



# The Stilt

Volume 39, Issue 6  
June 2010

Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

## eBird Gadget Tracks Gulf Coast Sightings

Several days ago, the folks at eBird put out a call-to-action to birders who live near the Gulf Coast and want to help with the oil spill response. In response, eBird launched a Google gadget that anyone can use on their website, blog, or Google homepage to explore recent sightings of 10 vulnerable species along the Gulf Coast. Get the gadget (or read on to find out how it works).

With oil starting to wash ashore, there's plenty of speculation about how birds of barrier islands, estuaries, and saltmarshes will be affected. Specialists and volunteers are mobilizing to rescue and rehabilitate oiled birds as they are found. But as Ken Rosenberg, the Cornell Lab's director of conservation science has pointed out, the spill's lasting effects are likely to go beyond individual birds. "If the oil comes into the coastal marshes and the inshore ecosystems and kills the oyster beds and the shrimp and fish nurseries, then there are much longer-lasting effects not only on birds but on an entire way of life for people of this region."

By visiting Gulf Coast beaches now and entering what they see into eBird, bird watchers can help scientists gauge the oil spill's effects as they develop. Birds they count before the oil spill arrives help serve as a baseline, and subsequent surveys can help track problem areas, identify places where birds are numerous, or highlight areas that still need to be surveyed.

The eBird Gulf Coast Oil Spill Bird Tracker brings the process full circle by making it easy for anyone to see results that eBirders report. It links to an interactive map to see individual islands, sighting pin brings up the date of the seen. Controls at the top of the page that's displayed, or look at results for

The oil spill's sheer size, the difficulty oil leave many of us feeling helpless—but unable or unsure of what to do. small efforts by many people—called "crowdsourcing"—are beginning to pop called Grassroots Mapping is generating high-resolution photos of the coastline using cameras and balloons made of helium bags. At least two other groups are ways for people to report oil spill effects using their cell phones, according to CNN.

eBird takes a similar approach, tapping into the specialized knowledge of bird watchers to compile information about the birds that are on the front lines of the looming oil threat. Those of us who live far away may not be able to help with surveying, but with the gadget we can at least monitor how our fellow birders are doing—and learn how many species are faring, regardless of whether they make it onto the evening news.

### eBird Gulf Coast Oil Spill Bird Tracker

Hundreds of bird species could be impacted by the Gulf Coast oil spill, including species shown here.

#### Brown Pelican

Recently removed from the endangered species list, the rebounding population nests on coastal islands throughout the impact zone.



Explore interactive sightings map

teractive map that shows all reports since April 1, 2010. You can zoom the beaches, and marshes. Clicking on a sighting and number of individuals allow you to change the date range a different species.

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# From a Songbird, New Insights Into the Brain

Researchers have gained new insights into the brain by decoding the genome of the zebra finch, a songbird whose males learn a single love song from their fathers that they repeat through life.

A team led by Wesley C. Wilson at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis decoded the bird's genome at a cost of about \$1 million, down from the \$10 million it would have cost to decode the chicken's genome.

Some 50 laboratories around the world are studying the zebra finch, gaining clues about how human language is learned. Like people and a few other species, the finch can imitate a sound it hears.

The mechanisms of this vocal learning seem to be quite similar in birds and people, from the level of the brain's anatomy down to specific genes. People called FOXP2 have several kinds of speech defects, and researchers have found that songbirds cannot sing when their version of the gene is disrupted. With the zebra finch's genome in hand, researchers have learned that a surprising number of the bird's genes are involved in singing and listening to the songs of other zebra finches. Some 800 genes become either more or less active in the zebra finch's neurons during singing, the researchers say in the current issue of *Nature*.



Warren and Richard K. University School of Medicine Dr. Warren said. That's needed several years ago genome.

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"Now that we have taken the lid off the cells we see they are pumping out all this transcriptional energy," said David F. Clayton, a songbird biologist at the University of Illinois and co-author of the report. This finding undercuts the common view of the brain as relatively stable in terms of genetic activity.

While the bird is listening to a song, the genes in its neurons are producing a large number of transcripts, or copies of genes. But these transcripts don't result in the cells producing proteins in the usual way. Instead they seem to modulate the activity of other genes involved in listening. "This is the first demonstration that these non-coding transcripts are robustly involved and activated in real time," Dr. Clayton said.

