



birding

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Aechmophorus
Grebe
Populations

Orange-crowned
Warbler
Subspecies

Field ID &
Distribution of
Tule Goose

Golden-winged
Warbler
Ecology

About the Cover

Mia McPherson

I am thrilled that my photograph of a pair of Clark's Grebes, with their bills elegantly crossed during a courtship display, graces the cover of this Dec. 2024 issue of

Birding. Photographed in the stunning marshes of Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in northern Utah, my Clark's Grebe image reflects not only the beauty of these remarkable birds but also the rich biodiversity of their wetlands home. For me, the photograph of the Clark's Grebes

represents more than just a beautiful image. It's an observation of the intricate rituals of their mating season, a fleeting moment of connection between two beings. My goal is always to share these intimate glimpses of avian life, hoping to inspire a greater appreciation for our feathered friends and their habitats.

Utah's landscapes have been a constant source of inspiration throughout my photographic journey. The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, now spanning nearly 80,000 acres, is a vital habitat for millions of migratory birds. My time there allowed me to witness and document the intricate dance of life in these wetlands.

Another Utah gem that has left an indelible mark on my experiences in the West is the Great Salt Lake. I've had the privilege of capturing a mesmerizing murmuration of Wilson's Phalaropes over its vast expanse several times—and I'm gratified that a previous *Birding* cover of mine (Dec. 2013) featured the huge phalarope gathering at the Great Salt Lake. This spectacle underscores the lake's crucial role as a staging area for numerous migratory species. Watching thousands of these graceful birds swirl and dive in midair in perfect unison is not only fascinating, it also reminds us of the complexity of nature.

I am likewise attracted to the small stuff in nature's realm. In addition to being drawn to the epic



spectacles of hundreds of grebes and thousands of phalaropes, I delight in something as simple-seeming as a little Orange-crowned Warbler pausing on its migration in a greasewood at Farmington Bay Wildlife Management Area (see p. 1 in this issue of *Birding*). It's great to see contributions in *Birding* from teen birders like Rajan Rao, and his article beginning on p. 58 provides a nice overview of the distinctive Orange-crowned Warbler subspecies *oriantha* ("Rocky Mountain Orange-crowned Warbler") that I photographed at Farmington Bay.

My approach to bird photography is rooted in patience, respect, and a deep connection with nature. I believe in capturing authentic moments that tell a story about the birds and their environments. This philosophy has guided me through countless hours in the field, waiting for that perfect moment when a bird reveals its true essence.

As a self-taught photographer, I've dedicated myself to honing

my craft, learning not just about photography techniques, but also about bird identification, behavior, ecology, and conservation. This passion has led me to explore diverse landscapes and encounter a wide array of bird species. From the salt flats of the Great Salt Lake to the marshes of Bear River and beyond, each location has offered

• This migrant Orange-crowned Warbler of the distinctively gray-hooded subspecies *orestera* paused in a greasewood, *Sarcobatus vermiculatus*, at Farmington Bay Wildlife Management Area, Davis Co., Utah, on Sept. 23, 2022.
Photo by © Mia McPherson.



unique challenges and rewards, shaping my skills and perspective as a photographer.

Recently, my journey has taken me to new horizons. I've moved from Utah to Arkansas, where I'm exploring fresh landscapes and encountering different bird species. This transition has reinvigorated my passion, offering new subjects and habitats to photograph. In Arkansas, I've had the joy of capturing images of birds like the Tufted

Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee—common where I live now, yet species that I did not see or photograph in Utah. Each day brings new discoveries and opportunities to grow as a photographer and person.

Through my daily blog posts at On The Wing Photography (onthewingphotography.com/wings/daily-blog-posts), I strive to share not just my images, but also the stories behind them. On May 2, 2025, I will have reached a significant milestone—10 full, uninter-

rupted years of daily posts on my website. Each and every post has been a joy to create.

I hope that by sharing these experiences and photographs, I can inspire others to explore and protect our natural environments. My connection to birds and nature continues to drive me forward, reminding me that there is always more to learn and discover.

As I continue to follow my passion for birds and photography, I am increasingly aware of the impor-



tance of conservation. The habitats I photograph, from Utah's wetlands to Arkansas's forests, face numerous challenges. Through my work, I hope to raise awareness about these issues and inspire action to protect these precious ecosystems.

Over the course of eight years now, I have had the privilege of mentoring young, budding bird photographers through the American Birding Association's Young Birder Program. This experience

allowed me to share my knowledge and passion with the next generation of wildlife photographers and conservationists, further emphasizing the importance of nurturing a love for nature in our youth. I believe that these young people are the best hope for their future and that of this planet.

Whether you're an experienced birder or simply someone who appreciates nature's beauty, there's always something new to discover in the world of birds.

Thank you for allowing me to share my passion with you here at the ABA. Life is good, especially when spent in the company of birds! 🐦

• This murmuration of phalaropes—mostly Wilson's Phalaropes but probably with some Red-necked Phalaropes also in the flock—was at the causeway to Antelope Island State Park, Davis Co., Utah, on July 18, 2017. Photo by © Mia McPherson.





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compiled by Ioana Seritan and Laura Guerard

with contributions from Max Breshears, Emily Brhel, Raúl Castro-Dean, Steven Cavros, Edith Dawson, Xavier Gitre, Aaron Gomperts, Brynn Hansen, Chris Henry, Ethan Kang, Aranya Karighattam, Milo Koehn, Zara Koehn, Cecilia Lewis, Ava Lyerly, Henry Malec-Scott, Arabella Pajoohi, Silas Powell, Anna Reichenbach, Rajan Rao, Owen Robertson, Zita Robertson, Killian Sullivan, Gwynnie Tien, Otys Train, Ryan Weber, and Zealon Wight-Maier

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