



# The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Wasatch Audubon Society  
Volume 43, Issue 3, May/June, 2024

## Unexpected March Visitor

by Weston Smith

The morning of March 4, 2024 was wet and snowy. I was itching to get out to look for any migrant birds the storm might have brought. My wife, Louize, told me she needed to finish up a few "last things" for our taxes.

While waiting for her to finish. I decided to take a good look at our yard feeders. I don't know if I was being rewarded for my patience, if it was karma, or what it was, but after a few minutes I happened to spot an odd bird. Upon closer inspection, I realized that it was a Brambling. I have always wanted to see a Brambling. Being able to spot one in my own back yard was amazing!



Male Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*). Credit: Weston Smith

I suppose it might be appropriate to explain more about the Brambling. This bird is a small passerine in the finch family. Found most frequently throughout Europe, Northern Africa, and Asia in an area commonly called the Pale-

arctic, the Brambling frequently visits Alaska and strays into other parts of North America. The last record of this bird in Utah was in 1985. So, to say this was unexpected feels a bit like an understatement.

"Holy cow! Lou! It's a Brambling!" I exclaimed. After what seemed like an eternity she meandered out of the office and I showed her our little guest. I then dashed off downstairs to get my camera. I returned upstairs to see my wife standing at the back door. "Where is it?" I asked. I think it's over there." My wife said pointing at the ground feeder. Sure enough!

I snapped a few hurried photos. I called my brother, dad, and several of my friends in the birding community. I then composed a quick blurb that I posted everywhere I could think of. The goal was to reach as many interested birders as possible. It didn't take long for the people to start flocking to the Brambling.

To the best of my calculations approximately 200 birders and their families showed up over the initial 11-days of the Brambling's initial visit (March 4-14). The Brambling did give us a very brief encore performance on March 26-27, although this time he was not as easy to spot. This bird garnered local media attention as well as social media attention on YouTube.

Although its visit was relatively short, this little bird made quite an impression on me and my family. We appreciate all those who came to share this bird event with us. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet old friends and to

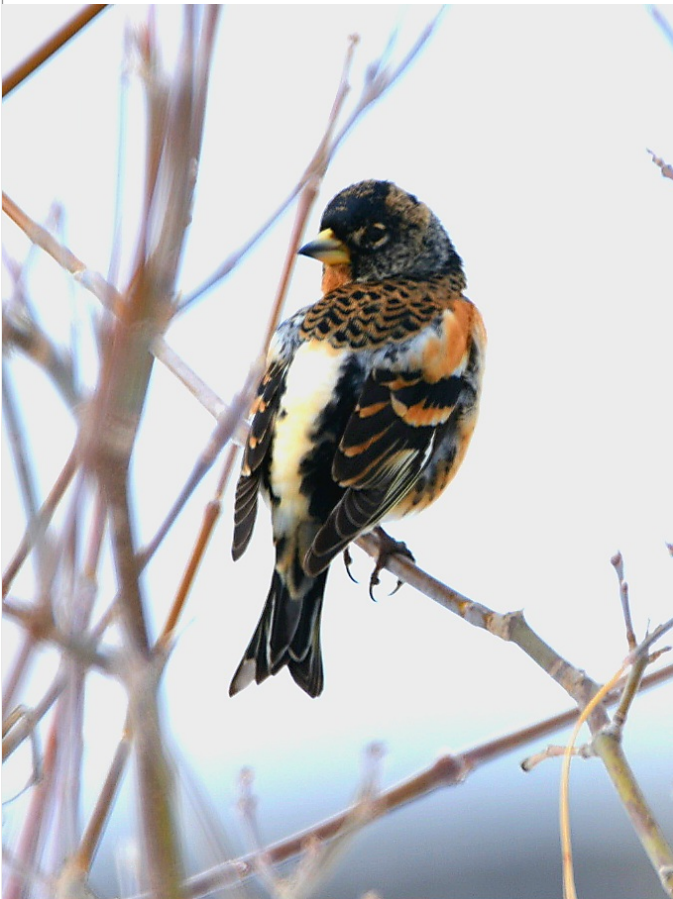
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make new ones. We also appreciate all the kind and thoughtful gifts that helped us to continue feeding birds and making our back yard a sanctuary for both birds and birders.

Also of note, I am working to get a book and kiosk set up for birders to record their visits to our back yard. That way my children and grandchildren may understand the impact of us sharing our yard with both birds and birders. Please look for the book on your next visit!

