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Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



Twelve Days of Birding
Black Swift Nest Camera
Lesser Black-backed Gulls in Colorado



Colorado Field Ornithologists
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Front cover:
Virginia Rail,
South Platte
Park, Arapa-
hoe County,
17 May 2010.
Photo by Bill
Eden

Convention, Thank You, and Welcomes

Jim Beatty

Fort Collins Convention

Our 2010 convention was a big success. Our attendance set a new record, with 190 birders arriving from near and far, and the birds put on a good show, with about 220 species recorded on our field trips to widely varied habitats. The program was very full and included exhibitors, a papers session, “Stump the Chumps,” book signings by some of our authors, and a banquet including three CFO awards—which will be detailed in other articles in this journal—and an interesting keynote address, as well as our four days of non-stop field trips.

A highlight in the exhibit room was the live raptors on display by the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. New field trips included Sunday and Monday “chase” trips to pursue recently found rarities, “Birds and Beetles” led by the axe-wielding David Leatherman, a 3:00 A.M. trip for insomniacs led by Ted Floyd (of course), and a slacker trip for those wanting a couple extra hours of sleep. At the paper session, Lynn Wickersham provided us with an update on the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II project which showed that while much has been accomplished, much remains to be completed. Jason Beason and Arvind Panjabi, both of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, presented their work with Black Swifts and transforming a sludge dump into a meadow, respectively. Stump the Chumps added sound to the challenging photos, giving the expert panel a serious ID workout.

Participants also completed a questionnaire that will provide CFO with valuable information to allow us to improve future events. We sincerely thank all who took the time to provide us with their thoughts, comments, and suggestions.

Thank You and Welcomes

At the banquet, Mark Peterson, who is leaving the board as he is term-limited, was thanked for his countless hours of work and his special expertise in information technology. We owe him a particular debt for his years at the thankless task of setting up convention field trips and recruiting field trip leaders. Another thank you goes to Bill Schmoker, who now leaves the board after serving an additional year as Immediate Past President. Willy’s energy, enthusiasm, and experience were of immense help to the current board.

We would also like to thank all the volunteer field trip leaders who made the CFO convention such a success.

We welcomed Brenda Linfield to the board and are excited that she brings much of the information technology expertise that we are losing with Mark's retirement. We also welcomed back Brad Steger to his second term on the board.

A final thank you goes to the Hilton Fort Collins staff who provided us with a wonderful breakfast buffet at 5:00 A.M. every morning, served a gourmet banquet dinner, and worked hard behind the scenes to provide the support that we needed to deliver a very complete convention to a record number of participants.

Jim Beatty, 165 Twelve Point Buck Trail, Durango, CO, 81301, jdbeatty@bresnan.net

CFO BOARD MINUTES

17 April 2010
SWCA Office
Broomfield, Colorado

Larry Modesitt, CFO Secretary

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 11:15 A.M. by President Jim Beatty. Officers and Directors present were President Jim Beatty, Vice President Bill Kaempfer, Secretary Larry Modesitt, Treasurer Maggie Boswell, and Immediate Past President Bill Schmoker. Directors present were Ted Floyd, Mark Peterson, Joe Roller, Larry Semo, Debra Sparn, and Brad Steger. Board members Nathan Pieplow and Bob Righter sent their regrets. Newly nominated member Brenda Linfield also attended part of the meeting.

President's Report

Jim Beatty noted the importance of final plans for the convention and the need to plan a transition in our electronic media/information technology areas from Mark Peterson to Brenda Linfield, who will officially join the board at the Annual Convention.

Secretary's Report

The minutes of the 30 January 2010 board meeting at the Fort Collins Hilton were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Brad moved and Joe seconded approval of the 2010 budget. The motion passed. Bill Kaempfer proposed

some grants and projects that will exceed the amount in the budget. This is acceptable as the 2009 grant amount was lower than usual. As of 16 April, total convention income is \$14,427, compared to \$11,321 at this time last year. Registration is 166 so far compared to approximately 140 at Lamar, the previous high. This includes 11 people from out of state. Several people who submitted convention registrations by mail, however, had their deliveries delayed significantly by the post office. When they were finally delivered, some trips were full, but field trip adjustments were made based upon postmarks. Future online registration will be easier and encouraged in order to avoid this problem.

Convention Tasks

Jim Beatty reviewed the convention tasks to ensure that all were assigned to specific persons, and that those persons were prepared to carry them out. A separate assignment list was prepared.

Director Nominations

Jim announced results of the email voting that Brenda Linfield will be nominated at the Annual Meeting to replace Mark Peterson, who is term-limited as a Director. Jim thanked Mark for his expertise, tireless effort, and many significant contributions to CFO. Since 2002, Brenda has been designing and building websites and is expert in PHP, the language used for the CFO website. She has been a birder since college. Brad Steger, whose term expires this year, agreed to stand for reelection.

Information Technology Assignments and Transition

Jim led a discussion of all of the information technology that CFO uses now and plans to use in the future. Mark will gradually transfer his work to Brenda, and will be available to help as needed. Mark will continue maintaining the CBRC site as needed. The highest priority item for Brenda is an online membership database. Currently, the existing database is shuffled between the Treasurer and the Membership Chair, which is cumbersome and introduces errors due to different computer platforms. The second priority for Brenda will be updating the CFO website, something that has not been done for many years. It needs to be more appealing and easy to navigate, with drop-down menus. Brenda noted that every page on a website should have at least two links to get to it, as people navigate differently. Maggie pointed out that adding information about the responsibilities of each director would help people know whom to contact about issues that arise.

CBRC Chair

Larry Semo's second term expires at the end of 2010, and the CBRC Bylaws mandate a 1-year absence. Jim noted that Larry is doing an excellent job as chair. Larry stated that he is willing to remain as Chair. Jim noted that the board must either find a new chair or modify the CBRC Bylaws which the CFO Board is authorized to do. Ted stated that while he is a fan of term limits for most jobs including the CBRC committee

members, the special requirements of the chair cause him to agree that we should retain Larry. He stated that it takes years to establish the scientific contacts and expert resources needed in leading committee review of submitted records. Larry's hard-earned skill is extremely valuable. For example, Texas with its very strong records committee has a chairman with no term limits. It was also noted that Larry has a close and excellent relationship with the committee, which does have term-limited turnover. Jim recommended that the CBRC Bylaws modifications be developed for CFO Board consideration. Larry M. and Jim will work with the CBRC to recommend some CBRC Bylaws changes for the next board meeting. Jim said that any proposed voting would be officially secret and anyone who had reservations about this issue should contact him privately.

Committee Reports

A. CBRC—Larry S. The Board noted that online review of submissions by the committee has been a great step forward, and Larry S. agreed that submitting records online works very well. The committee is reviewing this season's spring submissions, which probably makes it more up-to-date than any other state committee. The committee waits until the bird has departed before reviewing the record, so that last sighting information is available. For example, the Golden-crowned Sparrow in Cañon City has been appearing now for several years. The next major improvement would be making existing records available

online. It was requested that the site list all species currently on the state checklist that are subject to CBRC review.

B. Project and Youth Funds—Bill K. Youth applications were due 31 March, and three were submitted. Saraiya, our convention brochure cover artist, requested funds to attend the CFO convention. Marcel Such requested funds to attend ABA Young Birder Camp Colorado. Kyle Huffstater requested funds to attend the same ABA camp. The total of all three is \$1,100. Bill moved approval, seconded by Joe. Motion was approved. We restated that the recipient is required to write about the experience. Ted stated that we might want to redefine "youth" as a "student," since Saraiya at 20 is older than our youth membership age limit.

C. Colorado Birds—No formal report except that it was noted that the April issue had been mailed.

D. Membership—Debra. We have 418 individual, 44 family, and 4 student members, for a total of 510 individuals. We have 51 new members since January, although 66 current subscribers have had their membership expire since December. Debra will be reminding them to renew. Debra mentioned that updating the database structure will be very helpful, as at least three people have "patched" the database in the past. Debra asked for phone numbers to be included on PayPal submissions.

E. Field Trips—Brad. Ted will do a combined TNC/CFO Fox Ranch trip in early October. Bill suggested a trip led by Duane Nelson to see his

work with Least Terns and Piping Plovers. Duane is involved with the Bureau of Reclamation dredging and on a June trip, he could show how he moves nests a few feet each day as the water level rises.

F. Birds of Colorado Online—No activity.

G. COBirds—Rachel is continuing as moderator. Current membership is 745.

H. County Birding—Mark reported that much of the work to add maps has been completed and only three counties remain. Now a user will be able to click on a site and locate it.

New Business

Initial thoughts/planning for the 2011 convention—Jim recommends staying with a spring convention for 2011. We do not have enough data to

risk making any change such as having a fall convention. Larry M. mentioned that we previously discussed having a second get-together in the fall, such as a weekend chase trip. This year's convention chase trips, for example, are full, so a CFO chase trip could have merit. Bill K. traditionally leads a two-day trip in the fall to the Sterling area and could make it a CFO trip. For 2011, Bill K. recommended Grand Junction as a great place with good amenities and great birding. The board agreed to hold the 2011 convention there. It would best be held over the Memorial Day weekend to ensure the Grand Mesa area is clear of snow.

Our next meeting will be 21 August 2010, somewhere on the West Slope. President Beatty adjourned the meeting at 3:10 P.M.

Minutes of the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Colorado Field Ornithologists

22 May 2010
Hilton Fort Collins
Fort Collins, Colorado

Larry Modesitt, CFO Secretary

The CFO Annual Meeting was called to order at 7:40 P.M. at the Hilton Fort Collins in conjunction with the Annual Convention. Board Members present were President Jim Beatty; Vice President Bill Kaempfer; Secretary Larry Modesitt; Treasurer Maggie Boswell; Immediate Past President Bill Schmoker; and Directors Ted Floyd, Nathan Pieplow, Mark Peterson, Bob Righter, Joe Roller,

and Debra Sparn. CBRC Chair Larry Semo and Director Brad Steger were unable to attend.

Jim recognized all officers and board members and thanked them for their service. He also recognized Saraiya Ruano, the convention brochure cover artist, and Marcel Such, who will be attending an ABA young birder camp in Colorado in June. He praised the Hilton staff for service, including an outstanding early breakfast, and thanked all exhibitors, field trip leaders, paper presenters, and the Stump the Chumps panelists. He noted CFO's strong financial condition, helped along by a strong convention attendance of 190 people. He announced that next year's convention will be in Grand Junction.

Jim noted that all officers have one more year remaining on their terms and have agreed to serve another year. Brad Steger had completed his first director term and has agreed to serve another term. Jim praised Mark Peterson, who was term-limited from being re-elected, as our hardware and software expert, as well as a valuable field trip and convention coordinator. Mark will be missed. Brenda Linfield was elected as a new board member to replace Mark and brings important computer software skills to the board.

The Nature Conservancy of Colorado (TNC) received the Distinguished Bird Conservation Partner Award, with Chris Pague accepting it on behalf of TNC. Presenter Ted Floyd commended TNC for its generosity to CFO members and its service to conservation across Colorado. Peter Gent received the first-ever Special Achievement award. Presenter Joe Roller noted Peter's monumental past service to CFO as President, editor of both *Colorado Birds* and "News from the Field," and Chair of the Colorado Bird Records Committee. Alex Cruz received the Ron Ryder Award. Presenter Bill Kaempfer commended Alex for his legacy of training students and doctoral candidates who have gone on to distinguished careers in field ornithology and bird conservation, as well as his voluminous research on birds. Professor Cruz dedicated the award to his students, noting that they will carry on the spirit of the award to other ornithologists.

Keynote speaker Craig Benkman, the world's foremost authority on Red Crossbills, was introduced by bird sound expert Nathan Pieplow, who stated that he began recording because of Red Crossbills. Professor Benkman enlightened the audience with many fascinating aspects of these very unusual birds. He explained how their evolution was related to their differing habitats and feeding requirements. As a result, banquet attendees were given an education on call types, optimal bill sizes for cone sizes of various conifers, and the presence or absence of squirrels. We learned that even when cross-

bills are quiet, they are there (listen for falling cone flakes). When they start calling, they are about to fly.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 P.M. See you in Grand Junction next year!

YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The 2010 CFO Convention

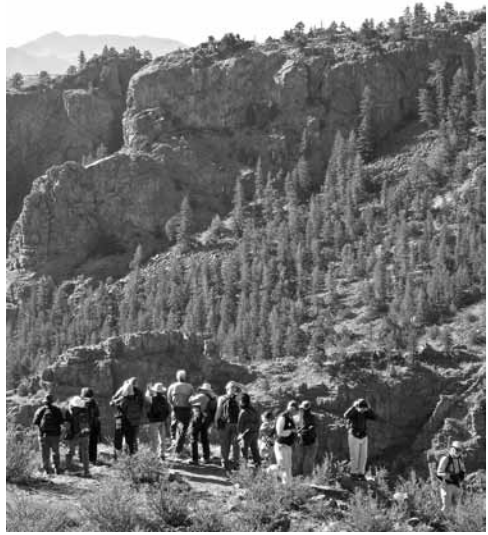
Saraiya Ruano

My heart has always been with the prairie. The birdlife may be simple compared to thick woods or wetlands, but displaying long-spurs and singing sparrows never fail to captivate my eyes and ears. For this reason, I was particularly excited to attend the 2010 CFO convention in Fort Collins: it provided ample opportunities to bird the sunburnt prairie of the Pawnee National Grasslands. Although trips were offered in mountainous habitats, I visited the Pawnee on three of the four convention days.

