



The *Stilt*

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

When is a Field Trip not just a Field Trip?

Notes from the Gunnison Sage Grouse Pilgrimage

Before dawn on April 12th, the participants on the BAS field tip headed out to observe a rare and intimate ritual performed in Monticello, UT and almost no other place in the world. I'm talking about the dawn courting display of the rare Gunnison Sage Grouse.

This trip was the second BAS-sponsored field trip pilgrimage to see this Gunnison Sage Grouse lek. The Monticello region is home to only about 150 Gunnisons. The lek (where we saw 17 birds) is on private land, with access controlled by the landowner and the Utah DWR. The grouse are carefully watched by a Utah DWR officer who personally escorted us and taught us about the birds. He celebrated the magic of the sight as enthusiastically as we did though he's heard the calls and seen the strutting rituals for years. The Monticello population is isolated and tiny but essential, particularly if any disaster strikes the only sustainable-sized population of these birds in Colorado's Gunnison basin.

When we heard the "coffee-perking" popping calls and saw the birds completely involved in their springtime work, it was like a window onto another world and time. Thinking about how rare this display has become, I felt the beauty like a flower that will fade. As I do for the Kirtland's Warbler and the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, I carry in my mind the question "how much longer?", and I wish them well.

After the Gunnisons and a hearty round of huevos rancheros at the café, we toured the Ponderosa forests, Indian ruins, and open lands around Monticello. Mr. Owl (Dick Hurren) called in many of the Ponderosa obligates with his Pygmy-owl calls, including Pygmy and White-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadees, Western Bluebirds, and Bushtits. We found migrant Swifts and Flycatchers, and we had great moments with Cooper's Hawks and Loggerhead Shrikes. All in all, a perfect day with a special dawn celebration we will never forget.

--By Sue Drown



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Audubon Calendar

June 2008

7 Bear Lake Wildlife Refuge Many of us go regularly to the Bear River Bird Refuge west of Brigham City, but very few of us go up to the Bear Lake Refuge at the north end of Bear Lake. Join us for a day trip to see birds and other animals. They are quite different from those seen in Cache Valley or at the Bear River Refuge. We'll leave at 7:30 a.m. from the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Please bring binoculars and a lunch (we'll also make a stop for raspberry milkshakes in Garden City). We will not be back before mid-afternoon. For more info Call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

14 Cherry Creek Canyon Plus Road Cleanup Join expert Allen Christensen as he introduces us to the birds of Cherry Creek Canyon east of Richmond and their sounds. Al knows as much about Cherry Creek and its environs as anyone in Cache Valley and always makes things fun as well as educational. In order to participate in this special birding, however, you must earn your keep by participating in an hour and a half of road cleanup along our adopted road in Richmond before we bird. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Please bring gloves, a snack, and plenty of water. It will not be overly taxing and will be both fun and satisfying. We will plan to be finished with the cleanup and the birding by early afternoon. For more info call Al Christensen at 435-258-5018.

21 Steel Canyon and Northwestern Cache Valley Reinhard Jockel, a fine birder and a real master of bird songs, will lead us on a trip to observe and learn the songs of migrating and resident songbirds as they establish and defend their territories in northwestern Cache Valley, including Steel Canyon. This is a unique area where several habitats come together to make it possible to see lots of different species of songbirds -including the elusive Blue-grey Gnatcatcher. Meet at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station at 8:00 a.m. Carpooling will be available and recommended. We will return between 2 and 3 p.m. Bring water and a lunch. For more info Call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

28 Logan Canyon's Right-hand Fork Join us for an easy walk and lots of good birding along the roads/trails and at the picnic area up Logan Canyon's right-hand fork. This is an especially nice trip in that there is walking (easy walking) with plenty of shade. We hear and see many species of songbirds and usually see plenty of wildflowers and butterflies. Bring a nice snack and water and meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. We will carpool up and will plan to be back by early afternoon. For more info call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

July 2008

12 Birding Beaver/Franklin Basin Local Bird and wildflower expert Reinhard Jockel will lead us to some very interesting habitat high in the area north of Beaver Mountain and in Franklin Basin. The last time we did this trip both the fauna and flora were absolutely magnificent. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring insect repellent as well as a lunch and water. Hiking will be no more than moderate. We will return in mid-afternoon. Carpooling will be mandatory. For more info call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

Audubon Calendar

19 A Wild Ride through the Wilds of Western Box Elder County In response to requests from prior years' participants, we are offering this outing again. Several, somewhat surprisingly, have dubbed it the "funnest" field trip they have ever been on. If you've never seen this area, you owe it to yourself to come out. We'll see some unusual things. We'll stop for a late lunch at Molly's Restaurant (or you can bring your own lunch) before returning to Cache Valley in mid-afternoon. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring plenty of water. Carpooling will be available and strongly recommended. For more info call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

26 Relaxing Canoeing on the Bear River/Cutler Marsh Cool down and let your troubles float away with a leisurely evening of paddling near the intersection of the Bear River and the Cutler Marsh. Join canoeing, birding and marsh experts Jean Lown and Bryan Dixon for this guided tour. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the parking lot between the Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring your own canoe or you can rent one at places like the USU Outdoor Recreation Center (435-797-3264). For more info call Bryan or Jean at 435-752-6830.