ABC 4 news story: <https://www.abc4.com/news/northern-utah/hundreds-flock-to-morgan-county-to-see-rare-bird/>

Bright Eyed Birding YouTube Video: [This bird has NOT been seen in Utah for 50 years... UNTIL NOW!](#)



Male brambling, showing the characteristic white rump patch.  
Credit: Weston Smith

## Lek and Loon Field Trip Report

by Jen Hitt

On Saturday, April 20, we had our annual field trip visit to the Henefer Lek to look for Greater

## Wasatch Audubon Society

Sage Grouse and to East Canyon State Park to look for loons. The weather was cool, but sunny. The sage grouse put on an incredible display, with several surrounding our vehicle. We were able to get great views and some nice pictures.

Wasatch Audubon member Raquel Johnson said of the experience, "This was the first time I have been to the lek to see the sage grouse. What an incredible and magical experience! They were really close to us and we could hear their sounds and see the details of their feathers. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to see them and I hope these regal birds will always be able to maintain their habitat for them, us, and future generations of birders."

After the lek, we headed to East Canyon where we saw least sandpipers, a Wilson's Phalarope, Mountain Bluebirds, Ospreys, a variety of waterfowl, and the target Common Loons.

A trip through Croydon yielded sightings of Sandhill Cranes, more Ospreys, a Canyon Wren, and an American Dipper.

It was a great birding day!



Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*). Credit: Jen Hitt.



Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*). Credit: Jen Hitt.



Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*). Credit: Jen Hitt.

### President's Message

by John Bellmon

Spring has finally come to northern Utah. With above average snowfall, we are looking forward to an increased water level in the Great Salt Lake. Again, we hope for a spring without any extreme weather. The very high record-breaking snowfall that we had last year along with some flooding isn't likely to be repeated this year.

The spring bird migration should be in full swing by the time this newsletter is posted online. The height of the shorebird migration at the end of April and the first of May should occur on time, so get out to the Antelope Island Causeway to see what is coming through. This will be followed by the peak of the songbird migration. Your backyards, parks, and hills should be alive with singing songbirds setting up nesting sites and attracting mates. Some of the colors are amazing and their songs are wonderful.

This is the time to make sure that your bird feeders are clean and in good repair for all of the incoming birds. A good supply of fresh bird seed is also best for these incoming birds. They really enhance our yards and homes. Be certain that your hummingbird feeders are cleaned and supplied with fresh hummingbird solution (4 parts water to 1 part sugar is best).

For migrants, also be very careful to keep your yard lights down or off and disconnect all lights that point up into the night sky. These disorient night-migrating songbirds. Most of our songbirds are night migrants. Have a bird friendly home with feeders, natural flowers, and shrubs along with trees and good habitats to provide them with shelter and nesting sites.

The Urban Bird Treaty signing will be held on Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at the Ogden Nature Center (ONC) (966 W. 12<sup>th</sup> St., Ogden) from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm. This is an important event to highlight the urban environment as an important place for wildlife to thrive in our community. About 50 fourth grade students will attend that day to do a service project at the ONC. The main ceremony will be from 9:30 – 10:00 am, where speakers will discuss the program and the mayor will be there to sign the certificate, along with regional officers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There will also be a live bird presentation with one of the ONC's birds to finish off the ceremony. We hope to see some Wasatch Audubon members there.

## Conservation Corner

### What the 2024 Utah Legislature did for the Great Salt Lake

by Lynn Carroll

As the 2024 Utah legislative session began, a number of bills aimed at conserving water and getting more to Great Salt Lake (GSL) were introduced. A few good bills passed intact or lightly amended. More impactful bills either didn't pass or passed after their most useful provisions were whittled away.

Appropriations were needed for programs passed last year and this. Not unexpectedly, the funding that was granted could be considered a good start, but not enough to achieve rapid progress.

One notable exception is phragmites removal. \$2.5 million (vs. \$2 million requested) is to be used in Utah Lake, Bear Lake, and Great Salt Lake, in order to achieve in 5 years what had been planned for 15 yrs. This should result in a significant amount of water (up to 35K acre-feet) either reaching or remaining in GSL.

