Mission statement: To preserve and improve the remaining habitat of birds and other wildlife, restore historical habitat, and educate the public, with emphasis on children, providing vision to all about our unique Nevada environments.

November 24 – Volunteers Appreciation Night and Chris Briggs – Survival, Parasites and Oedipus: Why are there so many morphs in hawk populations?

Volunteers Appreciation Night. Without you, our loyal volunteers, LAS would not be able to function as well as we do. So to say THANKS, and to show our appreciation for your dedication and hard work, we invite all volunteers to join us at the November general meeting for a short evening of recognition and camaraderie. We’d like all volunteers to attend, no matter what kind of work you did, and no matter how small it may have seemed to you. To us, all of it is important. We will start the event at 6:45 p.m. and go about 30-45 minutes. Please contact Alan Gubanich at aag@unr.nevada.edu or 857-0191 by Wednesday, November 18, to let him know if you plan to attend, so we know how many refreshments to provide. Looking forward to seeing you there, and Chris’s talk is one you won’t want to miss anyway!

Chris Briggs - Survival, Parasites, and Oedipus: Why are there so many morphs in hawk populations?

Many species have multiple plumages (morphs) within a given age and sex class, and the species within the genus *Buteo* (Red-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, etc.) are no exception, often making them an identification challenge. Chris Briggs, a Ph.D. candidate at UNR, will investigate several hypotheses about why so many plumages exist in both raptors in general, and Swainson’s Hawks specifically. He will talk about survival over the course of a 30-year study of Swainson’s Hawks in northern California. He will also discuss reproduction and recruitment, parasites, and mate preferences to try to disentangle how so many morphs persist and what it all means.

Note: There is no meeting in December. The next meeting after November is Tuesday, January 26, 2010.
Why Do Some Birds Hop and Others Run?

A few weeks back I got an interesting question: Why do some birds hop and others run? After a bit of research, I found that there is no one definitive answer. Generally, it involves a combination of size, economy of movement, and the bird’s lifestyle.

Size and leg length are considerations for determining if hopping or walking make sense for a bird. Walking (for two-legged animals) involves momentarily balancing on one leg while lifting the other to move it forward and then shifting the weight to the forward leg—this is one stride. Running involves lifting one leg forward while pushing off with the back leg, momentarily suspending the animal in the air, and increasing the distance moved in one stride. Speed determines the transition from walking to running. Humans shift from walking to running at about four miles per hour. Many birds that walk never really run because at that point flying is more efficient.

Hopping involves pushing off with both legs to move forward a distance. Hopping takes more energy than either walking or running one stride, so why would any birds hop? Short-legged birds tend to hop rather than walk because they can go much farther in a single hop than they can go in several strides. So, the amount of energy used per distance moved forward is less when they hop. But, hopping for larger, heavier birds becomes prohibitively energy expensive. (Can you imagine how much energy it would take for one of us to hop for a couple of blocks rather than walk or run?) Therefore, short-legged, heavier birds (such as ducks and geese) walk rather than hop when on the ground.

A bird’s lifestyle also determines whether it walks or hops. Generally, birds that spend most of their lives in trees are more likely to hop when on the ground. Hopping is a useful way of moving from branch to branch in trees. Because these birds don’t spend much time on the ground, they tend to continue to use hopping when on the ground. Birds that regularly forage on the ground have evolved the more efficient walking gait. For example, meadowlarks and grackles, which forage on the ground, walk, while closely-related orioles, which spend most of their time in trees, hop while on the ground. Robins forage for worms and insects in open areas on the ground, and they walk. Jays, which are similar in body size and leg length to robins, but spend more time in trees, tend to hop while on the ground.

So the answer to the question of why some birds hop and others walk seems to be “it depends.”

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

LAS has the positions of President, Communications Chair, and Conservation Chair available for any members who are interested in serving our organization. There is also room for volunteers to serve on the Education Committee (several exciting new programs being initiated!). If any of these sound like something you’d be interested in, please contact Alan Gubanich at aag@unr.nevada.edu or 857-0191. Thanks!

