



# The Stilt

Volume 37, Issue 7  
September 2008

Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

## An Anytime, Anywhere Celebration of Nature in the City; Simple citizen-science project reaches urbanites of all ages

Nature has the power to soothe and enthuse. More people are finding that out as they join the free, year-round "Celebrate Urban Birds!" citizen-science project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. From schools, hospitals, and senior centers, to wellness programs, scout packs, and military bases, participants are reaping the benefits of a closer connection to the natural world and a new appreciation for city birds.

A girl in 4-H changed her mind about city birds after taking part in the project: "At first I didn't like urban birds," she said. "I thought of them as pests. Then I realized that they are just like me and other kids. We are ignored or people just see us as pests or don't see us at all...yet if you look a little deeper you can see that on the inside we are pretty unique and cool!"

People of all ages and backgrounds participate in Celebrate Urban Birds through gardening, cultural activities and citizen-science. For the citizen-science part of the project, participants watch city birds for 10 minutes, check off 15 target species of birds, and send the information through the mail or the Internet to the Cornell Lab

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## UOS Fall Conference at Weber State

Please plan to attend the annual Utah Ornithological Society's fall conference at Weber State University's Shepherd Union, September 12-14. Events include a social Friday night at Jeremiah's Restaurant featuring Dr Dale Clayton, Saturday's lecture session at Weber State University, and field trips led by Wasatch Audubon Society members on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Friday night's keynote speaker, Dr Dale Clayton of the University of Utah, is a professor of biology who teaches evolutionary biology, ornithology and advanced field ornithology. His topic is Ornithology Adventures Abroad and he'll share some of the work he and his students have done on tropical birds in exotic locations, with an emphasis on his current work on Darwin's Finches in the Galapagos Islands.

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## 2008 Meeting Lineup

<b>September 11</b> <b>Presentation:</b> Bats with Mike Wolf	<b>October 9</b> <b>Presentation:</b> Wellesville Fossils with Paul Jamison	<b>November 13</b> <b>Presentation:</b> Sea Turtles with Robert Schmidt	<b>December 11</b> <b>Presentation:</b> TBD
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# Audubon Calendar

## September 2008

**4 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.

**6 General Birding** We are intentionally leaving the location of this field trip open because we want to be able to choose the best spots when it gets nearer the actual date. We will do some scouting around during the week prior to the trip and go to those spots that appear to have the best potential. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan fire station. Bring binoculars and perhaps a snack. We will plan to finish up in the very early afternoon. For more info Call Dick Hurren at 435-744-2017.

**11 General Meeting** Join us at our same great location, the Cache Valley Learning Center (75 S. 400 West), as Mike Wolf will be presenting on bats. 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. Enter through the building's west doors. We hope to see you there.

**13 Kokanee Salmon Run above Porcupine Reservoir** Come with us and local fish expert Ron Goede to learn about and witness the spawning habits of this inland salmon variety. Ron will explain the ecology and natural history of this unique fish and will take us to places where we can view them up close and personal. This should be an excellent trip for families. Birding in this area is also good, so bring your binoculars and plan to have fun. The last few years we have seen both Bald Eagles and Ospreys. We will leave at 8:00 a.m. from the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan fire station. Carpooling will be available and encouraged. Bring a snack and binoculars. We plan to return in early afternoon. For more info, call Ron at 752-9650 or Dick Hurren at (435)744-2017.

**19-21 The Tetons for Elk Bugling and More** Jack Greene will organize and lead our field trip to witness the Elk Bugling in the scenic Teton Mountains. The car pool will leave Friday afternoon, Sept 19th and return Sunday evening Sept 21st. Witness the Tetons in their best fall dress where rampaging large ungulates (elk, bison, moose), release their fall passion with grunts, bugling, and a nasty disposition. Fall migrating birds along with winter residents will add to the fun. For more information, call Jack Greene at 563-6816.

**27 Hawk Watching in the Wellsvilles** Let local naturalist and avid hiker Reinhard Jockel lead you on a hike up to the crest of the Wellsville Mountains to witness one of the wonders of the avian world. Thousands of raptors migrate along the Wellsvilles during the fall migration season. On a good day, we'll see over 100 raptors of a number of different species. We'll hike up Deep Canyon and plan to eat lunch while watching raptors drift by. The trail gains three thousand feet in approximately four miles, so be prepared and be sure to wear appropriate footwear. Bring plenty of water. Since it is usually cool and windy up on top, a change of layers, a warm sweater, and a good wind shell make the experience more comfortable. Bring binoculars, lunch, and water. Meet at the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan fire station. Carpooling will be available. For further information, call Dick Hurren at (435)744-2017.