The most exciting species for me was not a prairie bird at all, but one I had seen many times on visits to Florida. The first day of the convention, while we were driving on one of the many desolate dirt roads of the Pawnee, a small bird flitted by our caravan of wind-blown birders and hopped about on the side of the road. At first, the bird's active flitting behavior and pumping motions reminded me of a Rock Wren, which can be found in unexpected habitats during migration. But upon binocular inspection, the rusty crown and yellow wash, accompanied by vigorous tail pumping, identified the bird as a Palm Warbler. What a stroke of luck to have run into this bird as it rested on the prairie, a brief stop on its journey from the southern US to its breeding grounds up north! The group watched the bird as it foraged in the road until it flew out into the prairie with a short *chip!*

I also thoroughly enjoyed the field trip led by Ted Floyd to The Nature Conservancy's Phantom Canyon Preserve northwest of Fort Collins. The Phantom Canyon Preserve, sandwiched by private land, is surrounded by barren landscape occasionally speckled with stands of pinyon or stunted ponderosa pine. Hogbacks of red rock, the ribs of the land, rise up parallel to the road. Looking out at the foothills, one would never guess that the land suddenly drops off into a precipitous canyon carved by the Cache la Poudre River. Led by Nature

Conservancy staff, our group hiked into the canyon, where we found Golden Eagle nests as well as eagles soaring at eye level as we watched from the slope side. In the lush canyon bottom, we found Lazuli Buntings, Yellow-breasted Chats, and a lone merganser rafting down the river. We stopped in the shade of a three-hundred-year-old juniper tree. Not far away, our guide explained, are teepee rings. “Imagine, this tree was here when Native Americans occupied the canyon. They probably picked its berries or used its bark.” The gnarled tree also hosted a Lazuli Bunting as it burst into song.



Phantom Ranch. Photo by Tom Wilberding

CFO conferences, however, offer more than binocular experiences. They offer a chance to meet unique individuals in the birding community, to reconnect with old friends, and to associate with a variety of personalities. I particularly enjoyed being in the presence of sharp and experienced birders who were able to share their knowledge concerning identification. For instance, I recall looking at *Empidonax* flycatchers at Crow Valley with a trip leader as he patiently explained how to tell Dusky from Hammond's from Cordilleran. Hammond's Flycatchers, he explained, have a more hunched appearance, in addition to a shorter tail and longer primary projection. The tail on the bird we were looking at was longer, and it lacked the characteristic teardrop eye ring of a Cordilleran. After walking through a process of elimination, we arrived at the likely identification of Dusky Flycatcher.

I also enjoyed Craig Benkman's crossbill presentation. I found the evolution of crossbills particularly interesting. Compared to other bird species, the evolution of crossbills took place in a short span of time. Their evolution is tightly linked to the evolution of conifer cones. For instance, in locations with high squirrel populations, cones have developed larger, harder scales on the attached end of the cone, because squirrels always start on that end when feeding. Crossbills feed on the hanging end of cones, where the scales are smaller. The shape of certain cones thus indicates joint evolution based on squirrel and crossbill



Hereford Ranch birding. Photo by Tom Wilberding

populations. I have always known that the strange beak of the crossbill is specially designed for breaking open cones. But I never realized just how sophisticated the engineering of the beak is. Special muscles enable the lower jaw to move laterally. After crossbills wedge their curved, finely pointed beaks in between the scales, the lateral motion peels the scale off. I could talk for-

ever about all the aspects of the crossbill that I found fascinating. The presentation added a satisfying research aspect to the conference.

I thank the CFO for supporting my desire to attend the conference and for granting me a portion of its youth scholarship funding. The conference was an exciting experience and I learned so much—not only from the recreational birding but from the paper presentations and the “Stump the Chumps” photo quiz discussion. I also learned a lot from creating the T-shirt design. The opportunity to design a T-shirt has further developed my skills in representing birds accurately, and the drawing was the first flat piece of artwork I have sold. Thank you again for a week of unique and fun experiences!

Saraiya Ruano, mokeysue01@comcast.net

CFO AWARDS

CFO Awards Appreciation Plaque to Snowy Owl Hosts

Joe Roller

Numerous Colorado birders were thrilled to have close views of a

second-year male Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiaca*) in northeast El Paso County, Colorado, last winter. This special bird was found and identified on 27 December 2009 by Bernard “Snook” Cipolletti, a Colorado birder familiar with Snowy Owls from childhood sightings on New Jersey beaches and during military service in Alaska. News of this rarity went out on COBirds the same day, but several searchers were unable to spot it. Determined, Snook coaxed his wife into driving the roads for days while he scanned the prairie from the bed of their pickup truck. His diligence paid off. He found the Snowy Owl again on 8 January 2010, and again the news spread.

During January and February, literally hundreds of birders and non-birders were able to see this charismatic raptor, and all owe Snook their gratitude. For many it was a life bird. The owl often perched on housetops or flew about the Prairie Vista Meadows subdivision near Peyton, Colorado.

The Colorado Field Ornithologists appreciated the friendliness and cooperation of that community when so many eager owl watchers lined neighborhood streets to see and photograph the Snowy Owl. The CFO Board awarded its coveted Appreciation Plaque to the Prairie Vista Meadows Homeowners’ Association. This plaque has been presented about once a year to landowners and others who have cooperated with and encouraged visiting birders.

On 2 March 2010, I presented the CFO plaque to Craig McConnell, President of the Association, at its annual meeting. The group was also given a striking, framed photo of the Snowy Owl donated by Glenn Walbek, photo editor of *Colorado Birds*. In addition to accepting the gratitude of the CFO, the homeowners enjoyed hearing about the life history of their visitor from the Arctic. On the morning of the meeting, one homeowner noticed the owl perched on her roof; I



Craig McConnell accepts a Snowy Owl appreciation photo from CFO's Joe Roller, 2 Mar 2010. Photo by Noreen McConnell

did not hear of any subsequent sightings. Overall, the bird lingered in the Peyton area for over two months.

This particular Snowy Owl was loyal to an easily accessible site for a long period of time, which allowed many birders and casual observers to see and photograph it. Most of the other sporadic Snowy Owl reports in Colorado have been from more remote areas or of birds found dead. This would be the first documented Snowy Owl from El Paso County, pending acceptance by the Colorado Bird Records Committee (Larry Semo, pers. comm.).

Snowy Owl sightings in Colorado seem to be declining. Andrews and Righter (1992) listed reports of 28 Snowy Owls during the 1960s and 27 during the seventies, but only 11 during the eighties. During the nineties only six Snowy Owls were noted and there have been only five since then, according to News from the Field reports in *Colorado Birds*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Larry Semo and Bill Maynard for reviewing drafts of this article and for making helpful suggestions.

LITERATURE CITED

Andrews, R., and R. Righter. 1992. *Colorado Birds: A Reference to Their Distribution and Habitat*. Denver Museum of Natural History, Denver, CO.

Joe Roller, 965 South Garfield Street, Denver, CO 80209, pergrn@aol.com

CFO AWARDS

Special Achievement Award Recipient: Peter Gent

Joe Roller

Colorado Field Ornithologists has a long history of serving the Colorado birding community. For decades the CFO has held conventions, arranged field trips, published *Colorado Birds*, supported the Colorado Bird Records Committee and COBirds, and done much more for birds and birders. This has taken a lot of work—volunteer work.

Many people have given their time and energy for the CFO. Recently, however, the CFO Board of Directors realized that one par-

ticular person among all of our dedicated volunteers stands far above the rest, and deserves special recognition for his achievements: Peter Gent.

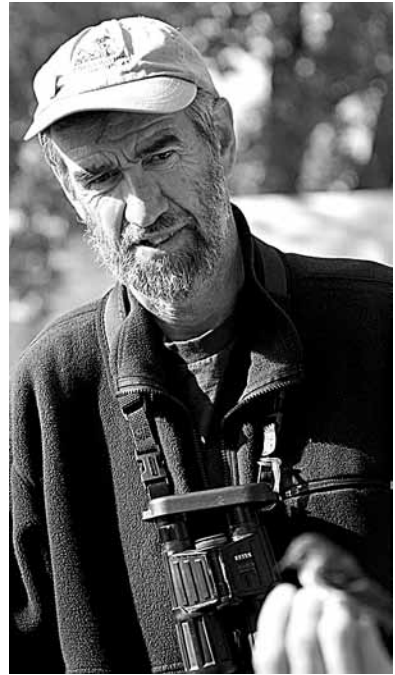
One of the best qualities of an individual within an organization is not only the ability to lead, but the willingness—the willingness to be there when needed, to always answer “yes” when asked. For the past 34 years since Peter Gent arrived in Colorado in 1976, no other individual within our organization has been so willing to do so much.

Peter has keen intelligence, a lively wit, and a large dose of modesty. He is quiet and effective, not one to attract attention or demand it. The job gets done. In a group with sometimes drastically different opinions, he has a calming effect. Those who go birding with him enjoy the experience, and usually learn something.

Peter was CFO President for seven years: 1987-1989 and 2002-2005. He was a member of the Board of Directors for many other years. Peter did not seek the limelight, but led the CFO with skill when he was asked to do so. He has contributed many articles to *Colorado Birds*; he edited *News from the Field* for ten years and served as editor or co-editor of the entire journal from 1980-1983. He has served on the Colorado Bird Records Committee on and off since the seventies, and was chair for five years: 1984 through 1988. In fact, he has been a records committee member for 16 of the past 32 years!

Born in England, Peter studied mathematics at the University of Bristol and earned a Ph.D. in fluid dynamics. He is a respected Senior Scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research and is the author of over 30 refereed publications just since 1990. In February 2009, Governor Bill Ritter presented the Governor's Award for Research Impact in Climate Science to Peter Gent, Ph.D.. In the atmosphere of the academic world, Peter's modesty is a refreshing wind.

He is high-level squash player, has birded all over the planet (including Boulder County), and is a master of all of Colorado's fourteeners. In addition, he is a past president of the Western Field Ornithologists.



Peter Gent

Peter Gent loves birding and has been a pillar of strength for the CFO, and that is why the CFO Board has chosen to present him with the first ever Special Achievement Award. When Peter accepted the award during the 2010 CFO convention banquet, there was a prolonged and heartfelt standing ovation. Peter's response was typically modest and brief, culminating in a call to action: "The CFO was a small organization in the 70's and it has certainly grown. Let's keep it strong."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Bob Righter for researching facts and dates and for helping to shape these comments.

Joe Roller, 965 South Garfield Street, Denver, CO 80209, pergrn@aol.com

CFO Field Trip to Northeast Colorado 28-29 August 2010 Leaders Bill Kaempfer and John Vanderpoel

This overnight trip will visit fall migration spots along the South Platte River including Prewitt Reservoir, North Sterling State Park, Tamarack and Red Lion State Wildlife Areas, and Jumbo Reservoir. Meet at 6:00 A.M. at the Niwot Park-and-Ride at Niwot Road and CO 119 on Saturday, August 28th. Return late afternoon on Sunday, August 29th. Arrange your own overnight stay in Sterling, preferably at the Comfort Inn or Super 8 located next to each other at the intersection of I-76 and US 6.

The route will depend in part on recent reports, but the first stop will be Prewitt Reservoir for songbird migrants, shorebirds, and terns. We will continue to Sterling and then the very rarely birded North Sterling State Park for more shorebirds, sparrows, and owls. In Sterling we will also search for Mississippi Kite. The following morning we will continue to Tamarack SWA for migrants and eastern Colorado specialties, Red Lion SWA for migrant shorebirds, and Jumbo for land and water migrants. The return trip will probably be through Haxtun in Phillips County.

Contact Bill Kaempfer at kaempfer@colorado.edu or 303-954-8998 for questions or to express your interest in participating.

Twelve Days of Birding

Brad Steger

It was December of 2006 and I was closing out the birding year with Mark Peterson and Lisa Edwards on our way to the Barr Lake Christmas Bird Count (CBC). We had all seen over 300 species that year, which many people had told me was sort of a “magic” number for a good year of birding in Colorado. Mark was putting his finishing touches on a record year at that time, 390 species, still more than my state life list. I knew my first child was on the way in August and my birding time was going to be greatly reduced in 2007, so I steered the conversation towards a question of interest to me: how many species could be seen if you only birded one day per month? I was sure I could manage to bird once a month. Could we get to 300?

“No way” was our first answer. Then, after some thought, we decided, maybe—if you got really lucky in migration—but even then it was unlikely. Some discussion with many others over the next couple of days led us to the conclusion that it might be possible. By this time, Mark and I were so excited about the idea of doing one Big Day per month that we didn’t really care what the total ended up being. That is how our Big Day Challenge (BDC) got started.

January

At the beginning of 2007, there were a lot of rarities in Fremont and Pueblo Counties that had been found during the CBCs and would be hard to find later in the year. We quickly decided our first big day would be on 6 January. Tony Leukering and Cole Wild came along with us; as always, it’s the more the merrier when it comes to birding. We ended the day with 102 species. Highlights included Long-tailed Duck, all six of Colorado’s grebe species, eight species of gulls, and Varied Thrush. We thought getting to 300 might be possible after all. We saw 13 species that we would not be able to see on any of our other big days for the year. Mark and I were committed to the BDC, officially hooked.