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Carol Coleman
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Pat Neyman
Alisa McWilliams

Ruby Crowned Kinglet $10 - $19
Meri McEneny
John Ramos

Other:
Bonnie Talso donated several bird books to LAS.

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Keep conservation to the forefront. Write your elected officials and tell them how you feel:

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Toll-free: 1-866-736-7343

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Kathy Oakes 775-747-5446 oakesy@sbcglobal.net

The Pelican
In this space, the LAS Bird Brain will answer your questions about birds and birding in northern Nevada.

Dear Bird Brain,

Can you tell me more about quail? I never thought of them as backyard birds, but from what I’ve seen, they don’t mind being around people.

Thank you,
Curious in Cold Springs

Dear Curious,

Northern Nevada is host to two species of quail, the California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) and the Mountain Quail (*Oreotyx pictus*). Locally, the Mountain Quail occurs almost exclusively in dense vegetation on steep slopes in the Carson Range and is far more secretive than the California Quail, which you are likely asking about.

California Quail tolerate a broad array of habitats and are surprisingly ubiquitous at the urban/wildland fringes. During the fall and winter, California Quail are highly gregarious. At this time of year, the previous breeding season’s new families are gathering into groups, or “coveys.” They will remain in their coveys until the next breeding season. In early spring, the coveys begin to break up, and individuals pair up to nest and rear their young.

Females typically build their nests on the ground, well hidden under a bush or a brush pile. However, as an example of their tolerance of humans, last year a California Quail laid her eggs in my neighbor’s potted pine tree before he had a chance to plant it. Although the nest was very well hidden in the pot under the tree’s bottom branches, we were surprised that she would nest in a relatively busy area of the front yard, right next to the sidewalk and driveway.

California Quail communicate with 14 different calls. These include courtship, re-grouping, feeding, and warning calls. The most frequently heard call sounds like the bird is saying *chi-ca-go*, just as one would pronounce the name of that city. This call appears to be a group assembly call. Other calls include the one-syllable *wow*, the *pit-pit-pit* contact calls, and the male’s aggressive call that I think sounds like a sneeze.

Here are a couple of curious quail quips before I close:

- Although the California Quail’s forward bending topknot looks like a single feather, it is actually a cluster of six overlapping feathers.
- The California Quail digests vegetation with the help of protozoans in its intestine. Chicks acquire the protozoans by pecking at the feces of adults.
- Clutches as large as 28 have been observed and may be the result of females laying their eggs in nests other than their own. This behavior is known as “egg-dumping.”

Happy Birding,
The Bird Brain

Sources:
Cornell Lab of Ornithology [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)

Do you have a question about birds or birding in northern Nevada? If so, please email the LAS Bird Brain at LASBirdBrain@gmail.com. Your question might be selected for the next issue of *The Pelican*. And remember, the only silly question is the one that isn’t asked!

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**Birds & Books**

LAS Birds & Books is a flock of readers interested in nature, especially birds and birding. The group meets in Reno on the third Tuesday of the month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Sundance Bookstore, 1155 W. 4th Street, #106-Keystone Square Shopping Center. You are encouraged to attend a meeting to see if this group is for you or to contact Kenn Rohrs at karohrs@charter.net or 775-849-9530 for more information. For a complete schedule and brief description of the selected books, go to the LAS website [www.nevadaaudubon.org](http://www.nevadaaudubon.org) and check the Birds & Books section of the Meetings page.

**November 17:** *The Sea Around Us* by Rachel Carson

**December 15:** *How to Be a (Bad) Birdwatcher* by Simon Barnes

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**Other Bird Book News**

In other book-related news, George Griffith, an LAS member who has lived in the Reno area for almost 20 years, is the author of a recently published book titled *Musical Birds of Nevada*, available at bookstores and online.
OF NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The header for this issue’s column is a bit of a misnomer. It should read, “Of Note from the Former President.” Those of you who subscribe to our LAS email list are already aware of the content of this column; a posting to the list on September 21 entitled “Time to Go.” Before I continue, I do wish to thank all of you who wrote such kind messages in return. Each one meant a very great deal to me. In part, here is the note I sent.

