



# The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

## A Decade of Birdie Days

For the past ten years, groups of intrepid birders have crawled out of bed well before crack of dawn on the last Saturday in April, made their way to the same ridgeline saddle at the far south end of our valley to witness a true ritual of spring – the dancing of the sharp-tails. Thanks to the generosity of Fred, Laura, Brett and Michelle Selman and the rest of their family, we have had access to a very active Sharp-tailed Grouse breeding ground or “lek” that lies on their property in the South Fork drainage of the Little Bear River. Those of you that have made the effort to get out and observe this phenomenon know that this is a truly special experience.

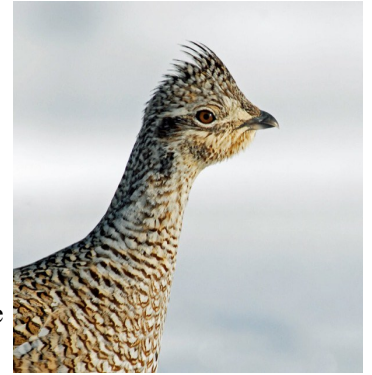


Photo courtesy of and copyright by Paul Higgins 2010

This year, more than 70 people made that effort, which included a pretty healthy hike, to get to the lek and they were not disappointed. Once again, just like they have for who knows how long – maybe thousands of years, they were there, focusing hard on the task at hand – sex. For male Sharp-tailed Grouse, this means showing up at this very special place, the same time each year, fighting for the best spot and then tirelessly performing a high energy, instinctively choreographed dance every time a female strolls by. I heard somebody comment, after watching the grouse for a while, that their dance reminded him of the dances of Native Americans. The bird’s dance moves are truly suave and were even imitated by some of us as we watched that morning.

The dance is truly something to watch. The wings arched out and down, head down, tail up, back straight, legs a blur of motion as the males dance in a straight line for about five or six feet, take a break and do it all over again, until the female makes her selection. The four inches of snow on the lek this year really accentuated the action of the birds’ feet, resembling little rototillers churning up the powdery crystals as they went through their motions. With good binoculars or a spotting scope it is possible to make out the colorful yellow eyebrows and purple air sacs which are inflated during the dance. In addition to all the visuals, the birds are making all sorts of guttural hoots, clucks, and chatters that add to the whole experience.

For the past few years there have been two chances to experience the sharp-tailed lek activities. The first is Birdie Day, when the Selmans invite all those interested to join them on the last Saturday in April. Birdie Day is even made more special by an amazing breakfast of eggs, sausage, hash browns and homemade biscuits and jam provided by the Selmans and served along the banks of the Little Bear River as birders return from the lek. After an early, cool morning excursion this is truly special and yummy hospitality!



Photo by Bill Masslich 2011

A second chance to visit the lek comes with a more formal tour as part of the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival. This requires advanced registration and a small cost for transportation and interpretation. Details about this opportunity can be found on the Internet at [www.greatsaltlakebirdfest.com](http://www.greatsaltlakebirdfest.com).

We hope that Birdie Day remains an annual spring event for another decade. Keep an eye out for this opportunity again next April. Bridgerland Audubon is deeply grateful to the Selmans for their willingness to have us out to their place for the last 10 years to observe this wonderful and unique phenomenon.

-- Bill Masslich

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## 2011 UTAH LEGISLATURE: SELECTED RESULTS

by Lynn Carroll

**D**uring the legislative session I forwarded to many of you the “Legislative Updates” produced by our policy advocate, Steve Erickson. [If you didn’t get them, it’s likely because I didn’t have your e-mail address or you didn’t want them.] You may have responded to an action alert by contacting a legislator. The last update was a few days before the end of the session. Here are the final results of some of the bills Steve was tracking.

**HB 49: Eliminates a provision requiring the Utility Facility Review Board to determine if a facility should be constructed.** Audubon opposed. It didn’t get past the standing committee.

**HB 97: Consolidation of the Department of Environmental Quality with the Department of Natural Resources.** Legislators are reportedly unhappy about “bureaucratic inefficiency” in the DEQ. Audubon opposed. Standing committee let it die.

**HB 246: Repeal of Phosphorus Limit in Dishwasher Detergent.** Audubon opposed. We and other conservation groups issued “action alerts,” and the bill was defeated in committee after an earlier tie vote.

**HB 399: Requires that a bond must be posted** by anyone (plaintiff) seeking an administrative stay or an injunction after a final agency action is issued by the Dept. of Natural Resources, UDOT, or the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration. The money would reimburse their opponent for damages if the plaintiff lost. DEQ was originally included in the list of agencies, but the EPA could have taken away Utah’s right to administer laws under EPA’s jurisdiction. Audubon vigorously opposed the bill with an action alert, as did other groups, but the bill passed and was signed by the Governor.