102 and counting....

It came time to set our own rules and start planning the rest of the year. The rules for the days themselves were not too hard; they were Big Days, after all, with clearly published rules from ABA. However, what about do-overs, bad weather, and other possibly unforeseen issues? We agreed that once we picked the day we were pretty much committed to it. We also agreed there would be no do-overs for a bad day since that would go against the basic premise of the BDC.

Second, some planning needed to be done. When to get certain species? What month was best for the mountain birds, plains birds, shorebirds, warblers, gulls, sparrows, etc.? What regular birds in Colorado could we afford to miss? When would we try for owls? One thing that I quickly realized was that I was going to see lots of our great state that I had never seen before, along with many new birds.

February

February is arguably one of the least exciting months to bird in Colorado. (That is probably why I am writing this article in February two years later.) The plan for our February Big Day was winter mountain birds. It was largely uneventful, but we ended with 78 species for the day. We dropped out of the mountains and ended the day at Tunnel Drive in Fremont County, where we saw our only Golden-crowned and Rufous-crowned Sparrows of the year. We added 25 more species for the year, but only a total of three that we would not see again.

127 and counting...

March

March, we decided, was time for West Slope “chickens.” For some reason, Mark couldn’t sleep the night before and woke me up at about 2:30 A.M. to listen to the Great Horned Owl outside the hotel room. It would be several hours later before we got our second bird of the day, certainly not a typical big day occurrence.

We started the “day” with Greater Sage-Grouse and followed up quickly with Sharp-tailed Grouse. Later that morning we got Chukar at Cameo. We ended our day with my lifer Boreal Owl on the Grand Mesa. We had 90 species for the day, five of which we would only see in March. Looking back at all of our big days over the last two years, this is my second favorite. The route worked like planned, we saw most of our targets, the scenery was fantastic, and ending the day with a lifer is always a plus.

151 and counting...

April

April was going to follow a route modified from a Big Day that Mark and I had done the year before that set the Colorado April Big Day record. We were joined by Brandon Percival and Lisa Edwards for our adventure. We started at the Bent County marshes for rails and owls.

As a small child I remember my dad playing a record (yes, I am that old) of the night sounds of a swamp for me and my brothers.

Other than frogs I had no idea what else was on that record, but I always liked sitting in a dark room pretending to be in the middle of the swamp. I think that is why April was my favorite Big Day. Midnight in the middle of the Bent County marshes is the real thing, not a record. The frogs, insects, and critters all singing their spring songs is a rare treat we often don't take the time to enjoy in our hectic lives. Then add in the birds: Virginia Rails, Soras, and Black Rails all spontaneously calling. Mark then picked out something different, a King Rail, a state bird for all four of us. We were excited to say the least—it was going to be a good day; we could all feel it.

From the marshes we headed southeast for the dawn chorus of the grassland birds. Sparrows singing at 4:00 A.M. makes you wonder how “regular people” can sleep until noon sometimes. They don't know what they're missing. We worked our way north hitting migrant traps, bodies of water, feeding stations, people's yards, city parks, and anything that we thought might add something new for the BDC. We ended the day at Bonny State Park. It was a record-setting April total. We ended with 18 species of shorebird, six species of owl, seven species of flycatcher, and 15 species of sparrows among the 145 total species for the day, ten of which we wouldn't see on any other day that year. Unfortunately, this would also be the day that I would miss my first bird of the BDC that Mark saw, a Glossy Ibis below the dam at Two Buttes.

224 and counting....

May

May is the classic Big Day month. This is when the all-time Colorado Big Day record of over 200 was set. However, we didn't need to kill ourselves since we were trying for a twelve-month goal. We were focused on migrants, and our route planned to hit the migrant traps in the southeast. Cole Wild and Saraiya Ruano joined the fun this month. “The younger crew to keep the old guys awake” was our hope. However, I think they both got more sleep between stops than Mark and I got.

I have never enjoyed our May Big Days, probably because they never live up to my expectations of getting to 200. We had our best day of the year in terms of species with 161. However, there were only eight species that we would not see on any of our other Big Days. And the total of only nine warbler species on the May Big Day was not what we had hoped for.

I think for the first time I was having serious doubts about whether we could get to 300 for the year. We knew that after July our Big Days needed to be closer to home, since my son Alexander was on the

way, as was Mark's second son Wyatt. We needed to make June and July count.

269 and counting...

June

June we decided we would tie together with the CFO convention in Craig. Tony Leukering again joined us. Having been so successful in March with many of our West Slope targets, we determined that starting in the very southwest corner of the state for Lucy's Warbler would be the best for our BDC totals.

After we had finalized our route but before we actually did the Big Day, a little gem showed up in Grand Junction. Colorado's first Lawrence's Goldfinch was a "must-have" for our BDC totals. After working the southwest corner of the state we altered our plans and headed to Grand Junction. Unfortunately, we spent a little too much time on the way there and missed the Lawrence's Goldfinch by about ten minutes. We had given ourselves a couple of hours of daylight, and we thought the goldfinch was sure to show up again. Unfortunately for us, nobody told the bird, and we spent a couple of nice but frustrating hours on Larry Arnold's patio. We finished the day with 107 species, eight of which we would only see in June.

282 and counting...

July

July is hummingbird time in the mountains in Colorado. I love watching the feeder battles in my yard every summer when the feisty Rufous Hummingbirds show up. Instead of getting to start at home, we decided we needed to head high up into the mountains because we needed other breeders that aren't in my yard: White-tailed Ptarmigan, Veery, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Fox Sparrow, and the two migrant hummingbirds. We saw them all and ended the day with 125 species, ten of which we would only see in July. Adding 18 species in June and July, we had made those months count like we needed. Getting to 300 was going to be easy.

292 and counting...

August

August was going to be fatherhood time for me; my wife Sophie was due at the end of August. Mark and I discussed a Big Day early in the month but couldn't settle on a date. Then the doctors said Sophie was going to be early by two or three weeks, so I wasn't going anywhere. Mark and I hoped we could squeeze in a big day between Alexander's birth and the birth of Wyatt, who was due the first week of September.

Alexander was born on 23 August, early by two days, not two weeks. Our incredibly supportive wives, Sophie and MG, let us go on our Big Day on the 31st, with no time to spare. We headed to the northeast hoping the breeders would still be around and shorebird migration would be in full swing.

If I remember correctly, the car thermometer hit 100 that day. If we could have measured the wind speed I am sure it would have been over 30 miles per hour for most of the day, with much stronger gusts. The birding conditions were not exactly ideal, and I don't remember a lot about the day with my mind on other things at home. Somehow, we added 15 species to our BDC total. We were over 300!

We ended the day with 123 species, six of which we wouldn't see any other time that year. Could we get to 320 or 330?

307 and counting....



White-tailed Ptarmigan, Cumberland Pass, Gunnison County, 22 Jul 2007. Photo by Mark Peterson

September

This month's Big Day needed to be planned when help was going to be in town to look after the new children. We decided on 16 September. This was going to be a special Big Day for me since my dad, the person I owe my interest in birds to, was coming along. Saraiya also joined us again. We were again hoping for migrants, this time in the southeast, where several shorebirds had been around the couple of weeks before.

Unfortunately, we missed most of the target shorebirds and had very little luck with any other migrants. Temps hit 100 for the third Big Day in a row and we again dealt with strong winds. We ended the day with 113 species, only three of which would be seen solely in September. It wasn't the best of days for the birds, but it was a nice birthday present for me to be able to do a Big Day with my dad.

311 and counting....

October

October sent us back to the northeast hoping for migrating longspurs, sparrows, pipits, and resident Greater Prairie-Chickens. Lisa thought she could put up with the two of us again this month. We started the day hoping for prairie-chickens “practice-lekking.” This would be the second bird I would miss for the BDC. Mark was outside in the pre-dawn light listening for them when one flew by. Lisa and I both jumped out of the car but neither one of us could get on the bird before it dropped below the hill.

After the chickens we headed to a couple of migrant traps and found them to be very active with sparrows and warblers, including my state Pine Warbler. However, after about 10:00 A.M. the winds picked up and the birding died down very quickly. We called it a day around sunset with 104 species, five of which would only be seen in October.

316 and counting....

November

November in Colorado is all about scoters and water birds in Park County. That is where we started the day with Lisa and Brandon. We started well with Black and Surf Scoters, Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, and the regular assortment of water birds. However, as soon as we dropped out of the mountains the birding was slow at best. We finished with only 86 species, our first time below 100 since March. Two were new for the BDC.

318 and counting....

December

December ended up being a missed opportunity, sort of. Due to Christmas Bird Counts, travel overseas, bad weather, and some poorly timed flu bugs, the only day Mark and I birded together was on a trip up north to see another first state record, Connie Kogler's Streak-backed Oriole. That is the only bird we counted for the day/month.

Mark ended the BDC with 319 species and I ended with 317 species. We traveled to the four corners of the state, from the lowest points to some of the highest, and hit all of the major habitats that Colorado has to offer. We were enjoying our success when we realized 2008 was right around the corner. What could we do to challenge ourselves again?

We realized that taking three-day weekends all over the state was not going to happen with our growing families and rapidly rising gas prices, so we agreed to limit ourselves to within 100 miles of the mid-point between our two houses. There is no way we could get to 300 with our eco-friendly BDC, could we?

Wrong. The 2008 BDC ended up being just as much fun as the one in 2007. We ended with 307 species, including Colorado's first Sooty Tern, which we found in September. Our two-year total for 24 days of birding is 345 species.

In the end, though, the BDC is not about the number of birds we see, but about spending time with good friends and family and just enjoying everything that Colorado has to offer. My thanks go out to Mark as well as to everyone else who helped make each and every Big Day a memorable one.

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STATUS & DISTRIBUTION

The Lesser Black-backed Gull in Colorado: Possible Explanations for its Rapid Increase

Robert Righter

History in North America

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) began expanding westward from its European populations, colonizing Britain, then expanding to Iceland (Cramp and Simmons 1983). As of the 1980's it became a frequent visitor to Greenland, where breeding was recorded in the 1990's, and presently there are over 700 pairs known to be breeding in the southwest region of Greenland (Boertmann 2008).

The first record for the Lesser Black-backed Gull for North America outside of Greenland occurred 9 September 1934 in Ocean County, New Jersey. By the 1980's the gull had greatly expanded its presence in the eastern part of North America, being recorded in central and eastern Canada and from the Great Lakes south to the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states, and by 1994 it had been recorded in thirty-one eastern states and sparsely in some of the Great Plains states (Post and Lewis 1995).

Of the eleven westernmost states, only four have ten or more records of Lesser Black-backed Gull: New Mexico with 10 records, the first from December 2001 (S. O. Williams pers. comm.); California



Lesser Black-backed Gull, second-cycle, Larimer County, 9 April 2007. Photo by Tony Leukering

with 60 records, the first from 14 January 1978 (K. Garrett pers. comm.); Washington with 28 records, the first from 2000 (D. Schonewald pers. comm.); and Colorado, which as of January 2010 has over 320 records since the first one on 11 December 1976.

Status in Colorado

Currently in Colorado the Lesser Black-backed Gull is considered a rare annual visitor. There are 130 fall records, the earliest from 28 August 1999; 100 winter records; and 72 spring records, the latest from 1 June 1999. There are also three accidental summer records: one of a second-cycle individual at Prewitt Reservoir, *Washington/Logan*, on 10 July 2004; one from Jackson Reservoir, *Morgan*, on 21 July 2006; and one from Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, on 26 July 2007. Because observers have not consistently aged the birds, it is difficult to determine the breakdown of age classes among the records, but it is safe to state that subadult Lesser Black-backed Gulls have occurred in Colorado at all seasons. Colorado has the most records of any inland state away from large lakes in North America, and has the largest number of annual records of any of the eleven westernmost states.

As of 1992 the gull was considered accidental in the state, with only three records, all from the South Platte drainage: one in Adams County at Lake Sangraco, 11 December 1976 through 1 January 1977; one in Larimer County at Hamilton Reservoir, 17-23 November 1990; and one in Arapahoe County, November 1990 (Andrews and Righter 1992).

From 1992 to 2001 the number of documented records for the state dramatically increased to 62. In 2002 the Colorado Records Committee ceased requiring documentation for the gull and since 2002, an additional 255 individuals have been reported. Because the gull has become so relatively common, it is feared that observers have let many records go unreported in the mistaken belief that the gull's

occurrence in the state is no longer unusual. Birders should be encouraged to continue sending in records for the gull, particularly any summer records, so that documentation can continue recording its amazing increase.

The South Platte River drainage on the northeastern plains accounts for about 75% of the total records and the Arkansas River drainage on the southeastern plains accounts for the remaining 25%. In western Colorado only two records have been noted: one in Rifle, Garfield County, 24 September through 5 October 2006; and one at Ridgway Reservoir in Ouray County, 2-13 October, 2007 (Coen Dexter, pers. comm.).

Reasons for the Increase

We already know that Colorado is attractive to many gull species. Over the years Colorado has documented 20 species of gull, which is equivalent to the number of gull species recorded from the state of Florida. Many of these records, particularly many first state records, are from the South Platte River drainage in northeastern Colorado. About 75% of all the Lesser Black-backed Gulls have been recorded from this region. Compared to surrounding areas, this region is bristling with extensive surface aquifers, ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and reservoirs, with most records concentrated in an area overlying the deepest part, the Denver Basin, a 13,000-foot-deep sandstone aquifer.