I want to let you know that on Friday September 18 I submitted to the LAS Board my resignation as both President and Communications Chair. I have been serving in these positions for quite a long time in addition to other LAS responsibilities I have had along the way. The decision was extremely difficult for me to reach. However, I believe that it is a sound decision and that this is the time to do it. I certainly will continue as an LAS member. I hope to do a few wild and crazy things, such as something I believe they call “birding.”

Our chapter’s structure is sturdy and well-designed. Our Board of Trustees and Committee Chairs represent a lot of talent and depth. Alan Gubanich, formerly Vice President, has taken on the responsibility of acting President. LAS will be in good hands with Alan at the helm for whatever length of time that turns out to be. Knowing that makes me feel a great deal better about my personal decision. I hope that many of you will consider stepping up when a need arises within LAS. Willing volunteers with positive attitudes are the power that fuels this organization.

In my communications about resigning, an effort to be very definitive – probably more for me than others – ended up sounding rather ominous. That was not my intent. I am fine. Please do not concern yourself in that regard. I would like to share a line from the actual resignation letter and extend its thought to all LAS members with whom I have had contact: I thank all of you for letting me lead in my own way, for participating in the dance, for being kind to one another and even to me, and for laughing along the way.

Despite the potential cliché, I sincerely mean it when I say that it has been an honor and a pleasure to serve our chapter in these positions. Best wishes to all of you.

– Karen L. Kish

Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the annual census of wintering bird populations that began in 1900. The results are used to estimate the distribution and abundance of wintering birds in North America. Each count circle covers an area 15 miles in diameter. Birders of all skill levels gather in teams and identify and count all birds observed throughout the day. The results of the nationwide census are compiled in the journal of North American Birds. Five CBC's are conducted locally: Carson City, Fallon, Pyramid Lake, South Lake Tahoe, and the Truckee Meadows. For updated information on CBC’s please see the LAS website. If you want to participate, contact the count leader or show up the morning of the count at the appointed location. Be sure to dress appropriately, and bring binoculars, field guides, scopes, and food and drink for the day. There is a $5 fee for each participant to cover compiling and publishing costs of the North American Birds journal that reports all count results. Ask your count leader for details on how to receive the journal.

Local CBCs

Fallon
Friday, December 18, 2009
Meet at Starbucks in Fallon (west side of town next to Comfort Inn) at 7 a.m. Please bring binoculars and a spotting scope (if you have them), warm clothes, water, and snacks. Count areas will be coordinated and teams dispersed from Starbucks. We will meet back up in the afternoon for refreshments and totals after the count, location to be determined. Please RSVP to Amy Leist (GBBO) at 775-722-2709 or amyleist@yahoo.com.

Truckee Meadows
Saturday, December 19, 2009
Meet at the McDonald’s on the corner of Oddie and Silverado (2 blocks east of 395) in Sparks at 7:00 a.m. All count areas will be coordinated and teams dispersed from this location. A potluck is planned for the evening compiling session; time and place to be determined. Call Dave McNinch for all the exciting details at 775-747-7545. Please do not call after 9:00 p.m.

Carson City
Sunday, December 20, 2009
Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the McDonald’s at the north end of Carson City (3344 N. Carson St.) south of the Bully’s Sports Bar. The after-count wrap-up will be held at a private home on the west side of Carson City. Any changes will be posted to the Nevada bird listserv. Contact: Greg Scyphers, scyph@sbcglobal.net or 775-745-3l56.

Pyramid Lake
Friday, January 1, 2010
Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Crosby’s Lodge in Sutcliff. Bring warm clothes, water, and lunch. Contact: Dennis or Becca Serdehely at 775-771-1575 or email birders@att.net. Please do not call after 10:00 p.m.

