

Monthly Bird Happenings at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Brigham City, UT

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Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Anytime at Bear River MBR is a great time to see year-round resident species such as: pied-billed grebes, great blue herons, Canada geese, mallards, northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, ring-necked pheasants, American coots, ring-billed gulls, black-billed magpies, common ravens, horned larks, European starlings, song sparrows, house sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, and western meadowlarks.

Bird numbers usually peak with spring migration in March - April (40,000-50,000 individuals) and during fall migration in October - November (120,000+). Species numbers usually peak with the songbird migrations: May and August in 2022 (with 75+ species seen during each).

December - January - February

Small numbers of waterfowl remain on the Refuge during the winter months when the open water freezes. In warmer winters, species include tundra swan, mallard, bufflehead, and common goldeneye. Raptors present during winter include bald eagles, rough-legged hawks, northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, and American kestrels. Ring-necked pheasants can often be seen amongst the reeds.

March

The tundra swans that spent the winter on the Refuge are now joined by those who overwintered in California's Sacramento Valley. Numbers peak around 10,000 during the first and second week of March. Migrating ducks such as American widgeon, northern pintail, northern shoveler, and redheads pass through the Refuge in the spring. March is typically the first month to welcome returning summer birds like cinnamon teal, double-crested cormorant, American white pelican, killdeer, American avocet, black-necked stilt, sandhill crane, marsh wren, yellow-headed blackbirds, tree swallows, and savannah sparrows.

April

April sees the arrival of eared, western, and Clark's grebes, long-billed curlew, and several colonial waterbirds such as snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, and white-faced ibis. Shorebirds like lesser yellowlegs, marbled godwit, and long-billed dowitchers also start to gather.

May

In May, more birds arrive such as phalaropes, Forester's terns, western and eastern kingbirds, as well as bank, cliff, and barn swallows. Breeding birds are well into nesting and include such species as double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, mallard, white-faced ibis, and California gull. In mid-May, the first fuzzy broods of geese and ducks can be seen and are quickly joined by the earliest hatched American avocets.

June

By June, many of the young Canada geese have grown so large that they are difficult to distinguish from their parents. The young of black-crowned night heron, great blue heron, and snowy egret have hatched and are being fed by their parents. June offers the best chance to see pairs of western and Clark's grebes running across the water as part of their ritual courtship dance.

July

July is the best month to view a variety of young birds such as ducklings (mallards and gadwalls), and long-legged juvenile shorebirds like American avocets and black-neck stilts.

August

Mid-August, shorebird migration reaches its peak with large flocks of marbled godwits, dowitchers, and red-necked and Wilson's phalaropes. Adult grebes with chicks riding on their backs will start to appear. Populations of dabbling ducks like cinnamon teal, green-winged teal, and northern shoveler have started to increase. Cliff swallow young fledge and quickly leave the Refuge to return to their wintering grounds in South America.

September

Nesting songbirds such as sparrows, yellow-headed blackbirds, and brown-headed cowbirds start to leave the Refuge and head south to subtropical and neotropical wintering grounds. Ducks such as American wigeons, northern pintails, northern shovelers, and redheads start to arrive in increasingly larger numbers.

October

By October, many summer birds have begun to leave the Refuge such as black-necked stilt, American avocet, Franklin's gull, white-faced ibis, and barn swallow. Meanwhile, northern harriers and American pipits come back to the Refuge from their northern breeding grounds. Diving duck species such as canvasback and lesser scaup also start showing up at the Refuge. Duck numbers reach their peak in October, with numbers reaching upwards of 120,000 in some years. The first trumpeter and tundra swans may arrive.

November

Tundra swans have begun to migrate through from their Alaskan breeding grounds. Swan numbers peak in the beginning to middle of the month with as many as 10,000 swans. As weather turns cold, the last lingering shorebirds head south. Waterfowl numbers decline by the end of the month. Bald eagles and rough-legged hawks arrive for the winter.

For more information, check out the "Recent Bird Sightings" board in the Wildlife Education Center and on the Refuge's Facebook page. The Wildlife Education Center is open 8:00–4:00 Tuesday–Friday and 10:00–4:00 on Saturdays. Closed Sunday, Monday, and federal holidays. The Auto Tour Route and trails are open sunrise to sunset, 365 days a year.

