



The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Wasatch Audubon Society
Volume 44, Number 1 ~ January - February 2025

President's Message

by John Bellmon

A very Happy New Year everyone! As 2025 begins, we have many things for which to be thankful. As I write this just before Christmas, we are in the midst of the five Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) that are sponsored by Wasatch Audubon. Because of this year's mild weather we have not seen anything really special, just normal bird species for this time of year. I am looking forward to seeing everyone's reports, in case there are some surprises. Some of us on the Morgan CBC were able to see a large flock of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches just northeast of Henefer. On the Bear River Refuge CBC a farmer welcomed us onto his farm and were able to see hundreds of Snow Geese and Tundra Swans just north of the Bear River Duck Club. That is always an exciting experience for a birder. A big thank you to all who participated in our Christmas Bird Counts. This is our chapter's heritage. It is how we got started back in 1980.

We elected WAS officers for the new year. Jen Hitt was elected President, Dan Johnston as Vice-President, Sharen Perry as Secretary, Jay Stretch as Treasurer, and as members of the Board of Directors; Abigail Johnson, Leah Johnson, Laura Johnston, and Dallin Henderson. Thanks to all who serve as officers, board members and committee chairs.

In 2025, we will continue our Wednesday Morning Bird Walks and monthly field trips. During the winter, birding can be fantastic,

with winter vagrants that occasionally show up. The other exciting thing that will be happening is the Great Backyard Bird Count from February 14 – 17. This is the largest wildlife survey in the world. You can count birds in your backyard or out on a birding trip. Then enter your results on the Audubon or Cornell Lab of Ornithology websites. Checklists are sent from all over the world for this four-day count. It is really amazing how popular this count has become in the last 25 years. You can spend as little as 15 minutes or can participate in an all-day survey if you wish. Please participate and help with this worldwide bird survey, "birding with a purpose." It helps to track bird populations throughout the world.

A birding friend, Keith Evans, once said that if you want a birding challenge you should take on gulls. The winter around the Great Salt Lake is a great time to go birding for gulls. Most of the winter gulls that we see are Ring-billed Gulls, but there are others mixed in. There always a few California Gulls that stayed around for the winter, even though most of them migrate to the west coast for the winter. Coming from the coast are always a few Herring Gulls and if you look closely you might find a Short-billed Gull (Mew Gull). Then there are the rare ones: Iceland Gulls, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Glaucous Gulls and if we are really lucky, a Little Gull. These and some others have been seen at Antelope Island State Park, Farmington Bay Wildlife Management Area, Willard Bay State Park and

Utah Lake. So if you are gullible enough, dress warmly, study your field guides and get out to do some gulling. We will have some Wednesday Bird Walks to Farmington Bay WMA just for this. It's a great time to take up this new challenge!

I am looking forward to a new year and many exciting birding events with all the faithful members of Wasatch Audubon. Good birding to everyone!

John Bellmon, President
(stepping aside in a peaceful transfer of power)

Conservation Corner

Prepare to Influence the Utah Legislature by Lynn Carroll

The 2025 general session of the Utah Legislature will run from January 21 to March 7. The four Audubon chapters in the state form the Utah Audubon Council (UAC), which attempts to track important legislation and appropriations (funding) and to inform legislators of our views. UAC has a contract with Dan Strauch, who tracked bills for the conservation community last year and will be our Policy Advocate this year, with a license to lobby.

During the 7 weeks of the session, Dan will provide us with summaries of environment-related bills and will suggest opportunities to influence outcomes. I will pass these to our members via email. For this effort to have impact, it is important that you pay attention and follow through with phone calls or emails to your legislators.

To prepare, make sure that I have your email address and that messages I send with MailChimp don't get relegated to your junk folder. (The sender will always be Wasatch Audubon Society.) Then go to le.utah.gov and find the names of your senator and representa-

tive. The home page of that site has a section that says "Quick Links" then "Find your Legislator" for that purpose. Early in the session, you can learn a lot by exploring that website if you have time.

