



The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the **Wasatch Audubon Society**



Vol 34, Number 5

Sept/Oct 2015

WAS Meetings and Happenings

Tuesday, Sept 15th
7:00 pm
WAS Meeting

An African Safari is our topic, presented by John Bellmon, a “founding father” of our chapter and long-time member of National Audubon Society. John will share his experiences from a recent trip to Africa.

Tuesday, Oct 20th
7:00 p.m.
WAS Meeting

American Kestrel Research will be presented by David Oleyar, of Hawk Watch International. We are excited for him to share the information he has gathered by following the reproductive process of these tiny falcons in the hope of gaining insight into their decline.

Both meetings are at the Ogden Nature Center, 966 West 12th Street, Ogden.

Please join us and bring a friend!

2nd Annual The Big Sit! Fundraiser

by Katie McVey

You are invited to Wasatch Audubon’s 2nd annual The Big Sit! fundraiser. The Big Sit! is an event held world-wide the second weekend in October. Participants sit in a 17-foot circle and record the number of bird species viewed in a 24-hour period. The Big Sit! is hailed as “birding’s most sedentary event” and it is a whole lot of fun. Our The Big Sit! will be held at the Robert N. Hasenyager Great Salt Lake Nature Center at Farmington Bay. Many folks have been birding this area for years. Now it’s time to bird for a cause!

Our event will be on Saturday, October 10th, from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm. All are welcome to participate - from fledgling to eagle-eye. People can be part of the circle for as little as 15 minutes or as much as the full 18 hours. Even though the Nature Center will be closed, we will have access to parking, restrooms and, of course, birds!



Participation is free, but the event is also our fall fundraiser. Our first The Big Sit! raised nearly \$2,000. It's easy to participate and easy to donate. Participants might consider making a fundraising goal. Do you want to raise \$100 or \$500? Talk with family, friends, neighbors and co-workers about sponsoring The Big Sit!. People can pledge a flat fee (like \$30) or a per species donation (like \$0.50 per species). Per species donations are great because they encourage the participants to really identify every bird. We expect to see about 40 species,

so a donation of \$0.50 per species equals \$20. As your sponsors make pledges, keep track of them on a Sponsor Pledge form available on our website. After the event is over, contact your sponsors and let them know just how many species we saw. Donations can be made by sending a check to Wasatch Audubon, Attn: The Big Sit! P. O. Box 3211, Ogden, UT 84409.

The Big Sit! is our big fundraiser for the year and all contributions go to support more than 60 free field trips, 4 special events and 10 community programs that Wasatch Audubon hosts each year. For more information, visit our website www.WasatchAudubon.org or call John Bellmon, 801-814-7544 or Martha Ann Albretsen, 801-544-1771. We hope to see you on October 10th.



Wasatch Audubon Society
 Website: wasatchaudubon.org

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Website	Patricia Allaire	801-597-1091

SCARECROWS

by Jay Hudson

with help from the internet and Aminrazavi's "The Wine of Wisdom, the life, poetry and philosophy of Omar Khayyam."

In the fall of the year, the scarecrows come out! But do you know their history? Farmers have had trouble protecting their crops ever since man switched from hunter/gatherer to farmer. Scaring crows and other birds has been with us at least since the Egyptians. The inventive Egyptians built structures and dropped nets over the pesky quail which helped save the crops and gave them meat. The Greeks made statues painted purple with a club in one hand. The Japanese protected their rice fields by also making wooden statues clothed in long coats and wearing high peaked oriental sun hats. In Great Britain, young boys patrolled the field with bags of stones. The job paid nothing and the boys were termed "bird scarers." When the plague killed half the population including the boys, the farmers fashioned scarecrows that looked human.

Before the white man came to America, the native Indians raised wooden platforms where men shouted to scare the crows. The Zuni Indians built a network of poles connected with yucca fiber. They hung wind-driven rags on the lines and tied bones together that made noise when they clacked in the wind. There has recently been talk of culling the crows here in Utah. In America during the 1700s bounties thinned out the population of crows and in the early 1800s, so many crows had been killed that a plague of corn borers and other insects took the crops. During WWII, chemistry took the lead with insect-killing DDT that some say even killed humans.