Ogden will get \$5 million of American Rescue Plan money to help with replacing a leaky 90-year-old pipeline in Ogden Canyon. The \$100 million project will stop the leakage of about 9 acre-ft. of water per day as it flows from Pineview. Mayor Nadolski has pledged to send some of the saved water to Willard Spur of GSL each August, to reduce outbreaks of avian botulism.

The largest investment in GSL is \$10 million to the Great Salt Lake Commissioner's office, which will be working on strategies to get extra water to the Lake. They expect to try out "split-season leases," where farmers are paid to stop using their water early, after a first or second crop, sending the water downstream for the rest of the season.

Over \$2 million more is earmarked for other

water conservation work. More cities will get workshops teaching how to include water-wise planning in their general plans. Curriculum will be developed for Utah students to learn all about water. The legislation became very specific about what will and will not be taught. Cities and irrigation companies will continue to educate water users about what they must do to conserve water.

New government buildings, including schools, will not be able to irrigate "non-functional turf" (grass grown just for looks, not sports fields and such) with sprinklers under HB 11. Since drip-irrigating lawn is impractical, it amounts to a ban.

HB 61 permits the use of telemetry in water data collection and gives the State Engineer powers that will improve water measurement and shepherding of water, essential for getting water to GSL.

Homeowners' associations may no longer require lawns under HB 275.

Needed changes to administration of agricultural water optimization projects and the definition of "saved water" were made in SB 18. These will protect the water rights of participants in those projects and are required to get any saved water to GSL.

SB 77 allows money from the Water Rights Restricted Account to be used for water measurement infrastructure.

HB 453 made significant changes to the way extractive industries on GSL are regulated. The role of the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands is clarified. It requires the State Engineer to establish a distribution management plan, like a water budget for the Lake, with limits on what the mineral extraction companies can take from the Lake during low water years, and it will protect water conserved upstream for the benefit of the Lake from being diverted into evaporation ponds.

Dan Strauch, hired by the Utah Audubon Council as our bill tracker, will follow the Interim

meetings of legislative committees this summer and fall to anticipate what may be coming in the 2025 session.

This article is mostly based on material from the Great Salt Lake Collaborative and Friends of Great Salt Lake. I've listed the positive results from the 2024 session, not the bad bills or the missed opportunities. SB 18 and HB 453 both have provisions that could have negative results. See for instance the Legislative Report Card from Utah Rivers Council at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a46b200b2007bcca6fc4/t/65e22cff131e2967059b95ad/1709321479188/2024+Legislative+Report+Card+Final+%5BMedia+Copy+930am%5D.pdf>

### Feeding Birds at Ogden Nature Center

by Laura Johnston

It was another successful winter of feeding birds at ONC! The Audubon Society generously provided many pounds of seeds. Dedicated bird lovers fed hungry birds daily at seven feeders along the trail enjoying the beautiful Nature Center in all kinds of weather! Birds that enjoyed our offerings were Juncos, White-crowned Sparrows, Towhees, Song Sparrows, Chickadees, House Finches, Quail... Many thanks to the volunteers who made this possible – Brian and Jeanette Nosker, Susan and Doug Snyder, John Bellmon, Maya Pendleton, Bruce and Barb Perry, Julia Barber and her family, and Kay and Tim Healey. Dan Johnston provided much needed maintenance on feeders. Special thanks go to Jeanne Taylor who finished her ONC bird feeding duties after many years of dependable service on Sundays. Thank you, Jeanne!!

### Report On a Field Trip to Antelope Island

By Dan Johnston

On March 23rd, a warm cloudy day, a small group of four birders enjoyed a trip to Antelope Island, observing 42 species.

Exploring the Causeway on the way out to the island, we saw a large variety of waterfowl and shorebirds. Notable among those were Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, and Long-billed Curlews.

At Ladyfinger Point we were visited by our friend the Rock Wren who welcomed us with his signature song. We also spotted a Northern Mockingbird there.

It was a great day to see owls. We saw a total of four Great-horned Owls, two at the barn and two at Garr Ranch in the trees. Really outstanding, though, were the eleven Burrowing Owls that we saw throughout the island.

Also, at Garr Ranch, we saw Hermit's Thrush. Garr Ranch was hosting a large group of young children from Davis County Head Start. It was good to see them enjoying nature in this beautiful place.