South Lake Tahoe, CA
Date and Time: TBA
Contact: Will Richardson, T.Will.Richardson@gmail.com or 530-412-2792
FIELD TRIPS
Christiane Omer 775-354-2634 happycpo@aol.com

Saturday, November 7
Damonte Ranch Wetlands
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Leader: Kathy Oakes, 775-747-5446, oakesy@sbcglobal.net
This is an easy walk on paved trails and birders of all experience are welcome. It will be a good opportunity to see the wetlands created as part of the subdivision development in this area. Hopefully, we will see a few late fall migrants and resident birds of wetlands and open meadows. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one, and extra clothes for unpredictable weather. Prepare to be out until mid-day. Meet at the back of the Home Depot parking lot at 1001 Steamboat Parkway, Reno (Damonte Ranch Parkway exit off Highway 395); we will carpool to the wetlands from there. Detailed directions can be found on the LAS website. The group size is limited; please call Kathy to reserve your space.

Saturday, November 21
Sierra Valley Expedition
Time: 8:00 a.m.
Leader: Alan Gubanich, 775-857-0191, aag@unr.nevada.edu
Fall migration is underway, and that means wintering hawks, among others, are arriving every day. We’ll spend both the morning and part of the afternoon looking for any early wintering raptors (Red-tailed, Rough-legged, and Ferruginous Hawks) plus early winter waterfowl (swans, ducks, and geese). We can brown-bag our lunch or enjoy a great little restaurant in Sierraville. You can let me know your preference when you contact me. If time and weather permits, we may also visit Yuba Pass or Plumas-Eureka State Park. In the eastern Sierras chickadees, nuthatches, jays, woodpeckers, and sapsuckers are always possibilities. Meet in the McDonald’s parking lot, Lemmon Valley exit 74, north of Reno off Hwy 395. Please contact Alan to reserve your space.

THE AVID BIRDER
Kenn Rohrs 775-849-9530 karohrs@charter.net

In this issue I will discuss four recently published field guides. The Washoe County Library has all four books available for checkout. Each field guide would make an excellent holiday gift.

This new Smithsonian field guide is ideal for beginners, but also has resources for experienced birders including a CD-ROM, with 587 songs and calls (for 138 bird species) in mp3 format, ready to download onto your mp3 player. The written descriptions are good but the focus is on images – each bird’s entry is accompanied by at least two photographs (and often more), many showing specimens in flight, variations in coloring, and differences among males, females, and juveniles.

The Sibley Guide to Trees (2009) by David Allen Sibley
If you find The Sibley Guide to Birds (the big book) helpful, you will want this book. Species are arranged taxonomically, which enables us to browse the images to find a match for an observed tree in the same way we use the bird guide. Sibley’s detailed paintings illustrate the cycles of annual and lifetime development. More than four hundred maps show the range, both natural and cultivated, for nearly all of the species. Issues of conservation, preservation, and environmental health are addressed in authoritative essays. This new book will set the standard of excellence in field guides to trees. A stunning work!
The “fall” migration got off to a decidedly un-fall, early-August start in northern Nevada towns. Western Tanagers and Wilson’s and Orange-crowned Warblers, with a Nashville Warbler in Incline Village and a probable Connecticut Warbler north of Reno, began to move through the semi-urban landscaping. Ash-throated, Willow, and Gray Flycatchers appeared in several parks, and Red-necked and Wilson’s Phalaropes found the few remaining water bodies on their way south. The Rufous Hummingbirds finally showed up en masse in early August on the first leg of their two-step migration, kicking off major battles with the summer-resident Black-chinned Hummingbirds, dispersing Calliope Hummingbirds, and the breeding Broad-tailed Hummingbirds in Baker. A pair of Anna’s Hummingbirds nested near Diane McAllister’s yard in southwest Reno (very unusual for northern Nevada), undeterred by the nest and fledglings of a Cooper’s Hawk in the immediately adjacent tree. So far so good, and then...nothing.