Today, farmers still rely on scarecrows augmented with new creative inventions to scare birds. Africa still has a serious problem saving their crops from both insects and ravenous flocks of birds that sometimes number in the millions. Halloween is the best time to take a drive in farm country to see the resourceful way children have dressed up the scarecrow. The story is told about Omar Khayyam, the brilliant 9th Century Persian Muslim mathematician, astronomer, and poet who, when asked how to save the crops from birds, stated they should make large clay hawks. They should place these scarecrows on platforms in the fields and put dead birds all around. History tells us that the nasty hungry birds migrated elsewhere.

About Us:

The **Wasatch Audubon Society** is an association of people who share an interest in birds, all natural things, and Utah's varied habitats. Our goals include: educating ourselves and others about wildlife and the natural environment; enjoying the out-of-doors in fellowship with others who share similar values; fostering an appreciation of wildlife and understanding of ecological principles; promoting opportunities for the public to see and appreciate birds and bird habitats, and influencing public policy toward a conservation ethic. You might also want to visit our website at: <http://www.wasatchaudubon.org>

CONSERVATION CORNER

PLASTICS

by Lynn Carroll

In my childhood, there was no problem with plastics. They represented “better living through chemistry.” During the 1960’s, their use for disposable items and packaging increased, and the problem was “litter” and the way Styrofoam broke into little pebbles that couldn’t be contained. By the 1970’s, we were worrying about how population and consumption of raw materials were growing exponentially, and the problem was that plastics are made from petroleum. I thought that fossil fuels would become too precious for widespread use. I didn’t imagine that things like deep sea drilling and fracking wouldn’t cost too much for throw-away plastics to be used in the 21st century. But here we are: by not paying the environmental costs (or even knowing what they are) up front, we have almost unbelievable amounts of plastic being produced and thrown away.

Statistics I found include:

- 300 million tons of plastic per year are produced globally and about half of that is for disposable products like packaging.
- In 2008, 34 million tons of plastic were disposed in the United States.
- Americans buy 29-35 billion plastic bottles of water in a year.

I don’t remember how long ago “biodegradable” became an important selling point for products. I guess it went out of fashion when it was realized that anything degrades slowly in a landfill. In its place, recycling got a big push. Now it is a problem that the recycling of plastic isn’t nearly as efficient as, for instance, the recycling of aluminum. Plastics have to be carefully sorted and cleaned, and the variety of additives they can contain and their sensitivity to heat reduce the quality of the recycled product.

Perhaps the biggest problem with plastics goes back to the biodegradable issue. Because the chemical bonds

that join the units of these polymers together are not found in living things, no organisms have evolved with the enzymes to digest plastics. Plastic doesn’t usually decompose unless it is exposed to sunlight. UV rays will break and rearrange the chemical bonds, making the plastic brittle, so it breaks repeatedly although plastics for outdoor use have additives that protect them. I made the mistake of trying to make use of plastic grocery bags to hold compost in my yard. When I tried to move them, they fell apart and I never could get the ever-smaller pieces separated out.

Plastics buried in landfills continue to take up space indefinitely. The lighter pieces that litter the landscape and waters harm wildlife in many ways. We hear of animals becoming tangled in fishing line or nets, strangled by the plastic rings of six-packs, starving because they’ve swallowed plastic bags, etc. I even read about Condors feeding bits to their young. A study of plastic in the ocean listed over 267 species found to have ingested or become entangled in it. It’s unclear what happens to the tiny pieces of UV-degraded plastic. Some may be eaten by creatures of the soil or water such as worms, but it won’t be digested. Toxic components, such as the endocrine disrupter BPA, may leach out of it, but the extent of any ecological damage isn’t known.