**HB 210 and SB 57: Both of these bills involve feral cats**, so Audubon was interested, since feral cats take quite a toll on birds. Nevertheless we didn’t state a position on either bill. (Feral means a domesticated animal that is living a free-roaming, wild life.) HB 210 said that a person who killed a feral cat wouldn’t be violating animal cruelty laws. The House added restrictions and passed this bill, but it died in the Senate. SB 57 passed and is law. It facilitates programs that catch, spay or neuter, and release cats living in feral colonies, renamed “community cats” in the bill.

**HB 438: This bill would have changed the membership of the 11-member Water Quality Board**, increasing the representatives of agricultural interests from one to three and eliminating two other members. Several versions were proposed; the one that passed the House eliminated both “at large” positions, one of whom represents environmental interests. Audubon opposed the bill, again joined by other groups, and members were alerted more than once to communicate opposition. On the last day of the session, Senator McAdams was poised to propose an amendment suggested by Steve, when the leadership apparently decided the bill wasn’t worth the time it was taking and killed it. This was probably the most important victory of the session for the environment.

**HCR 7: Supports increased outdoor activities by children and policies that promote outdoor activities for Utah children.** Audubon supported. Passed and signed, showing that our leaders appreciate the natural environment we have in Utah, even if they like economic growth better.

Many thanks to Steve for a job well done and to members who supported his work with their messages to their legislators and Governor Herbert.

# Audubon Calendar

## June

**29** Nocturnal Birds of Green Canyon. Green Canyon is a convenient and productive place to find many of Utah's owl and nightjar species, and June is a great time to find them. Join local birding expert Ryan O'Donnell as we listen for Western Screech-Owls, Flammulated Owls, Northern Saw-Whet Owls, Common Poorwills, and others. In the past, Green Canyon has also hosted rare vagrants such as a Mexican Whip-poor-will and a Spotted Owl, so you never know what we might find. Bring a flashlight and meet us at the parking lot by the first gate in Green Canyon (at the east end of 1900N in North Logan) at 9:00 p.m. We'll be done by about 11:00 p.m.

## July

**16** High Mountains. We will hike around Tony Grove Lake and towards Naomi Peak in search of the specialties of Cache County's high mountains. Target birds include Red Crossbill, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Steller's Jay, among others. Pack a lunch and lots of water, and be prepared for a strenuous hike (but at a slow birding pace). Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East, 150 North). All skill levels are welcome. We will be back in the mid-afternoon.

## August

**27** Early Returning Migrants. It's hard to believe that summer could be ending already this time of year, but by late August many of the returning migrants are already passing through Cache County from points further north. We will start by looking for Rufous Hummingbirds and Townsend's Warblers up Logan Canyon, and then check some shorebird hotspots in the valley to look for returning sandpipers. If time permits, we might check some good warbler habitat to try to find rare eastern warblers that got lost on their way south. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East, 150 North). All skill levels are welcome. We will be back in the early afternoon.

## Free eBird Online Training – Wednesday, June 8 (or 15) at 7:00 p.m.

eBird.org is an internet based checklist system that uses the data on birds you see from your birding trips to create birding checklist archives for you and then utilizes the data in scientific research. Want to know who the top birders are in Utah? When various species are normally first seen or last seen in Cache Valley during the year? Where the nearest sighting of a particular bird is so you can go find it? How many birds you've seen by county in 2011 compared to 2010? eBird is your tool! <http://ebird.org>

Ryan O'Donnell and Mike Taylor will lead an online eBird training so you can start using eBird or improve the way you already use it. You will 'attend' the training from your home computer, where you can watch Ryan and Mike's presentation in real-time and ask questions over the phone or internet. Registration is limited to 25 people and an RSVP is required. After registering you will receive an email with instructions on how to join the training.

–Ryan O'Donnell

# Local Bird Spotlight

## Swainson's Hawk

It's always good to see Swainson's Hawks return to Cache Valley each year. This conspicuous buteo becomes a familiar sight as the weather warms, commonly perched on irrigation lines, fences posts and hay bales across the valley. This tendency to use low perches is one way to help distinguish them from Red-tailed hawks, the other common summer Cache Valley buteo.



Photo courtesy and Copyright @ 2006  
Lu Giddings

Back again from South America, Swainson's, famously chase the sun's energy across the planet each year, going deep into each hemisphere for a double dose of Summer solstice. Some individuals migrate over 6000 miles each spring and fall. Amongst raptors, only Peregrine Falcons are known to migrate farther. During their migration, Swainson's form large flocks called "kettles" that can contain up to 10,000 individuals. It is not uncommon to see kettles of 50 to 100 birds move over our valley each fall.

While in our valley, Swainson's nest and rear young. They usually build their nest about midway up a large cottonwood or willow tree, often near a stream or river. Their nests are loosely built structures made mostly of twigs and are often relatively small when compared to nests of Red-tailed Hawks. Occasionally Swainson's will build several nest structures in the same tree, using only one on any given year. Old or unused nest structures are sometimes utilized by other species such as owls for nesting sites.