The Denver Basin extends approximately as far north as Wellington in Larimer County and as far south as Chatfield Reservoir in Douglas and Jefferson Counties. It extends eastwardly in a triangular shape, narrowing to a point near Jackson Reservoir in Morgan County. This section of the South Platte drainage represents an area of about 2800 square miles, and arguably has more diversity in aquatic environments than any other region in Colorado, thereby offering an attraction that meets many of the biological requirements for migrating and wintering birds. The Denver Basin is bordered on the west by the Front Range, comprised of the Larimer and Medicine Bow Mountains and the Mummy Range. Many of the peaks tower over 13,000 feet. This mountainous shield acts as a terminal abutment that discourages migrating gulls originating from the east from venturing farther west.

The Arkansas River drainage in the southeastern plains has hosted about 25% of Lesser Black-backed Gull records in the state, with most of those records emanating from Pueblo Reservoir, a large reservoir situated at the base of the foothills. West of the reservoir a gull would quickly encounter increasing elevation and fewer aquatic en-

vironments—first the Wet Mountains and then the Sangre de Cristo range with many towering peaks over 13,000 and 14,000 feet.

It is not known whether the Lesser Black-backed Gull enters this region from the east, following the Arkansas River west—although there are several records from John Martin Reservoir in Bent County—or whether individuals drift south over the Palmer Divide, which separates the South Platte drainage from the Arkansas River drainage. Birds in the Pueblo area might arrive in both ways.

It can be assumed that in recent decades, a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls wandered to eastern North America in winter from their newly-established breeding grounds in Iceland and Greenland. Some individuals may have found the conditions to their liking, returned to Iceland and Greenland to produce offspring, and returned to eastern North America with some of those offspring, having passed on to them a genetic predisposition to wander southwesterly.

Indirect evidence to support this hypothesis may be found in the number of subadult Lesser Black-backed Gulls recorded in North America, including Colorado, and also in migratory studies of the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*). Within the Blackcap's range there are both migratory and non-migratory populations. Experiments from cross-breeding migratory Blackcaps with non-migratory ones demonstrated that migratory behavior can be genetically transmitted (Berthold et al. 1990). Cross-breeding individuals that migrated in different directions produced individuals that showed a tendency to migrate in directions intermediate between those of their parents (Helbig 1991). In recent years it has been shown that a number of Blackcaps that breed in Germany actually migrate northwest in fall, surviving the winter at British birdfeeders and returning to Germany earlier than the Blackcaps that winter south of the Alps, therefore pairing primarily with other Britain-wintering Blackcaps and passing on the genes for northwesterly fall migration (Berthold and Helbig 2008). It has been suggested by Newton (2008) that this winter range expansion by the Blackcap shows some similarities to the Lesser Black-backed Gull's westward expansion from the European continent to Great Britain to Iceland, Greenland, and then North America.

It is possible that the expansion in wintering range could be followed by an expansion of the breeding range, which would reduce the length and danger of migration for these gulls. In addition to the increase in winter records, the number of Lesser Black-backed Gulls seen on the Atlantic coast of North America in summer is increasing (Ellis 2009). The first North American breeding outside of Green-

land and Alaska was recorded in Maine in May 2007 (Ellis et al. 2008), where a male Lesser Black-backed Gull paired with a female Herring Gull. This banded individual returned to nest with its Herring Gull mate in 2008 and 2009, and was discovered wintering in Florida in January 2009 (Ellis 2009).



Lesser Black-backed Gull, first-cycle, Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe County, 12 March 2006. Photo by Glenn Walbek

In the eleven westernmost states, California has recorded an early summer through mid-August record

(K. Garrett, pers. comm.), and Colorado has three summer records. There are probably other “under the radar” summer records elsewhere in the region. Based on its current status, it is not inconceivable that at some time in the future the Lesser Black-backed Gull could breed in Colorado.

Future Study Possibilities

The length of the wing chord varies within populations of bird species, with resident individuals generally having shorter wing chords than migrating individuals of the same species, as the longer wings are more useful for long-distance flights (Newton 2008). It could prove interesting to match up wing chord measurements from individuals in Colorado with those of more sedentary individuals in Britain or mainland Europe and those of potentially intermediate populations from the eastern seaboard of North America. This could give us a window into the continuing process of the evolution of the Lesser Black-backed Gull.

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CFO-FUNDED RESEARCH

Use of a Game Surveillance Camera to Capture Nesting Activity of Black Swifts

Carolyn Gunn

Introduction

Box Canyon Falls in Ouray, Colorado, supports the largest colony of Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) in the state and affords many opportunities for study of this species. Most of the active nest locations are known and visible from the ground or from installed walkways. Because

most Black Swift nests are situated in remote locations with poor views of nests, little information exists on the breeding activity of this species. Although nesting phenology has



Fig. 1. Camera mounted on the adjustable bracket, 21 June 2009.

been established at Box Canyon (Hirshman et al. 2007), activities such as nest building and repair, egg laying, incubation, brooding, provisioning of young, and nestling behavior are mostly unknown or conjectured from limited observations. During the 2009 swift breeding season, a motion-activated camera with infrared (IR) capability was mounted and aimed at an occupied nest to record daytime and nighttime activity. Although photography has been used to document night-time provisioning of Black Swifts (Collins and Peterson 1998), this project represents the first attempt to use a remote camera throughout the entire breeding season. The purpose of this project was to obtain images at a Black Swift nest to document breeding activities and behavior of this species.

Methods

It was planned to install the camera prior to the return of northward migrating swifts to capture early activities such as roosting or nest building/repair. A delay in having a mounting bracket finished did not allow installation until after some of the birds had returned, including at least one bird that was found roosting at night next to the nest that was the optimal target for the camera. On 7 June, the camera was installed, aimed at this nest, and tested. A nest visit after dark revealed that the swift was not roosting at the nest as expected, possibly because the bracket's four foot extension arm was blocking the bird's flight path to the nest or otherwise causing disturbance. The camera and bracket were removed in order to have the bracket shortened and to allow a few weeks to pass to decrease the chance of causing nest abandonment.

On 21 June, the camera was placed on a shorter bracket, aimed at



Fig. 2. Chick in nest, one adult perched nearby, and one adult flying to nest, 5 August 2009, 03:06 hours.

had left the nest for the season.

The camera was a Leaf River IR-5 battery-operated 5.0 megapixel programmable game surveillance camera with color daytime and nighttime IR capabilities. Photos were recorded on a 2GB secure digital card. The camera could be programmed to take up to two additional photos after the motion sensor was activated and had a video clip option, but these features were not used in order to spare battery and memory card life. Each photo was imprinted with the date and time when the image was captured.



Fig. 3. One adult feeding chick, other adult perched nearby, 26 August 2009, 19:47 hours.

the subject nest, and tested again (Fig. 1). The adults roosted as usual that night and thereafter. The camera was left in place until 21 September, after the juvenile had fledged and the adults

Results

The camera performed well, and over the course of its deployment, 307 photos capturing activity at the nest were taken. The IR capabilities of the camera allowed for nighttime and low-light exposures (Fig. 2, Fig. 4). Twenty-two exposures (7% of all photos) were too poor in quality to allow interpretation. Egg laying, hatching, and fledging dates were

captured by images and confirmed by direct observations by Sue Hirshman, Ouray resident and long-time observer of swift nesting activities at Box Canyon.

The camera also captured incubation

activities, the approximate length of incubation and brooding bouts, the sex of the adult bird present at the nest, provisioning of the chick, night-time roosting behaviors, and other events.

The first significant activity captured was on 27 June, when an adult started to sit on the nest during daytime, an activity which usually precedes egg laying (S. Hirshman, pers. comm.).

On 28 June, no egg was present in the unattended nest; an egg first appeared in photos on 1 July, which coincides with Hirshman's direct observations that the egg was laid on 1 July. Images captured while the egg was visible showed the egg in different positions, indicating that it had been turned. On 25 and 26 July, the camera captured several photos with an adult perched on the side of the nest, either looking at the egg or chick or turning the egg. It was also possible to see that the position of the bird on the nest changed on 25 July from an incubating posture (head down, tail up) to a brooding posture (adult more upright and higher in the nest). Hirshman's direct observations indicate that 25 July was the hatching date.

The first view of the chick and portions of egg shells in the nest came on 2 August. After 12 August, the chick and nest were left unattended for longer periods. Several photos of the chick being fed were captured (e.g., Fig. 3). By 21 August, the chick nearly filled the nest and was alone at the nest most of the day.

White chevrons on the edges of the chick's flight feathers were visible by 26 August. On 9 September, the camera captured the chick exercising its wings, and this was again recorded on 14 September. Other images were taken of the chick perched during the day on the edge of the nest instead of in the cup of the nest, and the camera



Fig. 4. Three adults and chick at nest, 19 August 2009, 02:16 hours.

may have been tripped on those occasions by the chick exercising its wings. On 17 September, at 6:10 A.M., the camera captured the chick at the edge of the nest. This was the last photo taken, indicating that this was the fledging date and that no birds returned to the nest after this time. This coincided with Hirshman's observations of the fledging date.

Discussion

Determining activities at the nest from the images was not always straightforward because the camera did not capture all motion at the nest, but some patterns did arise. On eight occasions, photos were taken showing an adult incubating between 20:14 and 21:10, with no further images captured until between 04:30 and 05:27 the following morning when no adult was on the nest, possibly indicating that a bird incubated the egg all night without disturbance until it tripped the camera upon leaving the nest. The dawn departure time correlates closely with that found by Marín (1999), who recorded that birds left the colony he was observing at 05:30.

From 26 July to 2 August, on no occasion was an image captured without an adult bird on the nest, which would indicate strong brooding behavior for eight days after hatching. Hirshman (pers. comm.) has directly observed that adults rarely leave the chick unattended for the first week after it hatches. After 3 August, photos were captured of the very small chick lying flat or with its head erect, as well as of the adults feeding the chick; photos frequently showed two adults at the nest. The chick first sat upright in the nest on 9 August, at 15 days of age. For the next two weeks, as the chick grew and started to fill the nest cup, the adults rarely sat on the nest, but used the side of the nest or nearby rocks as day perches or night roosts.

After the chick was 30 days old, the camera rarely captured any images of adults at the nest from the time they departed at dawn until they were again at the nest feeding the chick between 19:47 and 20:40. These times conform closely to those observed by several researchers, including Collins and Peterson (1998), who recorded adults at the nest feeding the chick between 20:36 and 20:42 and again between 21:38 and 21:44, when they provided a second evening feeding. Collins (1998) reports an adult returning to a California Black Swift colony at 19:40 on 19 July and feeding the chick ten individual regurgitations of insects, providing what appeared to be an entire day's provisioning in one evening feeding. Grant (1966) observed an adult feeding a chick at close intervals around 18:51 at a nest in British Columbia, four days before the chick fledged. This also correlates with Marín's (1999) findings that chicks older

than 30 days were fed in the evenings between 18:30 and 20:00 and apparently waited 12 hours between meals. He did not observe any chicks over 30 days of age being fed during mid-morning hours, and made the observation that as the age of the chick increased, feeding rates decreased and bolus size increased. However, he used direct observations in his study and did not gather data late in the evening or at night to determine whether chicks were provisioned during the night or pre-dawn hours before adults departed from the nest. On three occasions in the present study, the camera captured a chick more than 30 days old being fed at dawn just prior to the departure of one or both adults.

In some photos, it was possible to sex the adult at the nest because the female on this nest had a pale head. Also, if the birds were positioned optimally, the tail shape could be seen and the sex of the bird determined from it (Fig. 5). Out of all photos ($n=62$) in which the sex of the adult could be determined with some confidence by the shape of the tail or color of the head, the female incubated 93% of the time and brooded 100% of the time, but this is very anecdotal information due to the number of photos in which the sex of the adult(s) could not be determined ($n=124$). Hirshman (pers. comm.) has recorded males and females exchanging incubation duties during her observations.

On five occasions, three adult birds were photographed in the vicinity of the nest, either on the nest, perching at the edge of it, perching on rocks very near it, or flying into or away from it. Four of these occasions were between 20:00 and 21:00, and one at 02:00 (Fig. 4). Hirshman (pers. comm.) has occasionally observed three birds roosting at a nest over the years, especially at night.

Recommendations for Future Research

This project pointed out problems with the type of camera used, and future projects should consider different equipment. Because the



Fig. 5. Male (at left, with dark head and forked tail) and female Black Swift (at right, with pale head and square tail), 4 Aug 2009, 04:11 hours.

camera was designed for larger game such as deer and turkey, its infrared motion detection sensor (activated by changes in temperature) was not sensitive enough to capture all motion at the nest, despite assurances by the manufacturer to the contrary. Time-lapse photography (programming the camera to take photos at specific times not dependent on motion) might capture more activity, but such images would need to be taken at frequent intervals for useful interpretation. A laser aiming feature to ensure that the camera was centered on the subject would also have been helpful.