August 2008

2 Uinta Mountains Primitive Camping Overnighter Join us for an overnighter to the eastern end of the Uinta Mountains south slope. The area where we will be going offers opportunities to see fauna and flora seen nowhere else in Utah. Our camp site is primitive but very decent. Hiking will be moderate to strenuous depending on what you like. Meet on Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. We will not get back until late afternoon on Sunday. Bring camping gear and enough food for a day and a half. For more info call Dick Hurren or Dorothy Egan at 435-744-2017.

9 Returning Shore Bird Migrants Expert Keith Archibald will lead us on this half-day trip to see and identify shore birds as they come back through Utah after most of them have nested far north, some in the arctic. Join us for this outing of little walking and much viewing. We will meet at 6:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. In addition to binoculars, bring a spotting scope if you have one. We plan to finish up around noon.

23 Tony Grove Wildflower and Bird Walk This is an annual event led by native wildflower expert Reinhard Jockel. In past years, we have done this trip earlier in the year, but Reinhard wants to show us that there are many wonderful blooms and birds at this later period too. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring water and a lunch and plan to have a great time. For more info call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

30 Antelope Island and the Causeway During this period of the year, there are usually returning migrant shorebirds on the causeway and migrating song- and other birds on the Island. Join us for a fun day of viewing the migrants and the local critters on the island. Meet at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station at 8:00 a.m. We will carpool down to the island. Bring a lunch or be prepared to buy one at the island snack stand. We will be back in Logan by mid-afternoon.

Helpers Plant Shrubs at Barrens Sanctuary

On the morning of April 19, welcome volunteers from Audubon assembled to help further restoration at our Barrens Sanctuary. Big sagebrush, winterfat, 4-wing saltbush and golden currant arrived days earlier from the State's Lone Peak Nursery. These 100 shrubs were put out in groups of four, plus 20 coyote willows cut and rooted from the valley. Linda Kervin, Dick Mueller, Kaitlin Laughlin, Bill Masslich and his son Jake, Dan Zamecnik, Reinhard Jockel and I walked out to the 4 quadrants of the Sanctuary, shovels in hand, and planted 25 groupings among the many uplands (such as they are in such a flat low place). Soils were damp and soft, promising for root establishment. Find the flags and you'll find our shrubs next time you visit our Sanctuary. Note the rows of seeded native grasses too. Please report any nesting birds that you see out there. A few long-billed curlews have again been poking about our Sanctuary, but thus far, no evidence of nesting.

Jim Cane
Sanctuary Manager



Kid's Korner

Dear Friends,

When children first saw my magazine, RANGER RICK®, some forty years ago, the world was a different place. People were able to slow down, unplug and enjoy the simple things in life like catching fireflies with friends, hiking in the woods with family, and stargazing at night.

Want to re-live that simple life...if only for one night? Join me and thousands of campers across the country for National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout™ on June 28th! Camp out with family and friends in your own backyard or at your favorite campground.

And to get ready for your outdoor adventure, please be sure to take advantage of the FREE camping tips, activities, games, recipes and more at the Great American Backyard Campout™ website (<http://www.nwf.org/backyardcampout/>). While you're there, don't forget to register your campsite online and join the nationwide community of campers!

I hope to see you and your friends on June 28th. Together, let's create a new summertime tradition! Happy Camping!

Ranger Rick 



Ranger Rick

P.S. Coming soon: Night Watch, the Great American Backyard Campout's featured activity. Receive tips for watching wildlife at night and download "watch" lists for your state!

North American Big Day Record Broken

On April 19th the EDG Birding Team sponsored by Nikon Sport Optics and Birding America set a new Big Day record for the ABA area with 260 species. The day started in the Texas Hill Country and ended in the rice fields of the central Texas Coast. The team, consisting of Ken Behrens, Pete Hosner, Michael Retter, and Cameron Cox, experienced an incredible day of birding...

The team's quest began last year, with an exploratory attempt that came very near the record. Unfortunately, their parked vehicle was hit at 8 p.m. along a rural Texas road, ending the day. Fortunately, no one was hurt and the vehicle was a rental!

The April 19th day almost had similar results. The low point of the day was in the wee hours of the morning when a deer jumped in front of the vehicle. Missing it was not an option, but the driver saw it and slowed enough so that it only took out a headlight. The vehicle received only minor damage but tragically, the team's cheap cooler was less lucky, shattering upon impact dousing the two occupants of the backseat with icy water and filling the air with the smell of old cheese.

