



The *Stilt*

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Cattails, Conservation, and... Cows

After six years of effort, last April BAS secured a conservation easement (CE) on the first 500 acres of the Bear River Bottoms north of Trenton. That seems like a lot of land, but it's really just the beginning. As part of the preparations for the CE, volunteers and professional consultants completed surveys of wetlands, plant communities, weeds, potential hazardous sites, fence lines, debris piles, etc. Those surveys were woven into a site management plan that laid out plans for the future.

With the CE in place, we thought we were ready to go. However, an incorrect survey started a contentious process of trying to get access, which finally drove us to do another expensive—but correct—survey which established that we did, indeed control the access road. The lesson was that there are some long-standing associations between landowners out there, and not all are warm and fuzzy. We did work through them, however, and we have established some good relationships with neighboring landowners. We hope we can help make their operations more successful and that will encourage them to share some of our vision. We have even leased some of the BRB to neighboring ranchers needing temporary grazing for their livestock.

Finally, this fall, we were able to get to work. Several crews volunteered weekends and skin to help remove old barbed wire, put up new fencing, and clean up some debris piles (one of which belonged to some aspiring drug dealers who now have a new "occupation").

We've still got a long list of "to-dos." We need to complete fencing along the east boundary, map other non-indigenous plants, begin some serious weed control, and undertake wildlife surveys. All of that will begin in earnest this coming year.

There will also be education projects. The Stokes Nature Center has expressed an interest in developing programs that can use this habitat. Faculty at USU are also interested in using it as a lab for various student projects from landscape design, to recreation planning, to studies in conservation biology.

We're building a reputation outside the valley, too. When UDOT contacted the Army Corps of Engineers about per-

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Save the Date: 2010 Great Backyard Bird Count February 12 - 15, 2010

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is led by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and provides an opportunity for people of all ages to learn about birds and the environment we share. Chapters are encouraged to make the most of the thirteenth annual GBBC by including it in creative ways through field trips, birding ID courses, bird-watching competitions, photo contests and more. The GBBC website includes information and inspiration at www.birdcount.org, along with photos from last year's count, a game, and other materials, including a downloadable PowerPoint presentation, a voice narrated tutorial, and regional bird lists.

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Female Birds — Acting Like the Guys — Become Sexual Showoffs in Cooperative Breeding Species

Female birds in species that breed in groups can find themselves under pressure to sexually show off and evolve the same kinds of embellishments (like fanciful tail feathers or chest-puffing courtship dances) as males, according to new research in the latest issue of *Nature* (Dec. 10, 2009).

"We've known it happens with females in some specialized cases, but it's probably more widespread than we ever realized before," said Irby Lovette, the Fuller Director of Evolutionary Biology at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and co-author of a study published in the Dec. 10 issue of the journal *Nature* with Dustin Rubenstein, Ph.D. (Cornell '06), of Columbia University.

The researchers also have compelling evidence for why sexual selection sometimes acts with equal strength on both females and males. Sexual selection is strongest in situations where not every individual gets a chance to reproduce—as when rams butt heads over access to a flock of ewes. Called reproductive skew, this pattern tends to be common in males. Females of most species generally invest more in producing and nurturing young and tend to have more steady reproductive success.

Rubenstein and Lovette reasoned that if sexual selection were to op-

erate on females, it would likely be in situations where females had to compete for mates. They found such scenarios among more than a dozen species of cooperatively breeding starlings in Africa. In these systems, family groups raise young jointly, helping one or more breeding pairs with feeding and protecting against predators. With only a



The Superb Starling is an example of a cooperatively breeding species in which the females have evolved the same elaborate plumage as males. Image © birdchick1 (Flickr, via Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

limited number of breeding pairs, many of the females don't get to nest each year. On the other hand, unpaired males still have chances to father young through infidelity with one of the breeding females. Competition to be chosen as a mate is somewhat relaxed for males but intensified for females.

To test whether females show evidence of sexual selection on the same traits that males have used to compete for mates, Rubenstein and Lovette compared the 17 species of cooperatively breeding starlings in Africa with the continent's 28 species of typical pair-breeding starlings. They also used DNA samples

to reconstruct the African starlings' evolutionary history, confirming that cooperative breeding had developed independently several times within the family. After measuring more than 1,600 museum specimens of all 45 species, the researchers report that males and females of cooperatively breeding species were substantially more

similar to each other—closer in size and with similar plumage—than males and females of pair-breeding species.