Optimally, continuous real-time videos taken with security surveillance cameras that store images on a digital video recorder would record dynamic activities and potentially sound. Disadvantages to this method include the cost of purchasing, installing, and maintaining equipment and wires; the amount of time necessary to interpret the images; and the need for continuous IR lighting at night and during low-light situations, which could possibly disturb the birds or attract unwanted human attention to the camera or subject. Another option is the use of a camera with wireless capabilities that can store images on a satellite for downloading to a base computer, but the incised physical characteristics of Box Canyon may preclude satellite reception. A camera with higher resolution and zooming capabilities is required to capture more subtle activities, such as the turning of eggs and nocturnal feedings.

Additionally, because of the placement of the camera, park visitors were able to reach out and move it, even with a sign cautioning against tampering and locks to stabilize the camera and to prevent theft. It proved difficult to make the camera stable and tamper-proof in this setting.

Despite these problems, this project determined that use of a remote sensing camera can be of great value in elucidating various aspects of breeding and nesting activity for this species. The motion-detecting camera had several advantages, including capturing activities that would otherwise be difficult to observe, producing both daytime and nighttime images, working well in low-light situations, and operating reliably while unattended for long periods (weeks to months).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Colorado Field Ornithologists supported this project through their Project Fund. Rick Noll, Ouray City Resources Director, was instrumental in presenting this project to the Ouray City Council and gaining its support. The US Forest Service donated batteries for camera operation. Sue Hirshman continues to make her invaluable daily observations of nesting Black Swifts at Box Canyon and allowed comparisons of photo images and actual

events. This project was carried out in the memory of Rich Levad, to whom the Black Swift was a most special bird.

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House Wren, by Joe Rigli

The 55th Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee

Lawrence S. Semo

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

Introduction

This 55th report presents the results of deliberations of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) on partial results of circulations held between 2008 and 2010. This article provides results of the circulation of 16 reports submitted by 10 observers documenting 15 occurrences of 10 species from the period 2008 through 2009. Three occurrences involving three different species were not accepted because of insufficient documentation or because descriptions were inconsistent with known identification criteria. Per CBRC bylaws, all accepted records received final 7-0 or 6-1 votes to accept. Each report that was not accepted received fewer than four votes to accept in the final vote. Those records with four or five “accept” votes have transcended to a second round of deliberations, and results of those records will be published at a later date.

Highlights of this report include first county records of Neotropical Cormorant for *Larimer*, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron for *Bent*, Upland Sandpiper for *Montezuma*, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher for *Kiowa*, and Painted Bunting for *El Paso*.

Committee members voting on these reports were Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Rachel Hopper, Joey Kellner, Bill Maynard, Larry Semo, David Silverman, and Glenn Walbek.

Committee Functions

All reports received by the CBRC (written documentation, photographs, videotapes, and/or sound recordings) are archived at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS), 2001 Colorado Boulevard, Denver, CO 80205, where they remain available for public review. The Committee solicits documentation of reports in Colorado for all species published in its review list, including both the main and supplementary lists (Semo et al. 2002), and for reports of species with no prior accepted records in Colorado. Those lists can be found at <http://www.cfo-link.org/birding/lists.php>. Documentary materials should be submitted online at the CBRC website (<http://www.cfo-link.org/CBRC/login.php>).

Report Format

The organization and style of this report follow those of Leukering and Semo (2003), with some alterations. If present, the numbers in parentheses following a species' name represent the total number of accepted records for Colorado, followed by the number of accepted records in the ten-year period preceding the submission. The latter number is of importance, as it is one of the criteria for a species' continuance on or removal from the statewide Main Review List (Semo et al. 2002).

The records in this report are arranged taxonomically following the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Checklist of North American Birds (AOU 1998) through the 50th Supplement (Chesser et al. 2009). Each record presents as much of the following information as we have available: number of birds, age, sex, locality, county, and date or date span. In parentheses, we present the initials of the contributing observer(s), the official record number, and the vote tally in the first round and, if relevant, second round (with the number of "accept" votes on the left side of the dash).

The initials of the finder(s) of the bird(s) are underlined, if known, and are presented first if that person (those people) contributed documentation; additional contributors' initials follow in alphabetical order by name. If the finder(s) is (are) known with certainty, but did not submit documentation, those initials are presented last. Observers submitting a photograph or video capture have a dagger (†) following their initials; initials of those who submitted videotape are indicated by a lower-case, italicized "v" (*v*); and those who submitted audio spectrograms or recordings are indicated by a lower-case, italicized "s" (*s*). Thus, the parenthetical expression "(JD *v*, RA†, TL, JV, CW; 2001-36; 4-3, 6-1)" means: JD found the bird(s) and submitted documentation (including video) and, as the finder, is first in the list of those who submitted details, with initials underlined; RA, though alphabetically first of the five submitting observers, was not the finder, so comes second; RA submitted, at least, photographic documentation; the record number assigned to the occurrence was 2001-36; and in the two rounds of voting, the first-round vote was four "accept" votes and three "do not accept" votes, while the second-round vote was 6-1 in favor of accepting the report. The decision on most reports is completed in the first round.

In this report, county names are italicized in keeping with the style established for the "News from the Field" column in this journal. We have attempted to provide the full date span for individual records, with the seasonal reports in *North American Birds* and this journal being the primary sources of those dates. The Committee has

not dealt with the question of full date spans as compared to submitted date spans when documentations do not provide such. The CBRC encourages observers to document the final date on which a rare species was seen, as that provides historical evidence of the true extent of its stay.

For this report, the CBRC abbreviations are used for Chico Basin Ranch (CBR) and Reservoir (Res.).

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Neotropical Cormorant – *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (17/6). One was at Timnath Res., *Larimer*, between 15 and 30 Aug 2009 (RH †, BKP †, NK; 2009-79; 7-0). The bird was noted as being found on 14 Aug but no details were presented to the Committee for that earlier date. This is the first confirmed record of Neotropical Cormorant for *Larimer*.

Least Bittern – *Ixobrychus exilis* (22/8). A male was photographed at Cottonwood Hollow in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 21 Jul 2009 (RH †, NK; 2009-77; 7-0). There may have been up to three birds at this location but no details of the other birds were provided to the CBRC. It is interesting that a Least Bittern was present at this same location during Aug 2008.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – *Nyctanassa violacea* (22/8). An adult was found at the western end of John Martin Res. on 31 Jul 2009 (BSt †; 2009-78; 7-0). This is, surprisingly, the first established record of the species for *Bent*. Later that year, three juveniles were found near Jumbo Res., *Logan*, on 2 Sep 2009 (ED †; 2009-84; 7-0). An adult was found at Jumbo Res. on 30 Aug of that same year and its occurrence was previously accepted by the CBRC (Semo and Faulkner 2010). One wonders whether the spe-

cies bred at that location during the summer of 2009.

Upland Sandpiper – *Bartramia longicauda*. Establishing a first record for *Montezuma* and an extremely rare record for the West Slope of Colorado, an Upland Sandpiper was photographed near Cortez on 17 Jun 2009 (SM †, 2009-52; 7-0).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – *Tryn-gites subruficollis* (32/11). A juvenile, the third for *Arapahoe*, was documented on 30 Aug 2009 (BKP †, 2009-80, 7-0). The bird was apparently present at this location between 29 Aug and 2 Sep but no details for the remainder of that period were provided to the Committee. A second juvenile was seen at Jumbo Res., *Logan*, on 20 Sep 2009 (BSc; 2009-86; 7-0). This is the second accepted record for that reservoir and that county.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – *Tyrannus forficatus* (35/22). Establishing the first confirmed record for *Kiowa*, a pair was discovered near Chivington on 10 Jun 2009 (BSt †; 2009-74; 7-0). Subsequent attempts to refind the birds failed.

Pine Warbler – *Dendroica pinus* (35/17). An adult male was at Fairmount Cemetery in Lamar, *Prowers*, on 30 Apr 2009 (BKP †; 2009-72; 7-0). This is the fourth accepted Pine

Warbler record for Prowers. The bird apparently remained at this location for days afterwards, but no further documentation was submitted.

Kentucky Warbler – *Oporornis formosus* (37/11). An adult female was well-described from below the dam at Lake DeWeese, Custer, on 28 Apr 2009 (BKP, RM; 2009-71; 7-0). The bird, the second for Custer, was apparently first discovered the previous day, although no details on that occurrence were submitted to the CBRC.

Mourning Warbler – *Oporornis philadelphia* (28/11). An alternate-plumaged male, the first confirmed for Larimer, was photographed by DeFonso in Loveland on 14 May 2009 (ED †, CWi; 2009-73; 7-0). The bird was noted to have been discovered the previous day, but no further details were provided to the Committee.

Painted Bunting – *Passerina ciris* (33/15). A hatch-year bird was banded at CBR, El Paso, on 27 Sep 2009 (SB †; 2009-89; 7-0). This represents the first accepted record for El Paso and CBR and also the latest fall date for the species in Colorado.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

The Committee recognizes that its “not accepted” decisions may upset



Pine Warbler, Fairmount Cemetery in Lamar, Prowers County, 30 Apr 2009. Photo by Brandon Percival

those individuals whose documentations did not receive endorsement as state records. We heartily acknowledge that those who make the effort to submit documentation certainly care whether or not their reports are accepted. However, non-accepted reports do not necessarily suggest that the observer misidentified or did not see the species. A non-accepted report only indicates that the documentation did not provide enough evidence to support the identification of the species reported in the opinion of at least three of the seven Committee members. Many non-accepted reports do not adequately describe the bird(s) observed or adequately rule out similarly looking species. The Committee recommends that observers refer to the article written by Tony Leukering on documenting rare birds (Leukering 2004), which is available online through the CBRC website

(http://www.cfo-link.org/records_committee/CBRC_articles.php). All non-accepted reports are archived at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and may be reconsidered by the Committee if new information is provided (e.g., photos, documentation from other observers). We summarize below why the following reports were not accepted.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – *Tyrannus forficatus*. An adult documented from Barr Lake, *Adams*, on 3 May 2008 (2008-46; 4-3, 4-3, 5-2) may very well have been accurately identified, but the observer provided scant details to the Committee upon which to deliberate. The only description provided was that the bird had a long tail and light back and head. No information was presented on what size the bird was, how long its tail was, or whether it had pink wing linings.

Veery – *Catharus fuscescens*. The report of a heard-only bird along the Neversink Trail in *Gunnison* on 15 Jun 2009 (2009-75; 3-4) may have been correctly identified, but little information was provided to the

Committee. The only description provided was that the bird sang a “spiraling whistled song.” Most voters indicated that the description was just too brief to fully indicate the song of a Veery.

Baird’s Sparrow – *Ammodramus bairdii*. The report of three Baird’s Sparrows singing from near Two Buttes, *Baca*, on 7 May 2008 created quite a debate within the CBRC, causing the record to transcend through three rounds of circulation (2008-35; 5-2, 5-2, 4-3). Dissenting voters maintained that it would be extremely unlikely for three Baird’s Sparrows, which do not breed in the state, to sing from one location in southeastern Colorado. We have no knowledge that Baird’s Sparrows sing during migration and most observations of the species involve quick flushes with the bird diving rapidly back into the grass. The observer noted that the birds had blocky heads and had seen them fly, but failed to mention whether they also had white braces to the mantle feathers as Baird’s Sparrows would have.

REPORTERS AND CITED OBSERVERS

The CBRC graciously thanks the following individuals for submitting records of or discovering rare species in Colorado that prompted this circulation: Robert Bradley; SB: Steven Brown; Jay Carlisle; ED: Eric Defonso; RH: Rachel Hopper; NK: Nick Komar; Nic Korte; SM: Suzy Meyer; RM: Rich Miller; BKP: Brandon K. Percival; BSc: Bill Schmoker; BSt; Brad Steger; CWi: Cole Wild.

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THE HUNGRY BIRD

Hackberry Psyllids

Dave Leatherman

The bird of my attention in the hackberry tree had a yolk-colored throat and was shaping up to be a Townsend's Warbler. It was 28 September 1998, and that species is fairly common as a Colorado fall migrant. But the face pattern was not quite right and the back was dark gray with tan stripes. Blackburnian Warbler!

On 25 October 2009, Rich Miller birded Veterans Park in Cañon City. While hunting for a reported Black-throated Blue Warbler, in the hackberries he also found a Blackburnian Warbler.

Besides the best bird on Earth, what were the common denominators in these events eleven years apart? Autumn, Northern Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), and the subject of this edition of my column: gall-making psyllids.

Psyllids, pronounced "sill-ids," are tiny (2-5 mm long) cicada-like insects in the family Psyllidae (Fig. 1). They are related to other small beasts with sucking mouthparts like the more familiar aphids, scales, plant bugs, stinkbugs, and, yes, cicadas. In Colorado we have at least four psyllid species associated with our two trees in the genus *Celtis*. All are gall-makers.