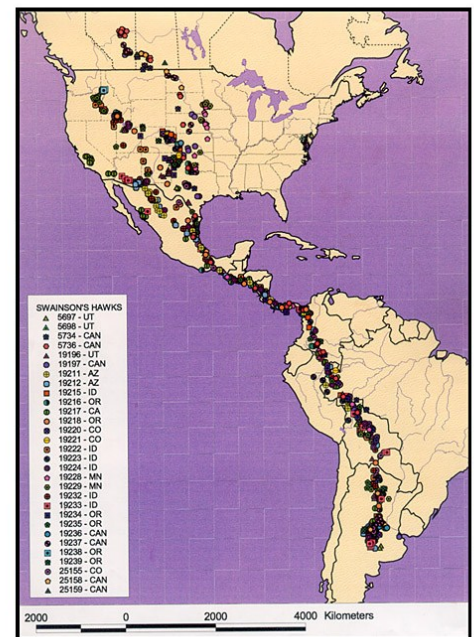
During their nesting period, Swainson's diet includes a lot of small rodents, rabbits and reptiles, which are fed to the nestlings. As the young birds fledge and become more independent, diets tend to shift more to insects like grasshoppers, dragonflies, beetles and moths. Swainson's hunt by soaring over open fields or from perches and will sometimes hunt in groups. In late August and September, they begin their migration back to their wintering ground where they usually arrive sometime in November.

On their wintering grounds in Argentina, Swainson's become almost exclusively insectivorous, especially focusing on grasshoppers. Unfortunately, this winter dietary preference has really predisposed them to poisoning from insecticides resulting in the death of close to six thousand hawks in 1995 and 1996. This vulnerability to poisoning as well as habitat destruction has led to a steady decline in the population of this species.

Even in our own valley a significant number of Swainson's have been shot in recent years, despite the fact that they prey on agricultural pests and pose no threat to humans or livestock. Keep a watchful eye out for our feathered neighbors this summer. If you witness or suspect that any person is shooting Swainson's or any other raptors, please contact the Utah Division of Wildlife as soon as possible on the wildlife hotline at 1-800-662-3337 or report the crime on-line at <http://wildlife.utah.gov>.

–Bill Masslich

Swainson's Hawk Migration Route





# Welcome to BAS

**New Members**

None this month

**Rejoining Members**

Coralie M. Beyers  
Dianne Morris Masten

**Renewing Members**

Lula C. DeValve	John G. Lyne
W. Bryan Dixon	Nancy Pitblado
A.P. Ebert	Richard & Virginia Ratliff
Lyle Henderson	J. Kingsland & A. Shifrer
Susan Jelus	

# Bridgerland Audubon contacts

**Trustees**

- 2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637
- 2009-2012 Ron Goede, 752-9650; Frank Howe, 787-1859; Robert Schmidt, 755-9262; Bret Selman, 257-5260
- 2010-2013 Ron Helstern 245-9186; Jack Greene, 563-6816;

**Bridgerland Audubon Contacts**

- President Val Grant, 752-7572, biores@mtwest.net
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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 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. Send to [bmasslich@gmail.com](mailto:bmasslich@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 \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send all checks payable to National Audubon Society with this card to:**  
National Audubon Society  
PO Box 422250  
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250  
Membership Source Code: COZW520Z



National Audubon occasionally makes its membership list available to selected organizations. To have your name omitted from this, please check

**Note to new National Audubon members:** To get on *The Stilt* newsletter mailing list without the usual 8-week delay, contact Susan Durham, 752-5637, sdurham@cc.usu.edu.

**Prefer the local newsletter only?** Send \$20 (make checks payable to Bridgerland Audubon Society) and this form to:  
Bridgerland Audubon Society, PO Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501 for a subscription to *The Stilt*.



# The *Stilt*

***Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society***

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

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## Bear River Watershed Conservation Area Planned

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to establish the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area in the northeastern corner of Utah, extending into southeastern Idaho and southwestern Wyoming.

This large-landscape, conservation easement strategy would protect important habitat for a variety of fish, mammals, and migratory birds and major migration corridors connecting the northern and southern Rocky Mountains. In addition, the proposed conservation area would facilitate watershed-wide conservation efforts and would protect valuable farmland and ranchland.

Conservation easement contracts with willing sellers would specify perpetual protection of habitat for trust species and place limits on residential, industrial, or commercial development. Contracts would prohibit alteration of the natural topography, conversion of native grassland to cropland, drainage of wetlands, and establishment of game farms.

Easement land would remain in private ownership. Therefore, property tax and invasive plant control would remain the responsibility of the landowner, who also would retain control of public access to the land. Contracts would not restrict grazing on easement land. **More information is available at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/lpp/ut/brr/brr.html>**

The next issue of the *Stilt* will be in September.  
Hope you have a great Summer!