Dan Strauch reported to UAC on a meeting of environmental groups that took place last May. They agreed that a top priority will be to maintain and increase appropriations for existing programs for GSL water: Water Metering, GSLWET, Split Season Leasing, and Incentives for Wise Crops. Priorities for legislation are: Minimum GSL Level and Maximum Salinity Level statutes and Wetlands protection (possibly further than the Supreme Court wetland definition).

Discussions among advocacy groups feature a lot of "alphabet soup" in order to save time. I'll try to help in my communications, but if you don't understand something, please ask me.

Here is a brief sample:

GSLWET - Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust

DNR - Department of Natural Resources, which has 8 divisions, including

DFFSL - Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands

DWR - Division of Wildlife Resources.

HNRAE - House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment committee

NRAEQ - Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality appropriations subcommittee

Note: to opt out of any emails about the legislature, just ask me.

Keep Water Flowing to Great Salt Lake

by Lynn Carroll

The Salt Lake Tribune said of the 2024 water year (Oct '23 to Sept '24), "The Beehive State ended at 100% of normal after an up and down 12 months." So how did Great Salt Lake (GSL) fare in 2024? Here are some highlights.

In my May column, I noted a few bills and appropriations passed by the Utah Legislature last session that could help get more water to the Lake. HB 453 changed how extractive industries on GSL are regulated and led to a voluntary agreement between Forestry Fire and State Lands (DFFSL) and Compass Minerals. The company will donate unused and unperfected water rights of 200,000 acre-feet annually to DFFSL. Compass will use its remaining water rights in the North Arm of GSL, but will reduce its water intake if Lake levels decline.

The GSL Watershed Enhancement Trust (GSLWET), managed by Audubon and TNC, has awarded grants "to protect and/or restore wetlands and benefit the hydrology of GSL." Work has begun on eight 2-year projects spanning over 13,000 acres of wetlands that were chosen in 2023. Recently more projects were awarded grants from GSLWET and DFFSL funds totaling over \$5.4 million to benefit 6,000 acres of GSL wetlands and habitat. Find interesting reading about these projects in the GSL Collaborative's 12/17/24 article and at <https://www.gslwatertrust.org/current-wetland-projects>.

Meanwhile, GSLWET has facilitated, provided transaction costs, and/or contributed funding to water transactions providing about 68,000 acre-feet of water to GSL this year. This includes the permanent donation by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and large multi-year donations by Kennecott and the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District. Donated and leased shares of water storage in Utah Lake provided 10 k a.f. of water sent through the Jor-

dan River to Farmington Bay and GSL. This release provided benefits all along its route.

This year GSL again saw strong runoff from winter snowpack, and the south arm gained nearly 3 feet from its 2023 low. Then a very hot summer and dry fall erased most of that gain. At least the north arm is back to almost the same level, as the breach between the two was left open. We can't stop conserving just because of good snow reports.

A timely infusion of money from the federal government will help with the infrastructure needed to get conserved water to GSL. Thirteen new stream gauges and some buoys were installed around GSL by the U.S. Geological Survey to better track water flow into the Lake and summertime evaporation. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will direct \$50 million in Inflation Reduction Act funds toward GSL-related conservation projects.

The Great Salt Lake Collaborative recently published a list of actions ordinary people (you) can take to help the Lake. It includes links to details. (Dec. 13, 2024 Solutions)

- Conserve water by replacing your lawn and encourage businesses and institutions (schools, churches, etc.) to remove grass they don't use. Learn how to water efficiently.
- Stop or cut back on eating beef and dairy (especially cheese). The demand for alfalfa is up. It feeds beef cattle and dairy cows, mostly for local consumption. Only 8% of Utah alfalfa leaves the country.
- Donate to GSLWET, the entity set up by the state to acquire water donations for GSL. A church in SLC added several thousand dollars from its members to a large donation from an estate for the Lake.
- Talk to Utah lawmakers about the lake. Suggested topics include:
 - Monitor and study GSL dust. Spend funds earmarked for PM10 monitors.
 - Commit conserved water saved at homes and farms to the Lake.
 - Change how people pay for water so that they use less.