Another co-author, Erich Jarvis, a songbird biologist at Duke University, said theirs was one of the first studies to show this high level of gene activity and regulation occurring during a natural behavior. The biological basis of learning is usually studied in rats or mice set to master artificial tasks. With the songbird, researchers have a way of following a rich natural behavior.

"A long-range goal is to understand the genetic contribution to learning a song, and to find out why the zebra finch learns one song and never changes while others like mocking birds can learn different songs," Dr. Clayton said. Birds have a genome of about one billion units of DNA, one-third the size of humans', yet possess about the same number of genes, since less is taken up with repetitive DNA sequences.

The sequence of the zebra finch genome will assist other biologists who study the bird. Besides vocal learning, they hope to understand the genetic basis of other aspects of the bird's behavior, like its parental care, territoriality and selection of mates.

—by Nicholas Wade

A version of this article appeared in print on April 6, 2010, on page D4 of the New York Times

# Audubon Calendar

## June 2010

**5 Birding Steele Canyon** Leave at 7:30 a.m. from Caffe Ibis parking lot. Prepare for a long day as we will return mid afternoon. Bring water, lunch, insect repellent, sunscreen and possibly a light jacket. This is one of the best sites for seeing a great variety of songbirds in one place because of the mixing of several habitats. We will surely hear and see the special bird for this area, which is the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

**19 Birding Sink Hollow** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) and plan on carpooling. We will be hiking up to Sink Hollow and Gibson Basin, botanizing along the creek with the USU Experimental Forest trip. It is an easy to moderate 4.5 mile hike. Bring water and a snack. We will be back around noon.

## July 2010

**10 Birding Tony Grove Lake** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) and plan on carpooling. We will be hiking around Tony Grove Lake, botanizing and birding. Bring water and a lunch as we will have a picnic afterward. We will be back around 1 p.m.

**24 Birding Beaver Creek** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) and plan on carpooling. We will be hiking around Franklin Basin. Bring water and a snack. We will be back around 1 p.m.

## August 2010

**7 Birding Antelope Island** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) and plan on carpooling. We will be traveling to Antelope Island to see what late Summer waders and shore birds might be around. Bring water and a lunch. We will be back in the late afternoon.

**21 Birding the High Uintahs** Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot between Caffe Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North) and plan on carpooling. We will be traveling to the Uintah Mountains to spot some unique Utah high altitude species. Bring water and a lunch. We will be back in the late afternoon.

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# Local Bird Spotlight

## American Robin

Although American robins can be found year-round in Cache Valley, I identify them most as indicators that winter has ended. In April, as the snow melts, the male robin announces his presence as he sets up his territory and sings his distinctive cheerily, cheerio, cheeriup repertoire. It's generally the first song I hear in the morning as the sun is rising, and one of the last in the evening. Our urban landscaping seems ideal for American robins. We plant lawns and keep the grass an ideal height for robins as they forage for worms and insects. Our shrubs and trees provide the small fruits and berries that make up much of their diet. And the mix of evergreen and deciduous trees in our yards provides many sites for building a nest protected from all but the harshest storm.

When they are not foraging, you can see your local robin perched on a branch or a fence, searching for mates, patrolling for territorial interlopers, watching for predators, or searching for food. When they spy the neighbor's cat, you hear the peek, tut, tut call that says

"HEY! I see you!"

Growing up in southern Ohio, I still



Photo by Chris Pearson

have memories of finding molted robin feathers on the lawn. At least I hope they were molted; I suspect cats can be effective predators of these birds on the ground. I was especially fond of finding an outer tail feather with its white spot, rare

in western races. And the "robin egg blue" color of the eggshell is an official Crayola color. Finding half of an eggshell, blue on the outside and white within, means there is a baby robin in the neighborhood. The eggs are laid in a mud and grass nest. After hatching, the helpless young need constant parental support in the nest for about 2 weeks. Then it is off to the races, begging the parents for food, learning to forage, hiding from predators, and storing the calories so necessary to survive the winter.

