



The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

The Ibis of Cutler Marsh

You can see them from a great distance – a long, wavering line of black pearls flying wingtip to wingtip over the fields and marshes. As they near their rookery on the east side of Cutler Reservoir, one by one they drop from the line by tipping up on one wing to lose aerodynamic lift and drop almost to the water’s surface – a maneuver mimicked by airplane pilots known as a “slip” – before circling briefly and landing in the reeds and rushes.

If they face a headwind coming in, they’re still in a line, but follow bill to tail in a queue, staying low through the marsh, rising only enough to clear islands of standing cattails before dropping again to the relative calm at the water’s surface.

They’re white-faced ibis, albeit I’ve always thought that an inappropriate moniker, for the miniscule band around the eye (or “face”) only appears during breeding season, and it isn’t even very white. But “glossy black bulbous bird with drooping bill and narrow pinkish patch around eye socket” is, admittedly, a bit long.

Ibis are one of the wading birds that migrate in spring from the coast of Texas to the northern Sierra and Rocky Mountains and the wetlands of the Great Basin and central Utah. Oddly, some groups also breed in the northeast corner of South Dakota and the northwest corner of Kansas.

The “ancients” among us Cache Valley birders say the birds weren’t here in great numbers prior to the legendary flooding in the mid-1980s that destroyed much of the fresh water wetland habitat around the Great Salt Lake. Suddenly (relatively speaking) a rookery appeared in Cutler Reservoir. I recall battling evening winds and whitecaps with Allen Stokes as he nonchalantly led a group of canoeists to witness this wonder in the early 1990s.

Ibis are colonial nesters, preferring the company of others, perhaps for safety or perhaps in order to exchange recipes for aquatic and “moist-soil” bugs. Yum. On average, their first arrival in Cache Valley is just before tax day (although I’m not sure what the connection is...). They seek out last year’s patch of rushes and cattails, a good selection of irrigated fields in which to feed. They begin laying eggs sometime in mid-May, one every day or two (probably taking off holidays), for a total of 3-5. Incubation lasts about 20 days, with males taking the day shift and females taking the night shift. (How thoughtful of those guys, letting mom catch some shut-eye while keeping junior warm!) By late May or early June, the young are starting to hatch and then the market for

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New "Spooky Bird" Contest

A Contest to Help Debunk Myths About Bird Behavior

Halloween is just a few weeks away, so the latest environmental challenge from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Celebrate Urban Birds citizen-science project is taking an eerie approach. The contest is called "A Murder of Crows and Other Spooky Bird Tales" and is co-sponsored by the Encyclopedia of Life website.



"Believe it or not, a large group of crows is called a "murder," says project leader Karen Purcell, "But there's nothing really scary about it. Crows are very intelligent, family-oriented birds. With this challenge, we really want to see what spooks people about birds. Then we can reveal what the behaviors are really all about. There's usually a perfectly natural, non-scary explanation!"

For the challenge, participants can take photos, do a painting, write a story or poem, even shoot a video showing birds doing something puzzling or strange to them. It may be a crow, starling, owl, pigeon, or any other type of bird.



Prizes include binoculars from Eagle Optics and Alpen, birdfeeders from YourBirdOasis.com, CDs, books, posters, and more. The first 50 entrants will receive a poster by Pedro Fernandez showing a variety of crow, jay, and other bird behaviors. Selected images and videos will be posted on the Celebrate Urban Birds website. The very best will be included in species accounts for the Encyclopedia of Life website.

How to enter: Email your entry to urbanbirds@cornell.edu.

1. Write "AMOC_YourFirstNameLastName_state" in the subject line. (Use the two-letter abbreviation for the state in which the photo was taken.)
2. Include your name and mailing address in the body of the email.
3. Tell us why you submitted your entry to the Murder of Crows challenge. What's the story behind it?
4. If you are submitting a visual image, attach it as a .jpg
5. One image per entry please
6. Read terms of agreement. (www.birds.cornell.edu/celebration/temporary/terms-of-agreement)
7. If you agree to the terms, send us your entry before October 31!

Deadline for entries is Halloween: October 31!

The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology

Utah Paper Wasps

We credit the Chinese with inventing paper 2000 years ago, but some social wasps have been making their paper nests for eons. Species of paper wasps are found throughout Utah.