"Galls" are plant swellings induced by the internal invasion of insects, eriophyid mites, and even certain fungi. The invader stimulates the plant into growing abnormal cell tissue, inside which it feeds and prospers. Generally, each gall-forming organism elicits a distinctive kind of "tumor" from the host plant, and only that type of plant. As such, most gall-makers can be identified by looking at the color, shape,



Fig 1. Adult hackberry nipplegall psyllid (*Pachypsylla celtidis-mamma*), actual length about 3 mm. Riverside Cemetery, Lamar, Prowers County, October 2009. Photo by David Leatherman

genus *Pachypsylla*, cause the formation of swollen buds or “budgalls” (*P. celtidisgemma*), swollen leaf petioles or “petiolegalls” (*P. venusta*), leaf blisters or “blistergalls” (*P. celtidisvesicula*), and leaf nipples or “nipplegalls” (*P. celtidismamma*). Budgalls are not easily seen and are the least important as bird food. Petiolegalls can be seen on most of the Netleaf Hackberries (*C. reticulata*) in places like Two Buttes State Wildlife Area in Baca County; they look sort of like pale chocolate chips embedded at the base of the leaf blade (Fig. 2). But it is the blistergalls and the nipplegalls that constitute the bulk of the bounty for our migrating passerine birds.



Fig. 2. Several large petiolegalls at the leaf bases of Netleaf Hackberry and a few small nipplegalls farther out on the leaves. Mayhill, New Mexico. Photo by David Leatherman

and location of the galls without ever having to extract the culprit. I have often used the analogy with children that galls are “insect piñatas.”

The Colorado gall-making psyllids, all in the

While the life cycles of the various hackberry psyllid species vary somewhat, in general they overwinter as adults in bark crevices of the host plant or nearby trees, forming a

winter food bonanza for birds that can find them. The species of tree does not matter as long as the bark contains cracks and other mini-ravines; spruce bark is ideal. If you want to find Brown Creepers, kinglets, nuthatches, and chickadees in any Colorado city in winter, go to a park or cemetery and check a hackberry—or better yet, a spruce near a hackberry. Chances are, that is where the gleaners and probers will be picking their way through at least part of a cold day.

The most important feature of hackberry psyllid life cycles, however, lies in their comings and goings. The overwintering adults come out of hiding in spring to lay their pointed, pearl-like eggs on swelling buds and young leaves, exactly when many northbound or upslope migrant birds are also on the move. The adult psyllids that avoid bird predation spawn a generation of offspring that develop within their particular types of gall.

These “nymphs” reach maximum size late in late summer and autumn, transform into adults, and emerge from the galls in preparation for winter. Because Colorado weather can be fickle, the timing of peak adult psyllid emergence can vary by several weeks, but it almost always occurs between September and early November. Whenever the hordes of psyllids are exposed in their short journey from the leaf galls where they spent the summer to the bark crevices where they must spend the winter, small birds of various types will opportunistically fuel up on them. Depending on when the psyllids emerge, the big winners might be Orange-crowned Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, or even a marquee eastern warbler.

If you want to find Brown Creepers, kinglets, nuthatches, and chickadees in winter, check a hackberry—or better yet, a spruce near a hackberry.

At Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins I have seen over 30 species of passerines feeding on hackberry psyllids. Probably the true number of bird species feasting on Colorado psyllids is two or three times as many. Among the rarities eating psyllids have been Gray Flycatcher (early May and October), Golden-crowned Kinglet (October through winter), Bay-breasted Warbler (September), Blackpoll Warbler (September), the aforementioned Blackburnian Warbler, and a Yellow-throated Warbler that is estimated to have nipped more than 15,000 adult psyllids on 15 April 1991! If these are the dots in one person’s journals, imagine the picture that would emerge from connecting them with hundreds of sets of other observers’ dots.

In late summer, when the nymphs are fat, watch for Black-capped Chickadees or House Finches pulling morsels from within galls. Chickadees often pull a blistergalled leaf from its branch, stand with



Fig 3. Upper surface of a Northern Hackberry leaf in autumn showing two large nipplegalls and about ten blistergalls. Adult psyllids emerge from the undersides of galls, usually prior to leaf drop. Riverside Cemetery, Lamar, Prowers County. Photo by David Leatherman

feet wide atop the leaf, and lay into it with vigorous pecks. When the leaf falls, find where it lands and hold it up to the light. Sunlight will beam precisely through the center of several discolored blistergalls per leaf. Chickadees would make great carpenters, rarely abusing a nail head. Finches and fox squirrels, on the other hand, usually just bite off the tops of nipplegalls before dropping the leaf. Yes, all that early leaf drop we see in August or early September from certain hackberries is the result of birds and squirrels high-grading the biggest, best galls and their contents, and then discarding the package.

If we have an early freeze, this may stimulate significant natural leaf drop from hackberries prior to psyllid emergence. Most of the psyllids will still emerge from the leaves on the ground and fly to overwintering sites. In such years, watch for birds on a warm sunny day following the hard freeze foraging by plucking and making little “leap-gleans” into the air among the layers of fallen leaves.

To best take advantage of the phenomenon of passerine birds feeding on hackberry psyllids, birders need to do a few things:

- Learn to identify hackberry trees. Buy a good tree ID book like the new National Wildlife Federation Field Guide to Trees of North America by Kershner, Mathews, Nelson, and Spellerberg.
- Locate concentrations of planted Northern Hackberry trees in urban parks or Netleaf Hackberry in rocky canyons. Let other birders know where the hackberries are.
- Learn to recognize psyllids in various life stages. Check buds with a hand lens in April for white eggs; pull apart galls in late summer to find the white, orange-eyed nymphs in development; or catch a flying adult.
- Monitor the seasonal development of galls and psyllids the way you might monitor the weather during migration, or the level of reservoirs in late summer for shorebird habitat.

- Finally, bird hackberries and nearby trees with regularity, particularly during late April and May, late summer, September and October, and winter.



Fig. 4. Very heavy infestation of nipplegalls on Netleaf Hackberry in summer. One to three adult psyllids are inside each gall. Two Buttes Reservoir, Baca County. Photo by David Leatherman

As always, I would appreciate hearing about your observations of birds and their food.

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Winter 2009–2010 (December–February)

Bill Maynard

“Time it was, and what a time it was...”
- *Simon and Garfunkel*, “Bookends”

Anecdotally, at least, it seemed to be a very cold and snowy winter in Colorado. Cold and then more cold, the arctic fronts pushing first waterfowl, then loons, and finally gulls to the last patches of open water. If you lived near one of the patches and bundled into your faux-fur-lined parka, there was a lot to see and do. And ample evidence shows that the birders didn't let the cold stop them: Colorado conducted 43 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) producing 182 species. As is often the case, the Pueblo Reservoir CBC topped the others in species totals with 115, and the Boulder CBC led the pack when it came to the number of observers. Boulder's field trip to Valmont Reservoir on 9 January drew over 120 participants.

For larophiles, winter is the only season. Finding, aging, and photographing gulls is a winter pastime. Sanitary landfills, if viewable, are often a source of instruction where gulls fly in and out, often on predictable flight paths, off to open water, the dump, or a favored ice shelf to preen and roost. This season the gull haul included multiple Mews, Icelanders, Glaucous-wingeds and Great Black-backed.

In addition to gull-viewings, some of the season's highlights included reports of a “Mexican Duck,” a hot hybrid Barrow's Goldeneye × Hooded Merganser, a long-staying Red-shouldered Hawk, a gray-morph Gyrfalcon, a hybrid Mourning × Eurasian Collared-Dove, a male Snowy Owl straight out of Harry Potter, Chihuahuan Ravens north of their expected range, side-by-side Winter Wrens of two subspecies (soon to be two species), four Varied Thrushes, a drab but entertaining Pine Warbler eating maple sap, a “yellow” or eastern Palm Warbler, four Field Sparrows, four “Red” Fox Sparrows and two “Slate-colored,” bunches of Harris's Sparrows, two Golden-crowned Sparrows including one returning for its fourth consecutive winter, a January Indigo Bunting, a smattering of Rusty Blackbirds, White-winged Crossbills from two locations, and a small number of Common Redpolls in an otherwise mostly northern finch-free winter. Details are provided below.

“News from the Field” contains news, reports, and rumors of bird sightings from Colorado. The news is compiled from online discussion groups and Rare Bird Alerts (RBAs), with valuable contribu-

tions from a large network of statewide informants. Rarity reports may become records after vetting and scrutiny by the Colorado Bird Records Committee.

I want to thank the many regular contributors whose sightings form the foundation of this report. As always, regional compilers added insight to county and regional rarities and breeding species. All sightings, whether of rarities or regulars, helped to arrange local puzzle pieces in some semblance of order, fashioning a broad state seasonal picture. No matter what your level of expertise, you are encouraged to send your bird reports to COBirds, cobirds@google-groups.com; eBird, <https://ebird.org/ebird/>; and/or the West Slope Birding Network, wbn@yahoo.com. All sightings are compiled and tabulated by your regional compilers and the Chair of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC), who then sends them in taxonomic order, along with comments, to the “News from the Field” editor for summary.

Note 1 – The reports contained herein are largely unchecked, and the report editor does not necessarily vouch for their authenticity. Underlined species are those for which the Colorado Bird Records Committee requests documentation. You should now submit your sightings through the CFO website at <http://www.cfo-link.org/CBRC/login.php5>. This is the preferred method of submitting rarity records. However, if you need a hard copy form, use the one on the inside of this journal’s mailing cover. Mailed documentation of rarities should be sent to the chairperson, Larry Semo (address on form).

Note 2 – The name of the county is listed in italics.

Abbreviations: AVAS – Arkansas Valley Audubon Society; CBR – Chico Basin Ranch; CBRC – Colorado Bird Records Committee; CG – campground; CR – county road; CVCG – Crow Valley Campground; DFO – Denver Field Ornithologists, FCRP – Fountain Creek Regional Park; LCCW – Lamar Community College Woods; m.ob. – many observers; doc. – documentation was submitted to the CBRC; no doc. – no documentation was submitted to the CBRC; NWR – National Wildlife Refuge; Res – reservoir; RMNP – Rocky Mountain National Park; SP – state park; SLV – San Luis Valley; SWA – State Wildlife Area, WS – West Slope, YVBC – Yampa Valley Bird Club.

Hybrid goose: A bird suspected of being a Greater White-fronted Goose × Canada Goose was seen at Stearns Lake, Boulder, on 10 Dec (CH).

Ross’s Goose: Exciting, at least to

the two observers, was a very rare dark morph bird that flew overhead with Snow Geese and light Ross’s Geese during the Rocky Ford CBC in Otero on 17 Dec (BM, BKP).

Cackling Goose: Of interest were the 2200 reported on 2 Jan from the Bonny Res. CBC, *Yuma* (m.ob.).

Mute Swan: Reports of this species, which is not officially on the CFO Colorado Checklist of Birds, continue to accumulate from various Colorado locations. At least two of the birds reported this season were known escapees from captivity: the one from the Montrose CBC, *Montrose*, on 20 Dec and the one in *Pueblo* at CF&I Lakes on 4 Jan (CS, PSS). A third singleton was in *Adams* on 4 Feb (DK).

Trumpeter Swan: The only report of the period was of five birds at the pond in Rocky Ford formerly known as “Valco” Pond, 2-13 Feb (SO, m.ob.).

Tundra Swan: Up to 48 birds were reported from six locations. As many as 22 birds were seen at Chatfield Res., *Douglas/Jefferson*, on 3 Dec, including three juveniles (GW, JK, m.ob.). The species is uncommon in *El Paso*, where BKO reported 10 at Big Johnson Res. on 5 Dec (BKO). Other reports came from *Douglas, Jefferson, Arapahoe, Boulder, Pueblo, Mesa, and Delta*, mostly from Dec, except that the WS birds were seen 22-28 Feb (m.ob.).

“Mexican Duck”: Although it is likely impossible to determine the purity of the genotype of Mexican Ducks without genetic analysis, especially in northern areas like Colorado, one bird that was phenotypically good was found on the Penrose CBC in *Freemont*, 20 Dec (fide MP). See the thorough discussion of this taxon in Semo and Faulkner (2010).

Surf Scoter: The only scoter report for the season was of one found on the Pueblo Res. CBC on 19 Dec (LS).

Long-tailed Duck: The earliest report was of a single at Barr Lake, *Adams* (TD, BK) on 5 Dec. Another was reported on the John Martin Res. CBC in *Bent* (fide DN) on 15 Dec. A male was seen at Pueblo Res. 18-28 Dec, and a female in the same location 18-29 Dec (BKP). A winter male was at Dry Creek Res., *Larimer*, 1-4 Jan (BK, m.ob.), and three birds were in *Adams* at a gravel pit near the South Platte & 88th from 4 Jan through the end of the period (JR, PB).

Barrow’s Goldeneye: Counties where this wintering duck was seen included *Routt, Moffat, Boulder, Denver, Bent, Otero, Pueblo, Logan, Mesa, Delta, Summit, Adams, Garfield, and Larimer*, but one location had up to 192 individuals between 17 Jan and 11 Feb—the Coryell Ranch Ponds in *Carbondale, Garfield* (DF)—surpassing the size of the large flock in the same area in 2008.

Barrow’s Goldeneye × Hooded Merganser: This interesting hybrid was at Runyon Lake, *Pueblo*, on 7 Jan (RMi).

Sharp-tailed Grouse: Nice to see in the winter season were 55 tallied on 20 Dec on the Steamboat CBC, *Routt* (TLi).

California Quail: Released birds remain in the vicinity of the feeders at Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso*, where six birds were noted on the Fountain Creek CBC (m.ob.).

Pacific Loon: Loons were scarce during the season; the only report of a Pacific was of one on 2 Dec at Pueblo Res. (BKP).

Red-necked Grebe: Only one bird was reported, a single first found on 12

Dec by RM on his first visit to Pueblo Res. from North Dakota (RM, BM, BKP).