The population of American robins is estimated at over a hundred million. Their abundance makes them a biological sentinel of change. When common species become less abundant, whether because of environmental contaminants, climate change, or diseases like West Nile Virus, we notice. Let's hope that the American robin, singing that cheerily, cheerio, cheeriup song so familiar to us, with that red breast, the yellow bill, and a white eye ring, continues to persist as one of nature's most visible species.

Robert Schmidt

## Think Before You Drink: Birds and Beans

A simple lifestyle choice can have a positive impact on bird conservation around the world. Scientists have established that the traditional method of growing coffee—beneath the canopy of a forest, rather than chopping down the trees for sun-grown coffees—provides vital habitat for birds.

"It's a simple formula: keep the trees, keep the birds," says Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "When trees are retained, this has tremendous value to birds, especially migratory birds that winter in Central and South America and breed in North America during the summer."

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Research has shown that traditional shade-grown coffee plantations in Mexico can support more than 100 bird species, compared with 6–12 species in sun-grown monocultures.

Support of the shade-grown coffee movement has led to a new partnership between the Cornell Lab and Birds & Beans®, a Massachusetts-based retailer that specializes in shade-grown coffee products certified “Bird Friendly®” by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. This certification means that Birds & Beans coffee is 100%-organic and shade-grown.

“We started this project to make it easier for bird and nature lovers to do the right thing and enjoy great-tasting coffee at the same time,” says Bill Wilson, co-founder of Birds & Beans. “By partnering with the Cor-

nell Lab, we’re sure we can all make a big difference for tanagers, thrushes, orioles, warblers, and other beautiful songbirds.”

People who buy Birds & Beans Bird Friendly coffee also help protect birds a second way: A portion of all online sales and sales of the coffee from some Wild Birds Unlimited stores goes to the Cornell Lab to help support its ongoing bird research, education, and conservation programs.

“Simply drinking the right coffee is an easy way for people to make a real difference for birds,” says Rosenberg. “We’re happy to support Birds & Beans in this effort and help bird and nature lovers make the right choice.”

# Birds in Education

## A Special Thanks to BAS

**O**n April 27th, Box Elder High School sponsored its third annual Green Day event. Mr. Brandon Spencer’s Advanced Placement Biology class hosted 92 first grade students from Discovery Elementary in Brigham City. The event focused on environmental themes ranging from the water cycle to predator/prey relationships, from recycling to food chains and webs.

“It’s a great way for my AP students to really learn the ecological topics they choose” Mr. Spencer said. “By studying and preparing, and then presenting those topics, my students learn much more than what I can teach them. And the elementary students get to have an activity filled ecology day that is as hands-on as they can get!”

A special treat since Green Day was instituted has been a visit by Jen Hajj from Hawk-Watch International. She brought a raptor for the kids to enjoy and to enhance her portion of the day. This year, she brought Yaki, a female American Kestrel. The kids loved the small raptor and were sad at the end of the day to have to say good-bye.

“It’s a great day for kids to learn that science can be entertaining and fun” said Spencer.



Jen Hajj from HawkWatch with Yaki, an American Kestrel

This year, a very special Thank You needs to be sent to BAS. During these more challenging economic circumstances we find ourselves, financial support is not only greatly appreciated, but necessary. Green Day 2010 would not have happened without the financial support of Bridgerland Audubon Society. Thank you very much!

# Funky Nests in Funky Places Contest!

Environmental challenge from Cornell Lab seeks the weird and wonderful

The Celebrate Urban Birds project at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is bringing back its "Funky Nests in Funky Places" environmental challenge! Participants sent in more than 600 entries last year. They found nests in hanging flower baskets, an old boot, a teacup, a coffee can—even on top of a clothespin, where a hummingbird built its tiny nest. Celebrate Urban Birds is a free, year-round citizen-science project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, focused on birds in neighborhood settings.



Photo by Boyd Jensen,  
California

For the 2010 Funky Nests in Funky Places challenge, participants may take photos, do a painting, write a story, or shoot a video showing a bird's nest built in some out-of-the-way or out-of-this-world place.



Photo by Jacquie Tinker,  
New York

"We've had such fun with this challenge," says project leader Karen Purcell. "The theme really struck a chord with people. You wouldn't believe how many people showed us bird nests in barbecue grills, bathrooms, garden tools, and signs. We even had Tree Swallows nesting in a cannon!"