The result paints two different pictures of evolution: Among pair-breeders, sexual selection on males makes the sexes look increasingly different; in cooperative breeders, competition among females leads to them evolving the same showy traits

as males. The finding that reproductive skew dictates how sexual selection acts could apply to nearly any species that breeds in groups, the researchers believe.

"This goes beyond starlings," Rubenstein said. "Any species that lives with relatives might be expected to show similar patterns. This type of complex social behavior is not only common in birds, but also many mammals—including humans—and insects."

The research was supported by the National Science Foundation and the Miller Institute for Basic Research in Science at the University of California, Berkeley.

Audubon Calendar

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.

7 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.

14 General Meeting: Join us at our same great location, the Cache Valley Learning Center (75 S. 400 West), as Val Grant will present a slide show of South Africa's diverse and colorful bird life, based on a trip to Cape Town and Krueger National Park. The photography was done mostly by Kendrick Moholt of Lostine, OR. The speaker has a few of his photos in the mix and they will be readily discernible. If Kendrick's photos haven't won awards for excellence, they will. 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 Logan Sewage Lagoons and Polishing Ponds: The Logan Sewage Lagoons and Polishing Ponds are real hot spots for over-wintering waterfowl. Join us for a trip with local expert birder Ryan O'Donnell. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station. Bring binoculars and dress for the season; a cold wind often blows across the lagoons. Beginning birders are welcome. Carpooling will be available. We will finish up around noon. For more information, call Ryan O'Donnell at (435)232-8146.

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!

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mitting some wetland fill sites along 10th West in Logan, the Corps told them to contact us to find a sizeable site suitable for successful wetlands creation. That will hopefully result in UDOT excavating 14 acres of bottomland and planting wetland vegetation. It will be exciting to help design the site and see it create new habitat.

Finances are always a concern, of course. We received the CE as a donation, but it did not come with any funding for maintenance. The short term leases have generated some income and we have received some donations, but it's hardly even scratched the surface of what is needed.

Watch for a fundraising campaign beginning in 2010 to establish an operating fund and endowment to ensure that we can truly manage this in perpetuity. (Of course, you don't have to wait for our solicitation; you could just send us a check marked "Bear River Bottoms"!)

At any rate, the Bear River Bottoms are capturing the imagination of everyone who has visited the site. We

hope to get things under control soon, because as soon as we can digest this parcel, PacifiCorp wants us to take over another 1400 acres they own along the Bear River between Benson and the Idaho line. And

that will continue our dream of conserving a major percentage of the Bear River riparian corridor for wildlife, especially birds.

Thanks to the Board members and volunteers who have donated time this fall on various projects: Debi Evans, Jeff Allen, Lyle Bingham, Jim Cane, Jason Carlisle, Val Grant, Jennifer Hoffmann, Frank Howe, John Jensen, Caleb Kauffman, Leah Lewis, Jean Lown, Dick Mueller, Carlos Munoz, and Dan Zamecnik.



Jim Cane, Bryan Dixon, and Dick Mueller building a fence at the Bear River Bottoms

Projects and opportunities to help out are announced on the Econet email distribution list. If you are not on that list and want to hear about this and other projects, contact bdixon@xmission.com.

– Bryan Dixon

Register Now for Online Bird Behavior Course

Next session begins January 6, 2010

The next five-week session for the new online course offered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology begins January 6, 2010. The goal of "Investigating Behavior: Courtship and Rivalry in Birds" is to help people learn how to observe and interpret behavior and communication among birds. A basic principle of bird behavior is explored each week using multimedia and interactive activities, guided by an instructor.

Course size is limited. To enroll or purchase as a gift, visit www.ecornell.com/birds where a video further describes course content. Another session will begin February 17, 2010. The cost of the course is \$295 (\$255 for Cornell Lab members) with a \$30 dollar registration fee. To receive the Cornell Lab member discount, sign up toll-free at (866) 326-7635.