The burly bald-faced hornet workers are patterned in black and white. They place their grey, basketball sized paper nests in tree branches.

Bold yellow and black striped Yellowjackets are the persistent unwelcome guests at summer picnics. They too wrap their round nests in an enve-



paper honeycomb suspended from a stiff, short stalk. There is no paper envelope, so you can readily see the hexagonal paper cells. Around your yard, look for the workers scraping fibers from weathered wood surfaces. Workers mix the chewed fibers with saliva and water, carry the ball of wood pulp home, and add it to the thin sheets of their paper nest. The nest is their nursery, where you can see the queen's tiny sausage shaped eggs and the fat white grubs. The grubs are fed by their sisters, the workers, who scour the surrounding habitat for insect prey or damaged fruit.



lope of paper, but typically place it in a shallow underground chamber. Within the paper envelope, both hornets and yellowjackets have a multi-tiered stack of paper honeycombs, like an inverted pagoda.

Our most familiar paper wasps belong to the genus *Polistes*. These are the reddish-brown spindly looking wasps. They make their simple paper nests under your home's roof eaves and deck railings. A *Polistes* nest consists of a single inverted

Top: Adult *Polistes* paper wasp

Left: Enclosed Nest of the bald-faced hornet

Right: Open-faced nest of *Polistes* paper wasp with grub-like larvae

Photos and article by Jim Cane

Utah has been invaded by the European species *Polistes dominula*. These interlopers are displacing our native *Polistes*. Where these European *Polistes* wasps are a stinging nuisance, you can easily dispatch them at their nests with a sprayed solution of dishwashing detergent and water. Thus stripped of its clever defenders, take the opportunity to admire their homes of paper.

— Jim Cane

Continued from page 1

bugs skyrocket, as both parents work to feed the young.

The young birds are altricial, needing constant care from the parents for the first two weeks – shade in the summer sun and warmth in the nighttime cool. After week 3, the parents no longer need to brood the young, and the little darlings start wandering around the neighborhood, probably terrorizing other parents, demanding food. By the 5th week, the young can flap a bit and the parents start feeding them in different parts of the colony, urging them to explore. Soon thereafter, the young fly.

Cutler Marsh was recognized by The National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area in 2004. About that time, Wayne Martinson, IBA Coordinator for Utah, became aware that the Cutler ibis colony was big – really big. When we told him we had thousands of birds using it, he asked that we start some formal counts. Since there are only 150,000 white-faced ibis in North America, if we could document 1% of that population – 1,500 birds – using the Cutler Marsh rookery, it might qualify as an IBA of “Global Significance.”

In 2005, we counted over 6,000 birds in flight over the rookery. That encouraged us to continue, and in 2006, we counted over 8,000. We needed only one more year of data to show there were, not 1%, but 5% of the biogeographic population of this waterbird species!

Then, in 2007, we visited the rookery in mid-June and there were no ibis. Zip. Nada. Zilch. Was it disturbance from the waterskiers and personal watercraft? Some radical change in wet meadows or other feeding grounds? A thunderstorm? We heard reports of a similar failure at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. Were they linked?

We returned in 2008, counting almost 1,700 birds in the air. They were back. This year, our counts made us realize that this species might be resilient. Volunteers conducted counts about every 2 weeks. The pattern was consistent with the biology described above (see table). High numbers of birds appear in early May –

probably parents actively establishing nests – followed by a dramatic drop – perhaps parents sitting on eggs. For the next few weeks, we counted numbers a little over half of the previous maximums, representing perhaps a single parent bringing food back to the nest. Counts ended in mid-July with very low numbers as most birds may have abandoned the rookery itself in favor of other roosting sites. (Can't say I blame them. It can't be all that pleasant after thousands of folks have done their daily business within just a few acres – if you know what I mean...)

Date	# Birds
5/12/2009	7,311
5/26/2009	1,526
6/12/2009	4,230
7/1/2009	4,959
7/15/2009	1,601

Wayne Martinson may move ahead with the “global significance” nomination this year. However, these surveys will probably continue into 2010, just to make sure. Ibis have been threatened in the past by DDE-DDT and hunting (which continues in Mexico), and recently by motorboats zooming through the rookery. The

Cutler Marsh rookery is clearly an important site. It's in our “backyard” and it's our responsibility to make sure it stays safe. So, join us next year for an exciting – and important – opportunity at citizen science.