Discarded fishing line is a hazard to birds

by Jen Hitt

On a chilly December Wednesday at Bountiful Pond, Wasatch Audubon Society members were scanning a nearby flock of sparrows looking for rarities when they saw movement in some nearby reeds. Closer examination revealed that a bird was in trouble. A Pied-billed Grebe was trapped in some discarded fishing line, and the line was caught in the reeds. Dan Johnston and Jim Kukula jumped in to help. They grabbed the struggling bird, cut and carefully unwound the line, removed the hook, and the Pied-billed Grebe was back on its way...although not without a bemused look back at its rescuers.



A Pied-billed Grebe wrapped in fishing line.

While this bird made it out safely, improperly discarded fishing line presents a serious threat to wildlife, including birds. In an article describing the problem fishing line poses to birds, the National Audubon Society reports that from 2002 to 2015, in just two California rehabilitation clinics more than 2,957 aquatic birds were treated for injuries related to fishing gear ([Audubon](#)). Most of these injuries are avoidable.



Dan and Jim rush to unwind the line from the bird.



Having freed the grebe from the line, Dan releases it back into the water.

Anglers can help by disposing of their used fishing line properly and avoiding fishing in locations where their line could become irretrievably caught. Non-anglers, including birders, runners, and dog-walkers can help by picking up any abandoned line they see while out recreating in the wild. Also, keep an eye out for entangled wildlife, and notify a rehabilitation agency if help is needed.

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The grebe looks back at rescuers as it swims away.

Youth Corner

Setting Goals for the New Year

by **Abigail Johnson**

As we begin a new year, it is time to set new goals and to develop new habits. I like to spend a few hours at the start of a new year by planning and setting my goals on paper. I usually set at least four. One goal is spiritual, one is social, one is physical, and one is intellectual. This helps me to become a well-rounded person and to feel good about myself.

As I considered my goals this year, I thought about some environmental issues. I felt that perhaps I could set a goal that would help solve a problem. After brainstorming for a while, I decided that I am going to help with waste. I will start by throwing plastics into the recycle bin, reusing paper, using a metal water bottle, and picking up litter.

After that I had to come up with a plan. I decided to make a chart to keep track of all these ideas. Every day I will have these items listed and if I do one of them, I will make a

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check mark or write the number of items and/or times I completed. Once I get to a certain number of times/check marks I will receive a treat. Then every month if I have at least one check mark every day then I will get a large prize.

I would like to challenge all of you. I want everyone to set at least four goals (it would be great if they could be around the categories I mentioned above). Plus, it would be great if one of your goals could help the environment or animals like mine do. If everyone that read this article was able to complete this challenge imagine how many people are changing for the better. This will help us all be amazing people and feel good about this new year. See you next time!

To Build a Better Peanut Butter Feeder

by **Steve Aird**

Several decades ago, I heard about people offering peanut butter to wild birds. Since many Japanese Tits and Varied Tits come to the sunflower seeds we offer, I decided to try it. Not willing to spend much money on this idea, especially with peanut butter at over \$7 for a small jar, I simply drilled eight 30-mm holes in a log, stuffed peanut butter in the holes, and hung it up.



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This was an immediate success with Japanese Tits, but the Varied Tits wouldn't touch the stuff. Diminutive Warbling White-eyes also loved it, but unfortunately, so did Brown-eared Bulbuls, loud, screechy, skittish, robin-sized birds. Worse still, they brought all their friends, flapping like ungainly hummingbirds to make a stab at the forbidden fare. Given their cowardly natures, I thought that hanging the peanut butter feeder right in front of my window might discourage them. It didn't.