Given the size of the disposal problem and the possibility of adding new impacts on already stressed ecosystems, I agree with those urging us to have our groceries packed in reusable bags, not to buy bottled water, and to shun products with excessive plastic packaging. I will return to my car to retrieve the reusable shopping bags if I leave them behind! 😊

Did you know that, in April 2015, North Fork Park in Weber County was designated as a highly prestigious International Dark Sky Park, the 21st in the world and the first to be urban-adjacent? North Fork Park is protected by its unusual topography against the urban glow of the Wasatch Front. The accreditation will be celebrated at several events this fall. To learn more: <http://www.starrynightsutah.org>



CALENDAR Sept/Oct 2015

September

2 Wednesday 7:30/8:00 am **Bird Walk**
Mantua Reservoir: Meet at McDonald's (1838 W 2700 N, Farr West, just east of I-15 exit 349) at 7:30 am for breakfast or 8:00 am to carpool.

9 Wednesday 7:30/8:30 am **Bird Walk**
Two Rivers Trail: Meet at Denny's Restaurant (North on 1100 W from 21st street in the Flying J Plaza) at 7:30 am for breakfast or at 8:30 am to carpool.

10 Thursday 5:30 pm **Evening Field Trip**
Bird Song and Rainbow Trails: Meet in the Rainbow Gardens parking lot, which is on Valley Drive near the mouth of Ogden Canyon. Please park near the trail head, away from the restaurant. Bring water.

15 Tuesday 7:00pm **WAS Meeting**
African Safari: Meet at the Ogden Nature Center (966 W 12th Street) at 7:00 pm. **John Bellmon**, "Founding Father" of Wasatch Audubon Society and long-time member of National Audubon Society, will share his experiences from a recent trip to Africa. Come, bring a friend, and enjoy the evening as John shares his photos and experiences.

16 Wednesday 7:30/8:00 am **Bird Walk**
Little Mountain Railroad Trail: Meet at McDonald's (1838 W 2700 N just east of Exit 349 on I-15) at 7:30 am for breakfast or at 8:00 am to carpool. We'll walk south along the railroad grading from the parking lot on 4000 N. (This is the road leading west from Smith and Edward's.)

19 Saturday 8:00 am **Field Trip**
Annual Bluebird Nestbox Cleanout: Meet at the northwest corner of Smith's parking lot (12th and Harrison, Ogden) at 8:00 am. Kris Purdy will give us further directions there. This is a service project to prepare the boxes for next year's nesting season. Bring a screwdriver, lunch and water. Gloves may be desirable.

23 Wednesday 7:30/8:30 am **Bird Walk**
Kays Creek Parkway: Meet at Village Inn (1765 E Skyline Drive, South Ogden) at 7:30 am for breakfast or at 8:30 am at the trail head.

30 Wednesday 7:30/8:00 am **Bird Walk**
East Mountain Wilderness Park, Kaysville: Meet at McDonald's (5745 S Harrison Blvd) at 7:30 am for breakfast or at 8:00 am to carpool.

October

3 Saturday 10:00 am-4:00 pm **Anniversary Party**
Wild About Birds Nature Center: Help at the Center (1986 Hillfield Rd., Layton.) Celebrate starting at 10:00 am Wasatch Audubon will have an educational booth. Call Arnold (801-829-3383) if you would like to volunteer.

6 Tuesday 7:00 pm **Board Meeting**
Ogden Nature Center: All members are welcome to attend. 966 West 12th Street, Ogden.

7 Wednesday 7:30/8:30 am **Bird Walk**
West Haven Hiking and Biking Trail, Western Extension: Meet at Moore's Family Restaurant (2490 S 1900 W, West Haven) at 7:30 am for breakfast. We'll drive/carpool to the West Haven Cemetery (West on 1800 S off 1900 W. Turn right at 2350 W and proceed north into the Cemetery.) We'll park on the Northwest corner of the Cemetery.

10 Saturday 4:00 am-10:00 pm **THE BIG SIT!**
Hasenyager GSL Nature Center, Farmington Bay: The Big Sit! Fundraiser, details on the front page and the flyer page 5. Hope to see you there!

14 Wednesday 8:00/8:30 am **Bird Walk**
Perry Nature Park: Meet at McDonald's (1838 W 2700 N just east of Exit 349 on I-15) at 8:00 am for breakfast or at 8:30 am to carpool.

17 Saturday 9:00 am **Utah Audubon Council Retreat**
Ogden Nature Center: Wasatch Audubon hosts the Fall Retreat for the Utah Audubon Council. The meeting will provide information about different chapters' activities and the efforts of our Policy Advocate with the Utah State Legislature. We will also be planning for the future as a united Audubon voice in Utah. Everyone is invited to attend. Contact John Bellmon, 801-444-3704 for more information.