Osprey: Late was a single in Lamar, *Prowers*, on 2 Dec (DR).

Red-shouldered Hawk: Very rare in Colorado was a first-winter bird seen by many in the vicinity of Kodak SWA near Windsor, *Weld*, 6 Jan to 1 Feb (DE, EDe, m.ob., doc.).

Gyrfalcon: Another rarity in the state was a gray-morph adult reported from south of Fairplay, *Park*, on 31 Jan (TD, doc.).

Peregrine Falcon: Interesting at any season—but especially so during the winter, when most birds leave the state—was a single at the Cañon City Riverwalk, *Fremont*, during the Penrose CBC (BKP).

Sandhill Crane: Notable was the flock of 902 birds seen throughout the period in *Delta* (m.ob.) as well as the flock of 100 in the Fort Lyon marshes, *Bent*, on 23 Feb (DN, SO).

Dunlin: Two particularly late individuals of this late-migrating species were reported. One in basic plumage was along the Arkansas River below Pueblo Res., 11-12 Dec (BKP), and one was along the Poudre River Trail in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 12 Dec (RS).

Mew Gull: Three documented reports of this winter visitor from the north were submitted. Continued documentation should eventually help remove this species from the review list. As expected, the bulk of reports



Red-shouldered Hawk, Kodak SWA, *Weld County*, 8 Jan 2010. Photo by Glenn Walbek

came from *Pueblo*, where an adult was at Pueblo Res. from 4-19 Dec (BKP, m.ob., doc.), while another was at Runyon Lake beginning 12 Dec (RMi, m.ob., doc.). The other large ice-free body of water, Valmont Res. in *Boulder*, had two birds present 20-25 Dec (BSc, MM, PG, m.ob., doc.).

Thayer's Gull: Ten reports of sixteen individuals included birds reported from *Larimer*, *Boulder*, *Broomfield*, *El Paso*, and *Pueblo*—in other words, mostly from the expected Front Range locations—in addition to the interesting report of a first-winter bird from Stagecoach Res., *Routt*, on 5 Dec (TLi).

Iceland Gull: Because of gulls' unpredictable movements from open water to feeding areas and roosting/preening sites, several of the reports

of this species may pertain to the same individual. A second-cycle bird was at Valmont Res. on 8 Jan (BSc, MSu, JSu, m.ob., doc.). Another second-cycle bird, or the same one, was reported from Anthem Ranch Pond, *Broomfield*, from 13-15 Feb (MP, no doc). A first-cycle bird thought to be this species, or possibly a hybrid, was at the same location on 22 Feb (BSc, LS, SM).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Illustrating how common this species has become in the last decade in Colorado, eighteen individuals were reported throughout the state, all but one an adult. Valmont Res. produced up to 8 individuals and many reports of multiple birds during the period 14 Dec through 26 Feb, the high count occurring on 26 Dec (TF, MS, JS). As many as three birds were in *Pueblo* at Pueblo Res. during the period. Other counties with winter season records include *Larimer* and *Broomfield*.

Glaucous-winged Gull: Vagrants to Colorado are almost always difficult to evaluate for genetic purity. A confusing first-winter bird having at least some Glaucous-winged genes was at Anthem Ranch Ponds, *Broomfield*, on 22 Feb (BSc, LS, SM, no doc.). Another individual was a Christmas present at Valmont Res. for TF (doc.).

Glaucous Gull: Open water attracted this species only to Front Range locations. The high count was of two birds at Chatfield SP's Plum Creek Delta in *Douglas*, a first-year bird found there on 3 Dec (PD) being joined by a first- or second-cycle bird the following day (GW). Other counties reporting singles include *Boulder*, *Broomfield*, *El Paso*, and *Pueblo*.

Great Black-backed Gull: Coming as no surprise, an adult returned to Pueblo Res. on 4 Dec (BKP, m.ob., doc.), marking the 18th consecutive winter of sightings of what has been quite possibly the same individual since 1993. An adult was at Horsetooth Res., *Larimer*, 19-21 Dec (RH, no doc.). A single first-cycle bird may have been responsible for sightings at Valmont Res. (TF), Erie Res. (TF), and Thomas Res., *Boulder* (WS); Carter Lake, *Larimer* (BK, m.ob.); and Anthem Ranch Ponds, *Broomfield* (DK), between 4 Dec and 7 Feb.

White-winged Dove: Since it was the winter season there had to be bunches of White-wings from southern Front Range cities. The Pueblo CBC, Penrose CBC, and Rocky Ford CBC accounted for 99 of the 105 individuals reported. Reported as "surely wintering in Grand Junction" was a single there 12-26 Dec (LA, NKO). Singles were also in *Montezuma*, *Larimer*, and *Huerfano* (RMi, DS, MDH, DF).

Mourning Dove × Eurasian Colared-Dove: Interesting, troubling, or both, this hybrid was reported on the Pueblo Res CBC (fide MY) on 19 Dec.

Western Screech-Owl: The ten individuals tallied on the Penrose CBC (MP) represented a huge number for that count, but it was dwarfed by the 33 found on the Grand Junction CBC (fide NKO). Other CBCs with multiple birds were the John Martin Res. CBC with four (fide DN), the Pueblo Res. CBC with three (fide MY), and the unofficial winter count at Chico Basin Ranch with two (MP). Other counties with singletons were



Snowy Owl, El Paso County, 18 Feb 2010. Photo by Bill Maynard



Snowy Owl, El Paso County, 14 Jan 2010. Photo by Glenn Walbek

Otero (SO) and *Fremont* (RMi). In contrast, no Eastern Screech-Owls were reported during the period.

Snowy Owl: Perhaps the “bird of the season,” an extremely cooperative

sub-adult male was first seen by SC on a power pole along a busy highway near Peyton, *El Paso*. Word of a viewable Snowy quickly spread, and the bird was found to favor a rural neighborhood where most residents welcomed birders. Hundreds of birders and many non-birders viewed this beautiful winter visitor from the north from 27 Dec to 18 Feb. A few people fed pet store mice to the owl (pers. obs.) creating joy in the form of awesome photographs for some, while at the same time causing consternation and ethical discussions for others. A CDOW game warden made periodic visits and said that no wildlife laws were being broken.

Northern Pygmy-Owl: This species is most frequently encountered during winter. In the most unusual location was

an individual in the Lower Dolores River Valley, *Montezuma*, on 26 Feb (JDG). Other counties from which this species was reported include *Garfield*, *Fremont*, and *Boulder* (m.ob.).



A Northern Pygmy-Owl holding its prey, a Harris's Sparrow which had been visiting the feeders of Joel and Marcel Such in Larimer County, 8 Dec 2009. Photo by Joel Such

Short-eared Owl: The highest counts of the season were of six individuals at Lower Latham, *Weld*, on 6 Feb (IS) and of three at Bonny SP, *Yuma*, on 2 Jan (GW, AH, PD, LK).

Northern Saw-whet Owl: There were only two reports, both on 20 Dec—of a WS bird at Carbondale, *Garfield*, on the Roaring Fork CBC (VZ) and of one in *Fremont* on the Penrose CBC (fide MP).

Belted Kingfisher: Rare in winter in *Baca* was one present in Cottonwood Canyon on 11 Jan (DLe).

Red-headed Woodpecker: This species usually retreats from Colorado in winter, but one spent the entire reporting period in Lamar, *Prowers* (DLe). Another provided a new CBC

species for the Bonny Res. count on 2 Jan (m.ob.).

Red-bellied Woodpecker:

In addition to sightings at traditional northeastern locations, a male was at Two Buttes Res., *Baca*, on 11 Jan (DLe), and perhaps the same bird was there on 26 Jan (TF), while two were at LCCW on 27 Jan (TF).

Williamson's Sapsucker:

Four individuals were reported during the period. An adult female was at the Holy Cross Abbey in Cañon City, a winter sapsucker hot spot, 12-14 Dec (m.ob.), and an immature female was in Cañon City's Rouse Park from 20 Dec to 31 Jan (BKP). Farther north, a female was photographed at Apple Valley Road, *Boulder*, on 26 Dec (NK). Another female was

at Lory SP, *Larimer*, on 13 Jan (MF).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Probably a carry-over from the Fall Season, a juvenile was at another winter sapsucker hotspot, Cañon City's Centennial Park, 14-21 Dec (JeM), and an adult male was there 5-21 Dec (and beyond, m.ob.). Pueblo City Park had a juvenile 13-16 Dec (MY) which was likely the same one found there 19-31 Jan (B.M., m.ob.).

Red-naped Sapsucker: The Holy Cross Abbey in Cañon City had a male 12 Dec through 14 Feb (m.ob.), and the Penrose CBC recorded all three sapsucker species on 20 Dec (MP). On the WS in Nucla, *Montrose*, a male was recorded 15-17 Dec (CD, BW).

Black Phoebe: Now expected during the winter season at certain locations in south-central Colorado in low numbers, one was at Rock Canyon/Valco Ponds, *Pueblo*, 1 Dec to 28 Feb (BKP), and another was on the Penrose CBC on 20 Dec (fide MP).

Say's Phoebe: Seven birds were reported from five locations, three of them in *Pueblo*, and singles from Grand Junction, *Mesa*, and CR G, *Montezuma*, where it was reported as an early spring migrant from 5 Feb (JDG).

Loggerhead Shrike: Rare in northern Colorado in winter was one at Nunn, *Weld*, on 18 Dec (NK, doc.).

Blue Jay: Noteworthy were the 52 individuals on the Bonny Res. CBC on 2 Jan for the highest-ever tally of the species on that CBC. The corvid family seems to have been particularly hard-hit by West Nile Virus, so this high number is encouraging—genetic diversity at work.

Chihuahuan Raven: A bird thought to be this species, identified by sight and sound, was at Greenlee Preserve, *Boulder*, on 11 Dec (TF). Two individuals identified by size, vocalizations, and tail shape were at Thomas Res., *Boulder*, on 7 Feb, and another bird was reported on the *Boulder* CBC on 20 Dec. There still remains a lot to be learned about the Colorado range and movements of this species in winter, as well as how to correctly identify both raven species at all seasons.

Winter Wren: From the AOU Check-list Committee website we learn that Winter Wren will be split into two species, but we must wait for the July supplement to the AOU

Checklist to learn the English names of each species. Both the western subspecies, *Troglodytes troglodytes pacificus*, and the eastern *hiemalis* were thought to be present along St. Vrain Creek in *Boulder* 1-19 Dec (DW, m.ob.). A bird photographed at Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso*, on 15 Dec and present through at least 10 Jan frequently gave a call that was reported as sounding like a Wilson's Warbler chip, meaning it was likely *pacificus*. The photograph was sent to Paul Lehman, who wrote back saying it would be much more difficult for him to explain why it was an eastern bird than a western. Another *pacificus* was reported from Greenhorn Meadows Park, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, 1-2 Jan (DS), and a closely-scrutinized reddish individual fitting the visual and audio description of a *pacificus* was on the Penrose CBC (MP, m.ob.). Reports of the more expected eastern birds came from *Bent*, *El Paso*, and *Jefferson*. See <http://earbirding.com> for more on how to separate the two "new" species.

Eastern Bluebird: There were 11 reports representing 68 individuals this winter. The largest group, of 24 birds, was reported on the Penrose CBC on 20 Dec (fide MP). Other birds were in *Boulder*, *Pueblo*, and *Otero*. Seven of the reports came from various locations in *Fremont*.

Hermit Thrush: Four birds on the Grand Junction CBC on 20 Dec, and later one there on 25 Dec, constituted a good showing, especially on the WS (LA). Thirteen birds were reported during the period, mostly from December; they may have moved south



Pine Warbler, Pueblo City Park, Pueblo County, 27 Jan 2010. Photo by Brandon Percival

when true winter set in. Still, one was at the Cañon City Riverwalk (RMi) on 26 Jan and one was in Haxtun, *Phillips*, on 6 Feb (BK, TW, TD). The other counties with reports included *Douglas, Otero, Delta, and Jefferson*.

Varied Thrush: There were two reports of this far-ranging fall/winter migrant. One was at a south Boulder residence on 4 Dec (AC, doc.), and one was photographed in the Boulder foothills on 7 Jan (DW, doc.).

Gray Catbird: Wintering birds were reported from the Bonny CBC on 2 Jan (m.ob.); from CBR, *El Paso*, on their unofficial CBC on 15 Jan (m.ob.); and from the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, *Jefferson*, on 20 Feb (DO, MCh).

Brown Thrasher: Two individuals were reported, one on the Rocky Ford CBC on 17 Dec (BM, BKP, photo) and one in the north Boulder Foothills on the Boulder CBC (DW, photo).

American Pipit:

Perhaps under-reported this year, this species saw only two sightings submitted, including five individuals on 9 Jan west of Lamar at the Arkansas River (DLe) and one at the Environmental Learning Center, Fort Collins (DLe).

Bohemian Waxwing: The only report of this irruptive species was of a single bird in Grandview Cemetery, *Larimer*, on 16 Feb (CW).

Pine Warbler: After birders did much grumbling about the absence of variety in wintering warblers, one Pine finally showed in Pueblo City Park, 18 Jan through 28 Feb (BKP, m.ob., doc.), where it was seen on occasion feeding on the sap flow from silver maples.