So I made a cylinder of plastic mesh, and cut out many cross pieces to yield a tube with holes about 3 cm square and a lid made of the same material. The Japanese tits and white-eyes were not put off much by this, but neither were the bulbuls, which quickly noticed that the bottom was open. Knowing that I couldn't see them, they flew in next to the house below the windows, landed on the ground, and then flapped up into the cylinder to grab a beakful of the brown gooey stuff. I had to make a mesh bottom for the tube to keep them out. Several times, an avalanche of snow off the roof nearly destroyed the feeder.

This year, I redesigned it, using an 8x8-cm treated post. To this I attached four sections of 5x8-cm pine with three 30-mm holes drilled in each. I added perches, a wooden lid and a wooden bottom 40 cm in diameter, and then stained the raw wood to keep the peanut oil from soaking into it and eventually turning it black with fungi.

Japanese tits and white-eyes are once again very happy, and even some varied tits have decided that chunky peanut butter is not bad. Globes of peanut butter that the tits accidentally drop, land on the bottom disk where they are eaten later, so the bulbuls don't even get to clean up. For two or three days, bulbuls landed on the cage and hopped all over it trying to find a flaw in its design. This time, they were beaten, and they knew it. Happily, I haven't seen them in over a week. I am still savoring the success of not being "out-thunk" by a bird!



Epilogue: I bought 2 large jars of Skippy chunky peanut butter in the U.S. this year. Apparently they were a security risk, because they were confiscated at SLC Airport by TSA. Has anyone ever heard of an airliner being brought down with peanut butter? Maybe I should have bought the smooth kind instead of chunky...

Antelope Island Field Trip Report

By Jen Hitt

Our Antelope Island field trip took place on a crisp, November Saturday. Recent reports of interesting waterfowl spotted on the causeway had the group excited. We were particularly hoping to see a Black Scoter hen that had been hanging around for several weeks near the second bridge. Regrettably, we were not able to find her. We did get some great views of a pair Long-tailed Ducks, however.

At Lady Finger point, we saw Sagebrush Sparrows and a Rock Wren. Before leaving the island we made a second attempt to find the Black Scoter, but she still eluded us. It was a lovely day on the island just the same.



Sagebrush Sparrow, Antelope Island. Photo: Jen Hitt.



Rock Wren, Antelope Island. Photo: Jen Hitt.

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

January 25 - Box Elder County

8:00 a.m. Meet in Denny's parking lot on 21st St. off I-15 at 8:00am. We will explore Promontory Point, Howell Valley, etc. Target birds are Gray Partridge, Snow Bunting, Rough-legged Hawk. This is an all-day trip so bring water and lunch. Trip leader – Dan Johnston. Viewing mostly from cars, can stop for restroom.

February 22 - Annual Morgan County Bald Eagle Trip

8:30 a.m. Meet at DWR office (515 E 5300 S in South Ogden). We will caravan from there. Target birds are Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Wild Turkey, American Dipper and Rough legged Hawk. This is an all-day trip so bring water and lunch. Trip leader – John Bellmon. Viewing mostly from cars. Can stop for restroom breaks.

Bird Walks

January 8 - **GSL Nature Center:**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Dylan's in Kaysville, 185 N. Main St., Kaysville

9:00 AM Meet in the parking lot. 1157 S. Waterfowl Way (1100 W Glovers Lane) Farmington. **R U L B**

January 15 - **Willard Bay:** This is a fee area.

7:30 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads 1720 W 12th Street, Ogden

9:00 AM Meet at the Willard Flying J Parking Lot and travel to Willard Bay from there. **R P/U L B**

January 22 - **Farmington Bay:**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Dylan's, 185 North Main Street in Kaysville

9:00 AM Meet at 1325 W (entrance to Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area), not GSL Nature Center. **R U L**

January 29 - **Farmington Bay:**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Dylan’s, 185 North Main Street in Kaysville

9:00 AM Meet at 1325 W (entrance to Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area), not GSL Nature Center. **R U L**

February 5 - **Mueller Park:**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 544 W. 400 N., Bountiful

9:00 AM Meet at the Gates to Mueller Park, taking Mueller Park Rd east until you reach parking area or park on the street if parking lot full. Bring your boots! Uphill walk, possible high snow levels **U**