20 Tuesday 7:00 pm**WAS Meeting**

American Kestrel Research: Meet at the Ogden Nature Center (966 W 12th Street) at 7:00 pm. We are excited to have **David Oleyar**, from Hawk Watch International, share the information he has gathered while leading a research project pertaining to the American Kestrel. Numbers of American Kestrels have been declining in recent years.

21 Wednesday 8:00/9:00 am**Bird Walk**

North Arm Pineview Reservoir: Meet at Dylan's (12th and Monroe) at 8:00 am for breakfast or at Smith's parking lot (12th and Harrison) to carpool at 9:00am. Depending on the weather we may alter the location.

24 Saturday 8:30 am**Field Trip**

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge: Meet in the parking lot south of Golden Corral (12th and Washington Blvd, Ogden) at 8:30 am. Look for my truck (Chevy S-10 with license plate that reads "IBIRD"). We will tour the Auto Tour Loop at the Refuge. Bring a lunch and water.

28 Wednesday 8:00/9:00 am**Bird Walk**

Ogden River Parkway: Meet at Dylan's (12th and Monroe) for breakfast at 8:00 am or at 9:00 am at the MTC Park on the Ogden River off Monroe Blvd. Note: there is also a sign designating this location as the Ogden Botanical Gardens.

31 Saturday 5:45 am**Hearell Field Trip**

North Fork Park Owl Prowl: Meet at Smith's (12th & Harrison) to carpool to Eden by 5:45 am or meet by the horse corals inside of North Fork County Park by 6:15 am This trip will be to search for multiple owl species, but our target owl is the Northern Pygmy-owl. We will be listening for owls from the parking areas and roads. As dawn approaches we will hike to areas for an attempt to get looks at owls as well as other fall specialties. After searching for owls the trip will continue with some birding behind the gates at the north end of the park. Trip should end around noon. Contact Mike @ (801) 529-8693 or utmarshrat@yahoo.com if you plan on attending.



Wasatch Audubon
Society
proudly presents its 2nd annual
"The Big Sit!"
Fundraiser

**Join the fun!**October 10th 4:00 am to 10:00 pm

At the

**Robert N. Hasenyager
Great Salt Lake Nature Center**
At Farmington Bay

All are welcome! From fledging to eagle-eye.
Identify birds for 15 minutes to 18 hours.
Covered area and restrooms!

How to participate: Just show up! Bring water,
snacks & binoculars.

Questions?

John Bellmon, 801-814-7544

Martha Ann Albretsen, 801-544-1771

Obtain sponsors: Make a flat donation or a
pledge per species to Wasatch Audubon

For more information and to donate:

www.WasatchAudubon.org

For more information about The Big Sit!

<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/>

AMERICAN KESTREL: LOOKING FOR A HOME

by Keith Evans

The sun had appeared over the Wasatch Mountains an hour before Betty and I drove through the parking lot before entering the Antelope Island Causeway. Our attention focused on an American Kestrel perching on a fence and holding a small mouse. We remembered a kestrel nesting box on a nearby power pole and that we had previously seen a pair of Kestrels in the area. Now, our speculation about them using the box became a fact.

We enjoyed our day of birding along the causeway and Antelope Island and returned to the area of the nesting box just before sunset. A young kestrel's head was extended from the box as he/she was looking over the surrounding area. The adult male kestrel was perched on a nearby post (see photo). We enjoyed watching and photographing these beautiful birds until a vehicle rudely blared its horn and sped by. The kestrels disappeared. To me, a state park should be for relaxing and viewing nature. Therefore, I will never understand some human behavior patterns. Oh well, let's take a look at understanding the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) in a relaxed manner.

There were good reasons for including "looking for a home" in the title of this article. First, this small falcon was formerly called "Sparrow Hawk." Its name was changed to conform with worldwide naming schemes. American Kestrels have a wingspan of approximately 22 inches and are often seen hovering as they hunt for small prey species, such as small mammals, birds, or insects. They are sexually dichromatic, meaning the males and females can be distinguished by color and patterns. Worldwide, there are 13 kestrel species with only one common in the United States. There are 17 subspecies of the American Kestrel with most of these subspecies occurring in South America.