Highlights of the day included beautiful turquoise blue rivers and the numerous birds of the Hill Country at the eastern edge of their range, such as Western Scrub-Jay, Bushtit, and Canyon Towhee, as well as lingering winter residents that had already cleared out of the coast. Then came a long race across the brush country, picking up most of the birds (like Pyrrhuloxia, Bullock's Oriole, and Greater Roadrunner) without even leaving the car. After a few brief stops to clean up south Texas specialties that reach their northern

limit in the Corpus Christi area (Great Kiskadee, Buff-bellied Hummingbird) it was on to migrants and shorebirds, which would "make or break" the day. While Texas has lots of publicity for migrant songbirds, actual good days are sporadic and depend on cold fronts. One had passed the day before, and there was hope for lingerers.



EDG Birding Team: Cameron Cox, Ken Behrens, Pete Hosner, and Michael Retter

Tule Lake added Snowy Plover, Marbled Godwit, and dozens of others in one stop, including a late Swamp Sparrow. Blucher Park had great understory warblers (Kentucky, Swainson's, Worm-eating, Hooded), but where were the *Dendroica*? South winds produced an overall slow migration day, with only a single *Dendroica* warbler (Black-throated Green), zero *Empidonax* flycatchers (which on the bright side alleviates concerns about their identification), and a dip on Scarlet Tanager.

As it was a Saturday, the beaches were packed, especially as there was a "Sand Castle Festival" on Mustang Island Crossing the ferry from Port Aransas to Aransas Pass would have been fatal, except a car had been dropped on the other side so the team could walk on to the ferry.

Cruising up through Rockport, the team added ducks (including a surprise late Bufflehead), a late Brown Thrasher at Goose Island, and a Le Conte's Sparrow while kicking up other birds on the edge of a saltmarsh. Before dusk the team found Red-bellied Woodpecker and American Crow at the southern margins of their ranges before hitting the rice fields in Calhoun County. A last-second Wilson's Snipe that flew by at dusk (a relief after missing the bird at two stakeout spots). The team tied the old record at 9 p.m. with a calling Black Rail, and then picked up Barn Owl before heading down to Rockport to pick up the last bird of the day, Black Skimmer. All the people on the beaches during the day had apparently frightened every Black Skimmer off of Mustang Island and the causeways, but fortunately there is an accessible breeding colony in Rockport to hear foraging birds calling as they return to their nests.

The total of 260 species in a single day highlights the diversity of habitat in Texas and the need for a strong conservation effort to protect this diversity. The EDG Birding Team has partnered with Houston Audubon to raise funds to protect the internationally significant Bolivar Flats. Houston Audubon is working to acquire a tract of land adjacent their current sanctuary at this location. They have recruited a matching donor, so all the money that is donated will be doubled and then go directly to the Bolivar land acquisition project. For more information about the team and how you can join the effort to protect more of Bolivar Flats see <http://www.houstonaudubon.org/index.cfm/MenuitemID/676.htm>.

Original article published on eBird.com and reprinted with permission from Pete Hosner

Local Bird Spotlight

Common Nighthawk

Anne K. Winters

Just as the sight of a Robin signifies the arrival of Spring, and the echoing call of the Canada Goose announces the onset of Autumn, the aerial swoops and dives of the Common Nighthawk awaken my senses to the joy of Summer. Though perhaps not typically thought of as the quintessential summer-time bird, the Common Nighthawk is in fact widely spread across North America during these warm months. In the summer it is a regular inhabitant of Cache Valley and can be found in the open spaces of urban and rural areas.

Though it has a broad range, the Common Nighthawk is well camouflaged and is not particularly visible during the day. As *crepuscular* creatures, they are mostly seen during dawn and dusk when lively insect activity brings them out into the open. Males and females are an overall mottled brown, the male appearing slightly more gray than the female. Both sexes are easily identified by bold, white bars on their primaries. These bars are visible above and below the wing. The male has an additional bold, white bar across his tail, and a white throat is visi-