February 12 - **Riverdale Trail- South:**

8:00 AM Meet at Moore’s Family Restaurant 3558 Wall Ave Ogden

9:00 AM Meet at the trailhead off Riverdale Road at 4800 Weber River Dr, Riverdale, UT 84405 **R, P, L**

February 19 - Ogden Cemetery:

8:00 AM Meet for breakfast at Dylan’s, 981 12th Street in Ogden

9:00 AM Meet at the northeast corner of the cemetery at 1875 Monroe Blvd. Ogden **P/U L**

February 26 - **Antelope Island Causeway (this is a fee area)**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Warren’s Drive In, 1778 S. 1000 W., Syracuse

9:00 AM Meet at the parking lot at the toll booth

March 5 - **Little Mountain Rail Trail:**

8:00 AM Breakfast at Ramblin Roads, 1720 W. 12th S., Ogden

9:00 AM Meet at the trail head located at 2000 W on 4000 N (west from Smith & Edwards). **U L**

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

Meetings and Talks

By Susan Snyder

The WAS general membership meeting will be at 7 PM, Tuesday, February 18. As a reminder, we will not meet in January. We will only meet every other month in 2025. The February program will feature Dan Johnston and George Mueller talking about their Costa Rica trip. Due to technical difficulties, many people did not get to see it in November, so we asked them to repeat it. As usual, the meeting will be a hybrid - on Zoom and at the Ogden Nature Center, for those who wish to meet in person.

Ogden Nature Center Bird Feeding

by Laura Johnston

Birds at the Nature Center have enjoyed a boost in their winter food options for about 6 weeks now. A team of bird lovers from Wasatch Audubon and the community feed the birds with seed donated by Wasatch Audubon. We welcome two new team members – Bettyann and John Mayer and Ruth Carmena-Murray. With their efforts, we can now feed daily! A bonus for their efforts is spotting a variety of birds drawn to the feeders – White-crowned Sparrows, Chickadees, Spotted Towhees, California Quail, Song Sparrows, House Finches, Goldfinches and others. Feeding will continue through mid-March.

Announcement

By Susan Snyder

Wasatch Audubon is looking for a new program director! This is a fancy title for the person who schedules speakers for our monthly membership meetings. In 2025, we will be meeting in February, April, June, August, October, and December. The August meeting is our annual picnic. Speakers have already been scheduled for February, so that’s not very many months left to find speakers. It’s a fun position, and allows us to bring diverse topics to our members. Anyone who is interested should contact WAS President, Jen Hitt jenhitt@hotmail.com.

New/Rejoined Members (December, 2024)

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.

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Nadene Archibald | Gail Rimington |
| Mindi Brough | Karen Robinson |
| Sue Eames | Chaesity Rodeback |
| Dallin Henderson | Mike Rosner |
| Katia Kelty | Sarah Schenck |
| Abby Musgrove | Dickson Smith |
| Demetrios Pagonis | Isabella Smith |
| Marcia Parisi | Brian Stecklein |
| Tiffany Pedersen | Michael Stephenson |
| Barbara Peters-Gorry | Jason Taukiueva |
| Brynn Poulsen | Richard Vernon |
| James Quast | |

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>



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

Wasatch Audubon Society

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Vice President	Dan Johnston	801-645-8633
Secretary	Sharen Perry	801-392-9554
Treasurer	Jay Stretch	801-721-9432
Past President	John Bellmon	801-814-7544
Board		
2024/2025	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
2024/2025	George Muller	801-745-4035
2025/2026	Dallin Henderson	801-309-7285
2025/2026	Abigail Johnson	
2025/2026	Leah Johnson	
2025/2026	Laura Johnston	801-458-9558
2024/2025	Open	
Committee Chairpersons		
Conservation	Lynn Carroll	801-392-8216
Conservation	John Bellmon	801-814-7544
Education	Dennis Collins	801-393-1115
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