Secondly, American Kestrel populations are often limited by lack of suitable nesting habitat, i.e., homes. They are secondary cavity nesters and prefer open habitats; however, available old trees with woodpecker holes or

natural cavities are limited. Luckily, they are compatible with humans and will readily accept a nesting box. Nesting box projects are benefiting kestrel population levels. For most of us, the sighting of an American Kestrel on a power line along the road is enough for a slight distraction from driving obligations.

Kestrels are also "looking for a home" within the phylogenetic classification system used in most bird identification guides. Formerly, the falcons were always classified with other diurnal hawks and eagles (i.e. raptors). Recent genetic research (DNA) has determined that genetically the falcons are actually more closely related to the vireos than to the other raptors. Searching for a "home" can get complicated, even for our feathered friends.





BIRDY THURSDAYS NEED A LEADER!

Susan Snyder, here. I am a WAS board member and the leader of the monthly Birdy Thursday walks. Due to some changes in my professional and volunteer arenas, I no longer will be able to lead the walks after September's trip.

Would someone else like to try? The walks are the second Thursday of each month. They generally stay close to the urban area and are shorter than regular field trips, as they are designed for people who will be coming straight from work without having had dinner. As a result, it's nice to also have a place in mind for dining afterward if folks so desire.

If you are interested in leading these monthly excursions, you may contact Les Talbot, WAS field trip leader, ibird2@comcast.net. Or you can contact me, and I will get you in touch with Les. You can text me at 801-388-4201 or email, naturescall@gmail.com.

NEST-BOX-ROUTE COORDINATOR

Wasatch Audubon is seeking a nest-box-route coordinator to fill the vacant position for the 2016 nesting season. The four routes along Ant Flat Road and in the Monte Cristo Mountain Range total 115 nest boxes and offer breeding sites for Mountain Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens and rare surprises like Mountain Chickadees and Cassin's Finches.

Duties include coordinating teams and materials to prepare four survey teams for the annual June breeding survey; September post-breeding assessment survey, repair and clean-out trip; and data collection. This long-term effort is one of the best education and nature entertainment programs we offer. The upcoming September 19 post-breeding field trip offers the new coordinator a training opportunity in preparation for next year's season. Contact Kristin Purdy at 801-605-0328 or Jack Rensel at 801-399-0240 for more information.

EDITOR

Wasatch Audubon Society is looking for a volunteer editor for *The Mountain Chickadee*.

The editor is responsible for receiving submissions, putting the newsletter together and emailing it to the printer. The newsletter is published six times per year.

If interested in this volunteer position, please contact Melissa Hofer at mah3338@msn.com or 801-388-0800, 801-544-1453.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

by Pat Bausman

Lynne Ball

Stephen Morgan

Troy Johnson

Christine Painter

We hope to see you at our next meeting or field trip!



Wasatch Audubon Society

P.O. Box 3211
Ogden, Utah 84409



**Audubon
Membership Application**

Please enroll me as a member of **Audubon** and of my local chapter, **Wasatch Audubon**. Send my membership card, and my annual subscriptions to **Audubon** magazine (6 issues) and **The Mountain Chickadee** (6 issues) to the address below. My check for \$20 (Introductory rate only) is enclosed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Send this and your check for \$20, payable to National Audubon to:

National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 422250
Palm Coast, Florida 32142-2250

Local Chapter: **Wasatch Audubon Society C9ZW540Z**



**Wasatch Audubon Society
Mountain Chickadee Subscription**

You can receive **The Mountain Chickadee** (6 issues) for just \$12, without joining **National Audubon**. If you would like to support Wasatch Audubon's education and conservation efforts, please indicate the amount of your contribution and include it in your check. Thank you.

__ 1-year **Mountain Chickadee** subscription: **\$12.00**

__ My contribution to Wasatch Audubon: _____

Total enclosed: _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Send your check, payable to **Wasatch Audubon** to:

Wasatch Audubon Society
P.O. Box 3211
Ogden, Utah 84409