A New Course at Bridgerland Area Technical College in Logan

Announcing a new course offering at BATC for Energy Efficiency Management Training and Renewable Energy Systems In Utah, demand for energy efficiency and renewable energy installation and service is higher than the number of trained experts and technicians in the state. As Utah works to meet the Governor's energy efficiency and renewable energy goal, Utah will need to train and educate upcoming energy efficiency professionals to meet demand in this industry. This is an introductory, exploratory course that will address energy management, alternative and renewable energy and its return on investment, an introduction to LEED training, HVAC controls and equipment, and retrofits. Additionally, students will learn about residential and commercial energy analysis, weatherization, and current needs and trends in the energy management industry, including a survey of career opportunities in this exciting field. The course runs from January 7 to March 11 from 6-9 pm Thursday at the BATC West Campus. The cost will be \$50 and transferable credit is offered. The course will be offered by Jack Greene, environmental science educator and practitioner.



Bioneers: A Smashing Success

Our 6th Bioneers conference was yet another smashing success, which is no surprise given the tremendous effort by so many to make it happen. "A Gathering of people at the crossroads of ecological restoration, human health and social justice", it is filled with hope and inspiration. The bottom line is getting participants to make a commitment toward making a better world by taking personal and collective action.

This year's conference focused on the economic implications for energy efficiency and renewable energy for our state and region. Our excellent keynotes included Dianne Nielsen, state energy advisor to Utah Governor Herbert spoke to "Utah Energy: Power Our Future" and Mary Ann Wright, also with the Energy Advisory Office talked on "The Economic Implications of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy for Utah". Both were very convincing that we have great opportunity given our extensive wind, solar, and geothermal resources. You can see the full program at www.extension.usu.edu/bioneers.

Mornings and early afternoons were filled with plenary speakers from the national conference and workshops by local and regional experts on the topic along with many USU students involved with various sustainability projects on campus and in the community. This was enriched by entertainment and sumptuous food provided by Culinary Concepts, Crumb Brothers Bakery, Café Ibis, and Rock Hill Creamery.

Again, we are indeed grateful for the generous support by Bridgerland Audubon and are hopeful more of our Audubon members will see fit to attend this conference someday as once you have sampled its greatness, there's no turning back!

Sandhill Crane Migration Focus of 40th Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

—by Kevin Poague, Audubon Nebraska

The 40th annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held March 18-21, 2010, in Kearney, Nebraska. Organized by Audubon Nebraska and the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the conference gathers together nature enthusiasts from across the county to witness the migration of over half a million sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl and other birds through central Nebraska. Events include guided field trips, workshops, a family fun room, and daily visits to river blinds operated by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary for up-close views of cranes roosting on the Platte River.

Local and national speakers will present information on a variety of wildlife and conservation topics. Main speakers are Scott Weidensaul, author of more than two dozen natural history books, including *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*, a Pulitzer Prize finalist; Mike Forsberg, nature photographer and author of *Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild*; Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas; and Chris Wood, eBird Project Leader, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. More than twenty local environmental organizations will have information booths and hands-on activities on Saturday.

The celebration is open to the general public. Registration materials can be found beginning in mid-December at www.nebraska.audubon.org. Or contact Audubon Nebraska to be put on the mailing list: Nebraska@audubon.org; 402/797-2301. Rowe Sanctuary has information about viewing the sandhill crane migration, 308/468-5282; www.rowsanctuary.org.



Welcoming the New Policy Advocate

We'd like to welcome Hank Welch as the new Policy Advocate for the Audubon Council of Utah. We look forward to working with Hank and allowing him use his talents to make a positive impression and impact at the state legislature for Audubon.

For those who do not know Hank, he comes to us with an impressive array of experience. Just a quick overview: Hank has served as Research Director and Legislative Assistant for Senator Orrin Hatch; policy analyst for Governor Scott Matheson; legislative assistant for congressman Hansen; management analyst for Salt Lake County; Deputy Director for the Utah Department of Commerce; Management and Facilities Analyst for Salt Lake County; Director of Research for The Seniors Coalition; Policy Manager for Utah Department of Health, and is a private consultant.

If you'd like to contact Hank, please work through our chapter president or Council representative, Chris Cokinos, at chris.cokinos@usu.edu. That way we do not inundate him with e-mails and requests.

In the next few weeks, Hank will be working with Bill Fenimore to learn some of the issues, agencies, people, and legislative committees we care about.

Welcome to BAS

New Members

Candace Berthrong
 Mathew Burnett
 Kristin Howard
 Allison Robyhill
 Karen Smith

Renewing Members

Patricia Bahler	Marion S. Murray
Debby Bronson	Ryan O'Donnell
Ian Campbell	Patsy Palacios
Annette R. De Knijf	Maureen Wagner
Rebecca Huffman	Nancy Williams

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

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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: 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*

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

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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.