*If you'd like to come along on a field trip but do not have binoculars, call Dick Hurren (435)720-7074. He'll try to find a pair for you to use.*

# Local Bird Spotlight

Starlings  
aka  
Short-tailed Bird of Perdition

— by Val Grant

I'll bet you've always wanted to know about starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), whose Latin name speaks volumes. They're noisy, gregarious bunches who've been blamed for forcing many hole nesting birds, bluebirds and flickers, out of their nests for fun and profit. They cost feedlot owners and berry farmers hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. They spread across the United States and Canada like the plague after their introduction into New York City's Central Park in the late 1800's, just so we dumb-bunny Americans could have the joy of being able to associate, up close and personal, with all the birds mentioned by Shakespeare. I think Pay Back sums it up nicely, kind of like the Russians and cheat grass, halogeton, tamarisk and Russian thistle (tumbleweed). So what can be said that could possibly redeem this rapid breeding invader whose short intestinal tract means they have to consume beaucoup amounts of food to survive? This is great during the summer when insects and creepy-crawlies are their favorite cuisine; it's during the winter when man-produced food pellets meant for our livestock are like Quaker's puffed rice or wheat, the digesta are "shot from guns", another not so an endearing image of the starling. Dirty bird! Dirty bird!



Photo by Brandon Spencer

Not to defend this image, especially after working with the little rounders for 14 years – six years with the Feds, eight years as a graduate research topic – but they showed me that I was working with a intelligent species, made up of very intelligent and not so intelligent individuals. I watched these birds in the field, in large pens in Green Canyon and in Skinner boxes in the Experimental Psychology laboratory on

USU's campus.

These birds made what I would define as reasoned judgments concerning the food they ate, spatially and temporally learning to avoid poisoned food, teaching another the avoidance pattern they had learned, making decisions just like we do, thinking, learning from mistakes and not. I realize this goes against all we're

taught: that human-kind are special. We're not. Our history shows that we all belong to the dumb-bunnys; we have no more of a grip on survival than any other species in the world. If we would take the time to study our compatriots on this planet, we would find our true place in the scheme of things. So take some time, pick a species you'd like to know more about - bird, mammal, reptile, bugs, plants – and see how they live and behave. Throw your assumptions of superiority out the door and let the biological world take you to heights and insights into what a fine planet we coexist on.

# Grass Seeding at the Barrens Sanctuary Bears Fruit

by Jim Cane, Sanctuary Manager

OK, not fruit, but those grasses that Craig Rigby planted back in November of 2006 have flowered this summer – for the first time – and are now bearing abundant seed in their second growing season. The two parcels had been used to cultivate dryland barley, leaving a legacy of Eurasian weeds that cropped up during the two intervening fallow years. They continue to thickly fill the spaces where the grasses are sparse, but a year of mechanical and chemical treatments and later touch-ups gave adequate control to give the grasses a chance. Two tiny patches were found this growing season that were populated by fierce Eurasian invaders. I eliminated the tiny patch of hoary cress with herbicide before its seeds developed; my wife Linda patiently cut (with hedge sheers), bagged and removed the fragile green seed heads of joint stem goat grass from the other tiny patch. Past weeding of Dyer's Woad has kept that species from spreading. I expect that vigilant patrolling and timely elimination of comparable problems will be an ongoing effort to prevent problems from spreading. Excepting the sunflowers, you are welcome to pull *any* broad-leaved forb (anything but grass) that you encounter in the seeded grass parcels, for they are all Eurasian weeds.



But the seeded grasses constitute our exciting story. If you visit the Sanctuary, you can't help but notice the tall, sometimes thick stands of grasses with seed heads on both the north and south parcels. They aren't amber waves of grain yet, but come fall they will be. Dr. Kevin Jensen of the USDA-ARS Forage and Range Lab helped me evaluate their identities and relative abundances. Two of our seeded grasses prevail, being Intermediate Wheatgrass and Slender Wheatgrass. Three others that we seeded are around but are sparser; Western Wheatgrass, Thickspike Wheatgrass and Bluebunch Wheatgrass. If you can readily distinguish them, you are better than me! Only the minor seeded components – Alkali Sacaton, and Basin Wildrye – were not to be seen.