Prizes include Kaytee bird feeders and seed, sound CDs, books, Cornell Lab gift baskets, nest boxes, and more. The first 50 entrants will receive a copy of the "Doves and Pigeons" poster by Julie Zickefoose and selected images and videos will be posted on the Celebrate Urban Birds website. We'll also be creating a 2011 calendar using some of the best entries.

Email your entry to [urbanbirds@cornell.edu](mailto:urbanbirds@cornell.edu):

1. Write "Funky Nests\_Your First and Last Name\_ Your City and State" in the subject line.
2. In the email, you MUST include your name, mailing address, and location where photos were taken.
3. Tell us why you submitted your entry to the Funky Nests in Funky Places contest.
4. Choose your best/favorite entry and send just that one, please!
5. Read the terms of agreement
6. Be careful around nesting birds. Read more about how to find nests and what to do once you know where birds are nesting.
7. If you agree to the terms above, **send us your entry before July 1, 2010.**

## Behind the Scenes of Hummingbirds

We all have preconceived ideas about what hummingbirds' lives are like, but so much of their world is imperceptible to the human eye. Filmmaker Ann Prum describes the breakthrough science and latest technologies that allowed her and the crew to reveal incredible new insights about these aerial athletes. Go to the following link for a fascinating look at these hummers!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjnc1kHMDDo>

# Welcome to BAS

## New Members

Kathryn Broughton Ellen Klomps  
 J. Culbertson Gary Meunier  
 Stanley Griswold Nancy Pitblado

## Renewing Members

Dennis D. Austin Allyson Davis Robert L. Perry  
 Leanna Ballard Barbara Farris Loren W. Richardson  
 Mara J. Ballard Nathan & Chris Hult Gardiner S. Stiles  
 Stephen C. Bromley Eric J. Meyer Nancy Williams  
 Barbara Campbell Terry Peak

# Bridgerland Audubon contacts

## Trustees

2007-2010 Chris Cokinos, 245-7769; Jack Greene, 563-6816; Reinhard Jockel; Ryan O'Donnell, 232-8146  
 2008-2011 Jim Cane, 713-4668; William Masslich, 753-1759; Richard Mueller, 752-5637  
 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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 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 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 send all checks payable to National Audubon Society with this card to:  
 National Audubon Society  
 PO Box 422250  
 Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250  
 Membership Source Code: COZW520Z

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**

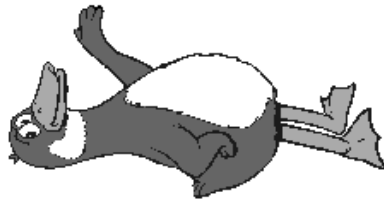
P.O. Box 3501  
Logan, Utah 84323-3501  
Email: [birdnerdut@gmail.com](mailto:birdnerdut@gmail.com)  
Visit our website: <http://www.bridgerlandaudubon.org>

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## 2010 Schedule Guided Refuge Tours

Sponsored by Friends of the Bear River Refuge

### Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge Brigham City, Utah



#### Wednesday

9:00am to 12:00pm

#### Thursday

9:00am to 12:00pm

#### Saturday

10:30am to 1:30pm

Tours are offered in June, July & August

Call ahead to reserve your spot on the tours! (435) 734-6422

- ◆ Tours are appropriate for ages 10 and up
- ◆ Knowledgeable guides to lead you
- ◆ Ride in our van or drive your own vehicle
- ◆ Limit of 6 vehicles per tour
- ◆ Binoculars available to borrow
- ◆ Stops made to view wildlife
- ◆ Learn about birds, history and management
- ◆ No charge, but donations appreciated

#### For More Information

Call: (435) 723-5887 - TTY / Voice: 711 - <http://www.fws.gov/bearriver> or [bearriver@fws.gov](mailto:bearriver@fws.gov)  
Education Center is open 8:00am - 5:00pm weekdays - 10:00am - 4:00pm Saturdays

**Directions:** From I-15 at Brigham City, take exit #363 (Forest Street), turn west and drive one block to the Wildlife Education Center. Meet your guide inside the Center. The auto tour route will be closed June 1 - September 15, while the county road construction project continues. The only refuge access will be through our guided tours.