Male Ruddy Duck. Photo: Pinterest



Bufflehead. Photo: Judy Gallagher / PW Conservation Alliance

## Upcoming Events

### Great Salt Lake Bird Festival

**May 16-19**

Information on registration and tickets is now available. Go to the website at:

[daviscountyutah.gov/greatsaltlakebirdfest](https://daviscountyutah.gov/greatsaltlakebirdfest)

to register and get details on presenters, field trips, workshops and more.



Long-billed Curlew. Photo: All about Birds

### Discover Gillmor Sanctuary

**Saturday, May 4th, 7:45-12:00pm**

The hidden world of insects with Rodolfo Probst

**Host:** Heidi Hoven

**Leader:** Rodolfo Probst

**Registration:** Sign up at Audubon Rockies.

<https://buff.ly/4cSGr6i>

Uncover the hidden world of insects and discover how they thrive and adapt in the unique environment of Gillmor Sanctuary. Participants will walk on uneven grasslands.

**Limit 20 people.** Meeting location provided with confirmation of registration. Provide own transportation, carpooling encouraged. **Easy to Moderate**

### Lectures

**May 21 - Edu. Bldg, Ogden Nature Cent.**

Deeda Seed, from the Center for Biological Diversity, will talk to us about the proposed endangered species listing for the Wilson's Phalarope at the Great Salt Lake.

**June — TBA.**

### Field Trips

**May 18 - Great Salt Lake Bird Festival**  
**Saturday, in lieu of a field trip**

Saturday is Family Day at the festival. Head out to the Wildlife Education Center at 1157 S. Waterfowl Way (1100 W Glovers Lane) Farmington. It's not too late to enjoy a multitude of activities at the festival from May 16-19! More info at <https://www.daviscountyutah.gov/greatsaltlakebirdfest>

**June 22 - Bird the Donner/Mormon Trail**  
**Saturday 8:00am field trip**

Meet at the DWR office, 515 E 5300 S (Adams Ave.) in South Ogden. We will caravan to Henefer where we will pick up the trail, follow it to East Canyon Reservoir and go on to Jeremy Ranch Road (a dirt road). We will spot historical markers and birds along the way, ending at Mormon Flats. Target birds: Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Dusky Grouse, Hermit Thrush, American Dipper. Accessibility: Mostly done in car, restrooms along way. Leader Dan/John.

### Bird Walks

**May 1- Kaysville Ponds.** Note earlier start time  
**7:00 a.m.** Breakfast at Dylan's, 185 North Main Street in Kaysville

**8:00 a.m.** Meet at 920 S 50 W, Kaysville, UT 84037 on the Frontage Road (50 West). Meet in the Botanical Center parking lot to walk the trail from there. **P/U M B**

**May 8 - Antelope Island Causeway.**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Warren's Drive In, 1778 S. 1000 W., Syracuse

**8:00 AM** Meet at the parking lot at the toll booth.

**May 15 - Farmington Bay.**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Dylan's, 185 North Main Street in Kaysville

**8:00 AM** Meet at 1325 W (entrance to Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area), not GSL Nature Center. **R U L**

**May 22 - South Ogden Nature Park.**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 1765 E. Skyline Dr., South Ogden

**8:00 AM** Meet at the trailhead. Parking for the trailhead is at 5981 Park Vista Dr., south of the Ogden Athletic Club. **B P/U M.**

**May 29 - Willard Bay.** This is a fee area.

**7:00 AM** No Breakfast. Meet at Flying J Parking Lot and commute into Willard Bay. **R P/U L B**

**June 5 - Fort Buenaventura river trail to Kingfisher Loop:**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Rusted Spoon, 1310 Wall Ave., Ogden

**8:00 AM** Located on A Avenue in Ogden. Meet at the entrance to the park, walk the trail that goes along the river to Kingfisher Pond. **P L B**

**June 12 - Little Mountain Trail:**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Dylan's in Ogden, 981 12<sup>th</sup> St., Ogden

**8:00 AM** Meet at the trail head at 2000 W on 4000 N (west from Smith & Edwards). **U L**

**June 19 - Croydon Lost Creek Area.**

**7:00 AM** Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 1720 W. 12<sup>th</sup> St., Ogden

**8:30 AM** Meet at Croydon City Park. 1801 N 6900 E, Croydon, UT 84018

**Accessibility Codes for walks and trips**

**R** - Restrooms available

**P** - Paved trail **U** - Unpaved trail

**P/U** - Combination

**L** - Level trail **M** - Moderately level trail

**B** - benches available

## Youth Corner

By Leah and Abigail Johnson

Wasatch Audubon has adopted a bird from the World Bird Sanctuary! After an exciting and close vote, we adopted a Barn Owl named Goblin! Here is some further information about the new addition to our Audubon family!