Thanks to the volunteers who have conducted these counts: Russ Beck, Adam Brewerton, Tracy Carroll, Chris Cokinos, Eve Davies, Valerie Frokjer, Mary Beth Held, Frank Howe, Reinhard Jockel, Jean Lown,

Kacey Lundstrom, Wayne Martinson, Dick Mueller, Richard Mueller, Ed Parker, Jim Parrish, Bruce Pendery, Ian Pendery, Stephen Peterson, Loren Richardson, Michael Sowder, John Stewart, Kim Sullivan, David Tidhar, Wendy Tidhar, Steve Trimble, and Dan Zemecnik.

- Bryan Dixon



Jean Lown, John Stewart, and Frank Howe helping with this year's count

Audubon Calendar

October 2009

1 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.

3 Cache Hikers Field Trip: This is a moderate hike to one of the oldest living things in the area, Jardine Juniper. We will meet at the South West corner of the Smith's Marketplace parking lot (700 North) at 8 a.m. Dress appropriately for the weather and bring water and snacks. For more information, please call Jim Sinclair at 752-0061.

8 General Meeting: Join us at our same great location, the Cache Valley Learning Center (75 S. 400 West), as Christopher Cokinos will read from his new nonfiction book *The Fallen Sky: An Intimate History of Shooting Stars*, which chronicles the triumphs and tragedies of meteorite hunters through history. The book blends scientific facts (including some little-known information about dust, lettuce and dead stars) along with Chris's personal journey to understand the obsession that drives meteorite hunters and scientists, a journey that helped him weather significant changes in his own life. Chris believes that meteorites not only reveal secrets of the solar system but also of the human heart. *The Fallen Sky* took him to Greenland, the Outback and Australia. *Natural History* magazine says of the book, "...the author knows what he's doing: he's not just taking you to the places where heaven fell to Earth, but also into the minds of people who have their eyes on those sites and their heads in the stars." The book's stories are "richly told and a delight to read," according to *New Scientist*. Cokinos will have actual meteorites to show from his collection too—and the book will be for sale, as will too a new edition of *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers: A Personal Chronicle of Vanished Birds*. 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. We hope to see you there!

10 Cache Hikers Field Trip: This is a moderate hike to the Tony Grove area. We will hike from Tony Grove Lake to White Pine Creek and on to Bunch Grass. From Bunch Grass, we'll make our way to the highway again. We will meet at the South West corner of the Smith's Marketplace parking lot (700 North) at 8 a.m. Dress appropriately for the weather and bring water and snacks. For more information, please call Jim Sinclair at 752-0061.

24 Joint Bridgerland and Great Salt Lake Audubon Field Trip to east Box Elder County: BAS will be joining Great Salt Lake Audubon for a field trip to eastern Box Elder County. We will go behind the gates at Salt Creek Waterfowl Management Area near Tremonton to view ducks, geese, and other marsh birds on the resting ponds; we'll also look for any lingering burrowing owls at the Salt Creek nesting colony. From there, we'll go in search of sharpies and Huns between Promontory, Whites Valley, and ATK. And, we're sure to see various hawks throughout the trip. Target species: sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, migrating waterfowl, and raptors. We'll meet at the Ibis parking lot at 08:00 and meet the other Audubon group in Tremonton at 09:00. If you have any questions, call Frank Howe at 801-244-4329.



BIONEERS

2009 Utah Bioneers Conference

Our Sixth Annual Conference

November 20 and 21, 2009

More information to come

BRMBR Big Sit

Dear Friends:

Our team is officially registered! "The Bear Bottom Sitters" will be hosting their first Big Sit on Sunday, October 11, 2009 at the refuge's bunkhouse RV pad, which is 1/4 mile west of the Wildlife Education Center on the south side of Forest Street. Although this is a 24-hour bird count, beginning at midnight on the 11th, team members plan to "sit" mainly during daylight hours.

The Big Sit is FREE. Anyone can participate for any part of the day. Stop by when you wish. Stay as long as you wish. BRING A CHAIR if you plan to stay a while and help us count birds! We'll have snacks and drinks throughout the day, and plan to grill burgers about noon. Betsy will provide burgers, buns and fixings. Bring other potluck items to share for lunch or snacks during the day.