Seeding these native grasses requires patient timing and some luck; this winter's generous snowfall no doubt gave them their boost. Amid the grasses we also have some volunteer native wildflowers growing, flowering and producing seed, notably sunflowers and a biscuitroot (*Lomatium*).

If you walk out at the Barrens Sanctuary, you are now welcome to walk through these seeded parcels. Pass through or over the smooth wire fences without standing on the wire, as the wires break down under your weight. If you see poaching of waterfowl or motorized trespass out there, I would like to know about it. If you have a description or a license number, all the better. I'd also like to know if any of our birds out there like our various wheatgrass seeds. Above all, enjoy the beauty and solitude of the place this fall.

# Good News... After Bad News

The news concerns the HawkWatch International observation point located in the Wellsville Mountains. Originally, there was potential bad news on the horizon. "There has been some buzz that we might not do the Wellsvilles this year" said Jennifer Hajj, Education Director for HawkWatch International out of Salt Lake. "We have just one observer, and we cannot do it that way. There must be two or more in order for the data to be consistent. The Science staff has been talking for years about opening a site on Bountiful Ridge, and they might just do it this year if they can move the existing funding. So, things are in flux."

This news, of course, elicited in me a bit of sorrow and concern for fellow Audubon members. During the approximate month that researchers are annually on the Wellsville ridge, several Audubon members and non-members in the area have enjoyed not only the hike, but also the company and educational opportu-

nity provided. These opportunities were in danger of migrating South to another ridge along the Wasatch range due in part to lack of support.

My concern melted in a sigh of relief when Jen emailed me four days later saying, "Good news...the Wellsvilles are officially on for this year." This near-miss should be a clear reminder to us not only of the wonderful natural resource we have in our backyard, but of the potential of losing a professional resource as well. It can be difficult to make time to hike the mountain in September; life gets in the way. But I think we should at least try. If nothing else, a quick "thank you" letter or email to HawkWatch might be enough to show them that we do care about this annual count. Perhaps a show of support will be enough to get the Wellsvilles off of the list of potential sites to be abandoned.

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of Ornithology. Once enough data are gathered, scientists hope to learn more about how birds survive in cities and how they use urban green spaces such as parks, rooftop gardens, and even potted plants on balconies for food, resting sites, and shelter.

Individuals can participate on their own or through public events organized by local groups. Celebrate Urban Birds has partnered with more than 2,000 organizations to hold special "birdy" events featuring the arts, science, gardening, or other ways to draw people into bird study and observation. While supplies last, everyone who signs up will receive a Celebrate Urban Birds kit in English and Spanish with two colorful urban birds posters, educational materials about birds and urban greening, a data form, and a packet of sunflower seeds to plant in pots and gardens. More than 60,000 free kits have been distributed.

After receiving his kit, one elementary school youngster with Down syndrome declared, "I will take these posters home and put them up on my wall forever-because I'm going to be a scientist when I grow up!" Teachers find that the 10-minute bird observation can be done within a class period, and it reinforces math, reading, scientific, artistic, and team-building skills. One teacher noted, "Our group of middle school boys was impressed with being able to help with a project sponsored by a university."

Some groups go beyond a single event by greening their neighborhood-creating habitat for birds on balconies, rooftops, front stoops, or community spaces. Others are tapping into the arts, creating dances, drawings, murals, sculptures, puppet shows, and short films based on city birds. The Celebrate Urban Birds web site has lots of resources and suggestions about how to craft an event or project for libraries, nature centers, schools and youth groups, community gardens, home-school groups, or individuals.

Learn more about Celebrate Urban Birds and sign up at [www.CelebrateUrbanBirds.org](http://www.CelebrateUrbanBirds.org)!

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a membership institution dedicated to interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds. Visit the Lab's web site at <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>.

