769; Jack Greene, 563-6816; 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

Bridgerland Audubon Contacts

- | | |
|--------------|--|
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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 23142-2250
Membership Source Code: C0ZW520Z

☐ 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

P.O. Box 3501

Logan, Utah 84323-3501

Email: birdnerdut@gmail.com

Visit our website: <http://www.bridgerlandaudubon.org>

Nonprofit Organization
BULK RATE
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Logan, Utah

Ballot

BAS 2010 Election of Board Members

Board of Trustees (Three-Year Term)

Vote for Four:

- ☐ Chris Cokinos
- ☐ Jack Greene
- ☐ Reinhard Jockel
- ☐ Ryan O'Donnell
- ☐ _____

Only BAS members may vote and each membership is entitled to one vote. To vote, clip this ballot and mail to Bridgerland Audubon Society, P.O. Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501. Alternately, you may vote at the banquet in April. All ballots must be received by April 15, 2010.