Bird count rules are fairly simple.

Species we record must be seen or heard from within a 17-foot circle, centered on the RV pad next to the garage. We'll keep a tally of the birds we observe, and when the event is over, your Team Captain, Betsy Beneke, will re-cord them via the Internet on the official Big Sit web site.

This event is kind of a "tailgate" party for bird watchers. We'll share food, swap stories, and have some fun. Elaborate body paint is not required.

More detailed information on The Big Sit is available at:

www.birdwatchersdigest.com.



Join Us!

Bear River Bird Refuge's Team:
The Bear Bottom Sitters
Sunday, October 11, 2009
Refuge Bunkhouse Yard
Daylight Hours

Contact "The Bear Bottom Sitters" Team Captain, Betsy Beneke, at (435) 734-6436 or Betsy_Beneke@fws.gov if you would like to sign up for the team or have questions.

Welcome to BAS

New Members

Mara J. Ballard
 Terry L. Glenn
 Jane Johnston
 Gladys Michaelson
 Richard Olsen
 Terry Peak
 Donna Reid
 Pam Riley
 Von Taylor

Michael C. Amacher
 Dale Azevedo
 Wallace O. Bloss
 Stephen C. Bromley
 Carl Brothersen
 Max Elliot Brunson Jr
 Phyllis Conover
 Star Coulbrooke
 Jane Erickson

Renewing Members

Edward & Deborah Evans	Ms. Linnea Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. T.J. Gordon	Ms. Geniel Loveless
Ms. Barbara S. Hale	Tim Slocum
Joanne Hughes	Joyce & Bert Stokes
Larry J. Jacobsen	Earl Sullivan
Lori & Robert Jenkins	M Coburn Williams
William Jensen	Karen Wood
Douglas A. Johnson	Wayne Wurtsbaugh
Glen Johnson	The Wellings

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

Trustees

2007-2010 Chris Cokinos, 245-7769; Jack Greene, 563-6816; Reinhard Jockel

2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637; Brandon Spencer, 753-2790

2009-2012 Ron Goede, 752-9650; Frank Howe, 787-1859; Robert Schmidt, 755-9262; Bret Selman, 257-5260

Bridgerland Audubon Contacts

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Webmaster TBA
Webhost www.xmission.com

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 15th 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 send all checks payable to National Audubon Society with this card to:
 National Audubon Society
 PO Box 422250
 Palm Coast, FL 23142-2250
 Membership Source Code: C9ZW520Z

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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Email: birdnerdut@gmail.com

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

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Botulism at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge is currently experiencing an avian botulism outbreak that is affecting mainly waterfowl.

Botulism is a common, recurring disease on the Refuge and other marshes around Great Salt Lake. Avian botulism is a paralytic disease caused by ingestion of a toxin produced by the bacteria, *Clostridium botulinum*. This bacterium is widespread in soil and requires warm temperatures, a protein source and an anaerobic (no oxygen) environment in order to become active and produce toxin. Decomposing vegetation and invertebrates combined with warm temperatures can provide ideal conditions for the botulism bacteria to activate and produce toxin. There are several types of toxin produced by strains of this bacteria; birds are most commonly affected by type C and to a lesser extent type E.

Healthy birds, affected birds, and dead birds in various stages of decay are commonly found in the same area. The toxin affects the nervous system by preventing impulse transmission to muscles. Birds are unable to use their wings and legs normally or control the third eyelid, neck muscles, and other muscles. Birds with paralyzed neck muscles cannot hold their heads up and often drown. Death can also result from water deprivation, electrolyte imbalance, respiratory failure, or predation.

Botulism in humans is usually the result of eating improperly home-canned foods, which contain types A or B toxin. Type E toxin has been associated with improperly smoked fish. People, dogs, and cats are generally thought to be resistant to type C toxin, but a few cases have been reported in people and dogs. Thorough cooking destroys botulism toxin in food.

As a precaution, hunters should not target birds that are exhibiting signs of botulism nor let their dogs retrieve sick birds.

We expect to see the outbreak naturally decrease in number of waterfowl affected as fall temperatures cool, though it's not unusual for the disease to persist through October.