# GOBLIN BARN OWL

### HATCH DATE: 2/20/2008

- Goblin was hatched at the World Bird Sanctuary through our conservation program for endangered species. Most birds through this program are released into the wild to help the wild population numbers. A select few are chosen to become permanent residents at World Bird Sanctuary and then trained to become educational ambassadors for their species, which Goblin did.

### FUN FACTS ABOUT GOBLIN

- Goblin is currently one of the flying birds we use in our educational programs during the fall season, sometimes even making an appearance during our evening Owl Prowl programs.
- He is very sound based with his flight training sessions. If Goblin gets distracted flying between his two trainers, all the trainer has to do is make a sound called a pish, and he will redirect his flight to make it to the trainer. Sometimes turning his body completely around mid flight!
- Goblin was named after David Bowie's role as the Goblin King, Jareth, in the movie Labyrinth.

### SPECIES FACTS

#### Scientific Name:

- Tyto alba*. Greek and Latin origin, meaning "white owl."

#### Distribution:

- Barn Owls are found on every continent except Antarctica.

#### Habitat:

- They prefer open fields to hunt in such as grasslands, prairies, and agricultural areas.
- Nest in hollow trees, nest boxes, caves, cliffs, barns and other structures.

#### Diet:

- Best mousers of any animal species ever recorded. They can hear a mouse's foot steps from around 1/4 of a mile away! One Barn Owl usually catches on average 3-4 mice a day.
- Will also eat other small mammals like rats, voles, lemmings, shrews, bats, and rabbits.

#### Behavior:

- Nocturnal hunters.
- Unlike most other owl species, Barn Owls do not hoot, they scream! Making them the source of many ghost stories throughout the ages.
- A Barn Owl mating pair are monogamous, meaning they will mate for life. A pair will usually raise two broods a year. Number of chicks is usually 5-7 per clutch of eggs.

#### Identification:

- Heart shaped facial disk with white, brown, and grey body feathers.
- Females are larger than the males and will usually be darker and have a distinct golden ring around their facial disk. In males this golden ring is very light in coloration.

World  Bird  
SANCTUARY



**Wasatch Audubon Society**

**Officers**

President	John Bellmon	801-444-3704
Vice President	Jen Hitt	801-540-5091
Secretary	Sharen Perry	801-392-9554
Treasurer	Jay Stretch	801-721-9432
Past President	Jay Stretch	801-721-9432

**Board**

2024/2025	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
2024/2025	George Muller	801-745-4035
2024/2025	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
2023/2024	Abigail Johnson	
2023/2024	Leah Johnson	
2023/2024	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
2023/2024	Susan Snyder	801-388-4201

**Committee Chairpersons**

Conservation	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Conservation	John Bellmon	801-444-3704
Education	Dennis Collins	801-393-1115
Feeder Projects	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
Field Trips	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
Bird Walks	Ben Johnson	801-231-7008
Membership	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Programs	Susan Snyder	801-388-4201
Historian	Ruth Davis	801-309-0425
Publicity	Arnold Smith	801-829-3383
Hospitality	Jeane Taylor	801-394-2813
Newsletter	Steve Aird	<a href="mailto:steven.d.aird@gmail.com">steven.d.aird@gmail.com</a>

**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 outdoors 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. Visit our website at: <http://www.wasatchaudubon.org>

**New / Rejoined Members**

Welcome to our new members, and to those who have joined again after an extended absence! We look forward to seeing you at a meeting or on a birding trip.

- Howard Browers
- Janice Dalley
- Elaine Jensen
- Debra Marin and Michael Behring
- Anne Martin
- Faith Pearson
- Sonja Rowell
- Cheryl Watson



Early-arriving Yellow Warbler at Kaysville Ponds, 21 April 2024.  
Credit: Ben Johnson

**Owl Pellets**



Thanks to all who collected owl pellets during the last school year. I was able to present my owl program in third, fourth, and fifth grade classes in three school districts. I never have enough owl pellets, so please keep them coming. The larger barn and great horned owl pellets are best. If you know of a good location to collect them, please give me a call. Thanks again, and happy birding!

Dennis Collins (801) 393-1115