ble when he makes his loud, nasal, chirping call-*peean!*

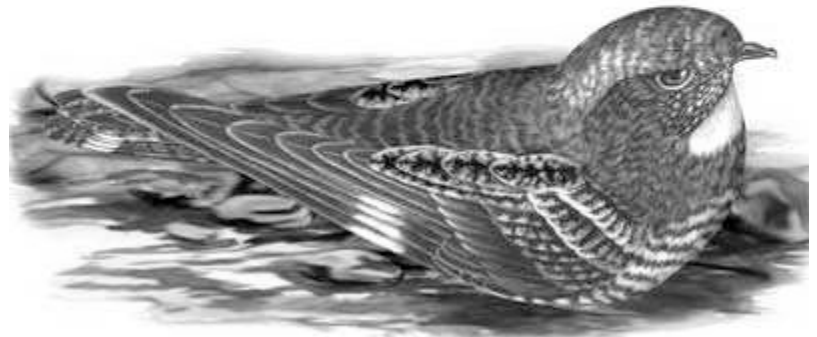
Common Nighthawks can also be identified by their behavior and non-vocal sounds. My first encounter with the Common Nighthawk was during a summer camping trip several years ago. As I cooked dinner at camp the first evening, a strange whooshing or booming noise occasionally broke the quiet air. Scanning patches of open sky through the trees, I noticed an unfamiliar bird swooping about above me. After watching for a moment, the bird suddenly plummeted wildly toward the ground and then just as quickly pulled back up toward the sky, producing the loud whooshing noise I had heard moments before. It was such a wonderful sight and sound that I had the sensation I had just been privy to a little known secret of summertime! Upon later investigation, I learned that male Nighthawks perform these aerobic dives near their mates, and will also dive near people or other animals as a distraction tactic. As they pull out of that dive, a rush of air vibrates their primary feathers, creating the strange whooshing noise.

As I watched the bird at my camp, I was also struck by its unusual size and shape. Though only about 9 inches in length, the Common Nighthawk has a wingspan of 24 inches. This dramatic wingspan and hawk-like silhouette may be where the Nighthawk's name comes from. The Common Nighthawk is not a hawk however and is instead found in a family of birds known as Goatsuckers. Just as the name Nighthawk is not completely accurate to the bird, the family name of Goatsuckers is also based in misconception. Long ago in Europe these birds were often seen fluttering up from amongst herds of goats. They often roost on the ground and the goats were probably stirring them from their nests. To add to the myth, the birds were only seen in the summer- the same time of year that mother goats were nursing their young. Legend has it that people assumed that these birds

were suckling milk from their goats! Needless to say, the Common Nighthawk and most other Goatsuckers have little interest in feeding on anything other than insects. In fact, the mouth of the Common Nighthawk is efficiently designed for catching insects. Their mouth opens wide, stretching far past their small beak, in order to catch insects in flight. Bristle-like hairs line the inside of the mouth and are believed to help filter insects directly into the bird's mouth.

By watching this special bird from my camp and during the summers since, I have found that, contrary to its name, the Common Nighthawk is far from a common bird. Its interesting behavior and physiology make it unique. However it is uncommon for a different reason too. Its population is in decline. Though reasons for this are uncertain, insecticide use and loss of open habitat may be contributing

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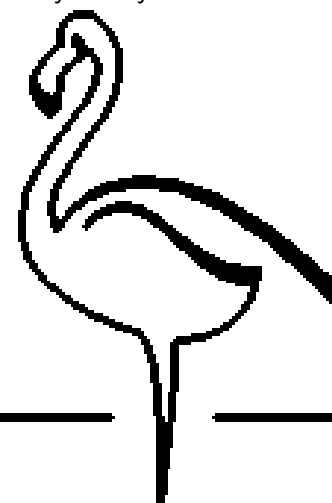
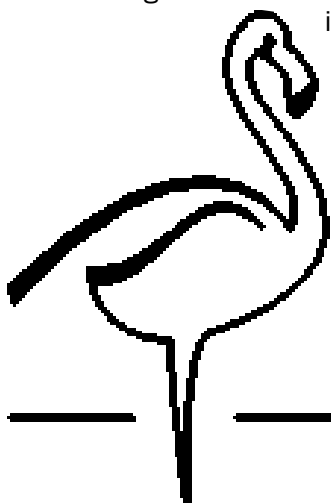
factors. The Center for Conservation Biology- <http://ccb.wm.edu/nightjars.htm> performs annual counts of these birds and needs volunteers to help study their habits and ecology. Through participation in monitoring and conservation efforts such as this one, we can all help the Common Nighthawk and other Goatsuckers rebound. Warm summer evenings in Cache Valley or anywhere in the country, just wouldn't be the same without them.

References:

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Ehrlich, Paul R. et al. The Birder's Handbook, 1988, Simon & Schuster, Inc. NY NY



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- 2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637; Brandon Spencer, 753-2790

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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:

_____ **New** member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.

My check for \$20 is enclosed (this is a special first-year rate).

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Please make all checks payable to National Audubon Society and send with this card to:
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 W-52 Local Chapter Code: 7XCHA

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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Beauty and the Beak

In case you missed it, there is an article on CNN.com about a Bald Eagle that had the top part of its beak shot off and the efforts to get it fitted with a “bionic beak.” There is also video on You Tube. The link is http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uy_-VjOR_Jo. Warning: if you don't like injured animals, this one is tough. But, it has a hopeful ending.