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# California Condors OK Amid Ruins

Making their way deep into the wilderness along a narrow dirt road Tuesday, Kelly Sorenson and Joe Burnett of the Ventana Wildlife Society didn't know what they would find. They returned for the first time in about two weeks to the mountaintop condor sanctuary in Los Padres National Forest. Since 1997, almost half of California's condors have been reintroduced into the wild from there. "Just not knowing is the hardest part," said Sorenson, executive director of the Wildlife Society. When the Basin Complex Fire erupted June 21, the compound's staff was forced to evacuate, moving eight condors held in captivity to safety before leaving. The rescued birds are doing fine at their temporary home at Pinnacles National Monument, but the well-being of birds still around the sanctuary, and the condition of the facilities, worried Sorenson and Burnett, a senior wildlife biologist. "It's been frustrating the last two weeks not being able to get up here," said Sorenson. Charred trees and ash covering the slopes and making it look like a moonscape indicated what they might find would not be good. Their expectations were not high. But as their dusty pickup reached a point in the road overlooking the compound, both men erupted in joy, sharing a high five. Amid the ruins, there was a sign of life. Perched on a rock was a condor, No. 340, hatched at the Oregon Zoo under the care of Burnett several years ago. Covered with a thin layer of ash, the

bird stood virtually motionless, looking over the remains of a release pen on the hillside below. Flames had torn through the corrugated sheet metal, twisting it in the heat. The presence of Sorenson, Burnett and a volunteer accompanying them didn't rouse the condor at first. As Burnett stepped closer, the bird spread its wings and took flight, soaring across the scorched terrain and landing in a nearby tree. "They are as bewildered as we are," Burnett said. Sorenson said seeing the condor was uplifting. It will be some time before the wildlife society can resume its work, he said. While the fire missed their mountain cabin, a trailer was reduced to a pile of rubble. The condor pens were lost. "Almost the entire infrastructure for the birds is destroyed," Sorenson said. "We are going to have a lot of rebuilding to do. I'm just glad it's not a total loss." Burnett said all but one of the 25 condors in the wilderness have been accounted for, a good sign they know how to survive on their own. Sorenson said the priority is determining if three condor chicks nesting within the fire area have survived. "Two of the three we are pretty confident survived," said Burnett.

by Daniel Lopez  
Herald Staff Writer  
Monterey Herald, CA  
Story taken from

[www.sevtaudubonbirdnotes.blogspot.com](http://www.sevtaudubonbirdnotes.blogspot.com)

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Weber State's Shepherd Union will hold Saturday's lecture session in the Wildcat Theater. The program features Dr John Cavitt's work and that of his students on Great Salt Lake's Snowy Plovers, selenium/mercury effects on GSL's shorebirds, Mountain Plovers in Eastern Utah, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's e-Bird program, White-faced Ibis Census Data, a *Syrinx* Study, the Raptor Inventory Nest Survey, and Common Goldeneyes wintering on Great Salt Lake. Attendees can also participate in the popular annual bird quiz. The program will end with a short general membership meeting.

Friday field trips include Snowbasin Ski Resort with Les Talbot, Bear River Refuge with Betsy Beneke, and the Rainbow/Birdsong Trail with Mort and Carolyn Somer. Jack Rensel will lead Saturday's pre-conference bird walk to Beus Park. Sunday's trips include Ogden Valley Favorites with Kristin Purdy, and Box Elder Campground and Mantua Reservoir with all members of WAS who join the event. Please come!

You'll find a detailed schedule of conference events at <http://utahbirds.org/uos/>, or you may contact Pomera Frence (801.272.2655 or [pinkstring@xmission.com](mailto:pinkstring@xmission.com)) for more information. Use the registration form found on the UOS web site. Print the form, register for the conference, and join UOS, if you wish. UOS cordially welcomes members and non-members to attend the conference. Please join us!

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## Save the date:

The Utah Audubon Council is holding their Fall Meeting in Bridgerland on the weekend of October 11th and 12th. General members are welcome to attend the field trips and meeting. A full schedule will be published in the October Stilt.

# Bridgerland Audubon contacts

### Trustees

- 2006-2009 Ron Goede, 752-9650; David Liddell, 797-1261; Bret Selman, 257-5260
- 2007-2010 Chris Cokinos, 245-7769; Jack Greene, 563-6816; Reinhard Jockel; Stephen Peterson, 755-5041
- 2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637; Brandon Spencer, 753-2790

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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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 make all checks payable to National Audubon Society and send with this card to:**

National Audubon Society  
Membership Data Center  
PO Box 51001  
Boulder, CO 80322-1001  
W-52 Local Chapter Code: 7XCHA

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*

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

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