Birders, their appetites whetted for migrant eastern warblers and the like, were left to be entertained by many reports of walnuts, an aptly descriptive term that Dave Worley’s coworker uses for just-fledged California Quail. In this case, the likely third (and final) round of quail emerged in early August, with the parents on the alert yet again for cats, Western Scrub-Jays, and just about all potential threats to their progeny. Snowy Egrets and Eared Grebes, also not ready to throw in the breeding towel, added new members to their ranks in August, and a lonely (anthropomorphic, I know) male Pied-billed Grebe continued to call for a mate at Rancho San Rafael. A few of the summer breeders began to drift away, including the Bullock’s Orioles, Western Kingbirds, and Black-headed Grosbeaks. The swallows, most notably the Barn Swallows, began to coalesce into their usual pre-migration flocks and gradually disappeared from late August into early September. By the beginning of a notably hot September, in-town birding was admittedly pretty dull.

And then the second wave of migration kicked into gear over the first ten days of September, and we were off and running again. Waves of warblers started to come through, with riparian woods almost dripping with chipping Orange-crowned and other warblers. Nothing unusual, mind you, but the numbers were impressive at times. A Caspian Tern and a Herring Gull along the Sutcliffe shoreline at Pyramid Lake and a Common Tern at Virginia Lake in Reno joined the usual California and Ring-billed Gulls. A very late Black-headed Grosbeak, likely passing through from elsewhere, stocked up on seed pods at Oxbow Park in mid-September. Although the majority of the hummingbirds left in late August and early September, a few Black-chinned and at least one Anna’s remained at area feeders through the end of September. White-crowned Sparrows usually trickle into the Reno-Carson area in late September. This year, based on the chorus of birders announcing the chorus of new sparrows, the birds all seemed to have arrived on September 19.

Have you ever seen a bird in your yard that you swear is something, but the range maps in the books say that there’s no way that bird could be in northern Nevada? A recent discussion about Phainopeplas addressed that very issue. The bird in question was at a Reno-area bird bath a year ago, but Phainopeplas are pretty restricted to arid regions with mistletoe: think southern Nevada. Yet a search of the literature and people’s own recollections showed that a few of these birds (half a dozen records total over the decades) do drift northward into northern Nevada towns, usually but not always in the late summer and fall. So, don’t necessarily dismiss the possibility of an errant bird, be it a Phainopepla or a Blue-winged Warbler (of which there was one just east of Reno, but not in town) and especially during times of migration or post-breeding dispersal. Occam’s razor argues for the simplest answer, namely that the bird is a relatively common local bird with an odd plumage, but careful observations might prove otherwise.

We might raise an eyebrow, though, at hearing of a Flamingo at your bird bath, unless of course it’s plastic and has metal legs like the “flock” that someone plants along the gravel bars of the Humboldt River near Elko every year (“Ah, it’s summer: the Flamingos have returned.”).

Northern Nevada birders identified 126 local and migrant species in northern Nevada towns and yards during August and September. Contributors to this total included Elisabeth Ammon, Carol Amos, Wendy Broadhead, Mary Jo Elpers, Peter Fairley, John Free & Melissa Renfro, Bob Goodman, Alan Gubanich, Robin Hargett, Linda Hiller, Ed Kurtz, Sue Anne Marshall, Diane McAllister, Martin Meyers, Kathy Oakes, Fred Petersen, Bob Power, Melissa Robards, Georgia & Kenn Rohrs, Greg Scyphers, Dennis Serdchely, Jean Sherman, Steve Ting, Steve Wiel, Dave Worley, and me. The deadline for the next column is November 25. Send reports to 1050 Sumac St., Reno, NV 89509 or wallacealan at sbcglobal.net, or post sightings on the Nevada bird listserv. Good birding!
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November/December 2009 issue

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