Palm Warbler: The only other warbler species of note—yes, it was a very cold winter—was one described as being yellow in coloration. Therefore it was likely the *hypochrysea* or eastern “Yellow” subspecies seen at a heated birdbath at the Boulder Wild Bird Center on 8 Dec (SF).

Green-tailed Towhee: Three birds were detected: one on the Penrose CBC on 20 Dec (fide MP); one at the Audubon Center at Chatfield Res., *Jefferson*, on 2 Jan (MH); and one in Steamboat Springs, *Routt*, on 5 Jan (DB, TLi).

Chipping Sparrow: Historically

misidentified and confused with American Tree Sparrows in certain parts of Colorado, this species legitimately showed up in basic plumage at Red Rocks Trading Post, *Jefferson*, from 19 Dec to 14 Jan (MC), and another was in Blende, *Pueblo*, on 6 Feb for the only winter records this year (MP, DM, BS, TK).

“Red” Fox Sparrow: Some ornithologists believe the subspecies that form the “Red” Fox Sparrow group comprise a unique species (Rising 1996). Two were along the Purgatoire River near Las Animas, *Bent*, 4-15 Dec (DN). One was in Paonia, *Delta*, 9-21 Dec (DG, m.ob.); one was found on the Fountain Creek CBC on 14 Dec (TF); and one was at a residence in Lyons, *Larimer*, 1 Jan to 21 Feb (MS, JS).

“Slate-colored” Fox Sparrow: More unusual in the winter than “Reds,” an individual of our breed-

ing subspecies was in Paonia 14-21 Dec (DG, m.ob.), and another was in Glenwood Springs, *Garfield*, from 20 Dec to the end of the season (TMC).

Swamp Sparrow: Perhaps numbers of this species fluctuate during winter months from year to year, so the low number of reports, four, may not have significance. One was at Swallows, *Pueblo*, on 1 Dec (BKP); two were on the Fountain Creek CBC, and one likely remained there through the end of the period (TF, BM); eight were reported from the John Martin Res. CBC (fide DN) on 15 Dec; and two were on the Penrose CBC on 20 Dec (fide MP).

White-throated Sparrow: This *Zonotrichia* was reported at four locations. First was one along the Purgatoire River near Las Animas, *Bent*, 4-15 Dec (DN); second was one found on the Rocky Ford CBC at Rocky Ford SWA on 17 Dec (BM, BKP); a third was on the John Martin Res CBC on 15 Dec (fide DN); and the fourth was at Higbee, *Otero*, on 28 Feb (TF).

Harris’s Sparrow: The big *Zonotrichia* was recorded at 14 locations with 21 individuals tallied. While most sightings were from the east of the Continental Divide as expected, one was at Paonia, 7 Dec to 11 Jan (JBe), and one was at Nor-



Rusty Blackbird, Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, Jefferson County, 5 Mar 2010. Photo by Mark Chavez



White-winged Crossbill, Grandview Cemetery, Larimer County, 5 Apr 2010. Photo by Dave Leatherman



White-winged Crossbill, Grandview Cemetery, Larimer County, 17 Mar 2010. Photo by Dave Leatherman

wood, *San Miguel*, 12 Dec through 28 Feb (GS). The four individuals on the Fort Collins CBC (fide NK) are noteworthy. One that wintered in Lyons ended up as a meal for a hungry Northern Pygmy-Owl (MS, JS).

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Returning for its fourth consecutive year, an adult was first seen at Tunnel Drive just west of Cañon City on 20 October and remained there through the end

Park, on 31 Jan (TK).

Northern Cardinal: The male found in the Stonemoor Hills subdivision in *Pueblo* on 16 Sep remained there into March (MP, BKP, m.ob., doc.). Two were along the Purgatoire River near Las Animas on 4 Dec (DN) and remained to be counted on the John Matin Res. CBC on 15 Dec (DN). Two males and a female were at LCCW throughout the period (DLe, SO, m.ob.).

of the period (RMi, m.ob., doc.). At Red Rocks Park Trading Post, *Jefferson*, BB found a first-winter bird on 19 Dec that also remained there through the end of the season (m.ob., doc.).

Snow Bunting: Although details are a little sketchy, a flock of 12 was reported in *Delta* between *Whitewater* and *Grand Junction* on 13 Jan (MB). One was found on the road south of *Fairplay*,

Indigo Bunting: Although most depart the state and even the US during winter, a male was reported at Picketwire Canyon, *Otero*, on 10 Jan (StO, doc.).

Rusty Blackbird: It is always good to keep tabs on all reports of this declining species. One was on the John Martin Res. CBC on 16 Dec (fide DN); three were on the Rocky Ford CBC on 17 Dec (fide SO); as many as six were along the Big Thompson River at Simpson Pond, *Larimer*, 1-5 Jan (DB, CH, CC, MH); a male and female were at Clear Creek, Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, *Jefferson*, on 23 Feb (MK, LL); and a single was in the White Rocks area along Boulder Creek, *Boulder*, on 20 Dec (BK, m.ob.).

Great-tailed Grackle: This species is becoming more and more common each year; 389 birds were in Burlington, *Kit Carson*, on 2 Jan (TF), making for perhaps the highest count ever in Colorado for one location. Also notable were the 60 on the Pueblo Res. CBC on 19 Dec (fide MY), and the adult male spending the winter in the vicinity of a feeder at Meeker, *Rio Blanco*, 1 Dec through 28 Feb (DH).

Rosy-Finches: This was a down year for rosies, the flock with 140 Gray-crowns including Hepburn's race being the exception at the Hilkey feeders in Meeker,

Rio Blanco, on-and-off from 1 Dec through the end of the period (DH).

Cassin's Finch: Away from the mountains, five were notable at Carrizo Creek Picnic Area, *Baca*, on 11 Jan (DLe).

Red Crossbill: Keeping tabs on identifiable flight call types, DLe reported 15 Type 5 birds at Grandview Cemetery, Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 5 Dec and a pair of Type 2 individuals at the same location on 17 Feb.

White-winged Crossbill: This is never an easy bird to find in Colorado—with the exception of a male and female that DLe dotingly kept tabs on during this winter season at Grandview Cemetery, Fort Collins. Found on 22 Nov, the pair continued throughout the winter with nest-building initiated in late Feb and continuing on into spring, when lots of drama unfolded. Stay tuned for details (DLe, doc.). The only other



Evening Grosbeak, Huffstater residence, Douglas County, 25 Feb 2010. Photo by Loch Kilpatrick

report was of one in the Hill area of Boulder on 20 Dec (MM).

Common Redpoll: The first of the season was a single on the Loveland, *Larimer*, CBC on 1 Jan (BBa). Two more were photographed at a feeder in Steamboat Springs on 25 Jan (BH). In *Boulder* at Valmont Res, one was present on 15 Feb (CW, NK), and another was at feeders in Carbondale, *Garfield*, on 21 Feb (DF).

Lesser Goldfinch: Winter reports of this species are increasing in Colorado. Twenty-six birds were reported

from five locations, including the counties of *El Paso*, *Pueblo*, *Fremont*, and *Otero*. Skilled birders on three CBCs (Fountain Creek, Pueblo Res., and Penrose) were responsible for the majority of the reports.

Evening Grosbeak: This irruptive and elevational migrant has been rare in the northern Front Range for several years, but this season small flocks visited feeders in the Castle Rock and Louviers, *Douglas*, area for much of the winter (GW, KH, m.ob.), as well as feeders in Ward, *Boulder* (BK, m.ob.).

REGIONAL COMPILERS

Without the compilation of sightings from these volunteer regional compilers, "Notes from the Field" could not be written. Continued appreciation goes to Jim Beatty (southwest), Coen Dexter (west central), Forrest Luke (northwest), Brandon Percival (southeast and SLV), Bill Schmoker (Front Range), Larry Semo (east central and northeast), and Glenn Walbek (north central); and many thanks to all of you who share your sightings with the birding community.

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IN THE SCOPE

Identifying Solitary Sandpiper Subspecies: Why and How

Tony Leukering

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) is a widespread breeder of North America's extensive boreal forest, with a breeding range extending from Labrador to western Alaska (Alderfer 2005). Unlike all other North American breeding shorebirds, the species nests in trees, utilizing old nests of passerines, typically thrushes (Alderfer 2005). It is also a widespread migrant throughout the continent on its way to and from its primarily neotropical wintering grounds. Unlike most other North American shorebird species, it is not very social, typically being found alone or in groups of fewer than twenty. When multiple individuals happen to occur together, those individuals usually establish tenaciously-defended intraspecific territories.

The species occurs as a widespread but low-density migrant in Colorado, being apparently more common in the eastern part of the state. However, their predilection for small, quiet, even wooded bodies of water means that Solitary Sandpipers are easily overlooked, and the lower intensity of birding in the state's western half may have created an artificial dichotomy of distribution. Regardless, the species is of regular occurrence in spring (primarily in May) and in fall. The earliest southbound migrants typically arrive in early July, making the species one of the first migrant shorebirds occurring in Colorado each fall. As is typical for shorebirds, adults (particularly failed breeders)

precede juveniles on southward migration by as much as a month. Though plumages of the two age classes are similar, juveniles can be fairly readily discerned by their somewhat paler upperparts with larger pale spots and their smudgier (vs. streaked and barred) underparts.

Taxonomy

Two subspecies have long been recognized in the Solitary Sandpiper, with nominate *solitaria* being the eastern representative, breeding from southeastern Yukon Territory southward and eastward, and *cinnamomea* the western one, breeding from northeast Manitoba northward and westward to western Alaska (Pyle 2008). In the prairie provinces, *cinnamomea* breeds farther north than *solitaria* (Moskoff 1995). Both the ornithological and birding literatures make little mention of the two subspecies, and birders have paid little attention to their respective occurrence patterns. Even Bailey and Niedrach (1965) who, in most all other cases, were extremely thorough, do not make any mention of the subspecies of Solitary Sandpiper, much less the Colorado occurrence patterns of the two, despite the very early naming of *cinnamomea* (Brewster 1890).

Why

While knowledge's sake may be a sufficient rationale for discerning the occurrence patterns of the subspecies of Solitary Sandpiper, a recent ongoing effort to "barcode" all of our planet's organisms (see review in Hebert et al. 2003) has provided another reason: it suggests that the two "subspecies" may deserve to be split into separate species. The "barcoding" project has initiated a firestorm of discussion about the accuracy of interpretation of its data (see, for example, Gill 2009), but it has also provided additional confirmation of some recent widely-accepted alterations in our understanding of taxonomy, so we should not dismiss it out of hand. Its results suggest that we ought to keep watch on this developing situation and, more importantly, try to discern the occurrence patterns of what are currently considered two subspecies only weakly differentiated by plumage.

How

The two photographs on the back cover of this issue illustrate juveniles of nominate *solitaria* (above) and *cinnamomea* (below). I present pictures of juveniles because they are the easiest to separate. The spots displayed by juveniles of eastern *solitaria* are white, while those of western *cinnamomea* are buff. However, utilizing this distinction in the field requires correct ageing of individuals, as adults of both subspecies have white spots.

Though the spot-color distinction sounds simple, there are caveats. First, lighting can make the color of these spots difficult or impossible to assess correctly. Second, my perusal of a large number of pictures of juvenile Solitary Sandpipers suggests that there seem to be some “tweeners.” Some individuals show a combination of spot colors, nearly always with the scapulars seeming to have buffier or whiter spots than those on the wing coverts. Other individuals have spots that are all very pale, but do not appear to be quite white. The appearance of these birds may be due simply to lighting, or to feather wear and fading, but I ran across enough photographs of them to cause me to be cautious about assigning them to either of the two subspecies.

Regardless, juveniles with unambiguously buff or obviously white spots are readily compartmentalized. Immatures in formative plumage (about which, see Leukering 2010) are considerably more difficult to identify to subspecies, though, again, the presence of obviously buff spots should prove the case for *cinnamomea*.

Adults of both subspecies sport white spots. Any identifications to subspecies should be based on incredibly good views and/or very detailed photographs taken in good light, and even then they should be considered tentative, as some of the features presented in Table 1 require extensive experience or direct comparison to use. I suspect that the loreal differences, while possibly the easiest field mark, are likely variable enough to cause a large amount of uncertainty. The differences in the outer primaries (p10) will probably only be useful with excellent pictures of the spread wing, as when individuals stretch. However, the species has a predilection to holding its wings up for a short while after landing, so these pictures may be more readily obtained than one might think.

On the Back Cover

The upper picture on the back cover is of a juvenile of the nominate subspecies *solitaria*. This bird has obviously white spots on the upperparts and was photographed in New Jersey, where *cinnamomea*

Table 1. Features differing in the two subspecies of Solitary Sandpiper

Subspecies	Upperparts color	Lores color	p10 shaft color	p10 inner web
<i>cinnamomea</i> (western)	brownish ¹ or olive-brown ²	brownish ¹ and finely-spotted ²	paler ¹	whitish mottling ¹
<i>solitaria</i> (eastern)	dusky blackish ¹	dusky blackish ¹	darker ¹	dark ¹

¹ from Pyle (2008)

² from Paulson (2005)

is unknown (or virtually so). The lower picture, taken in California, is of a juvenile of *cinnamomea* that sports obviously buffy upperparts spotting. Also apparent is the difference in overall upperparts coloration, with western *cinnamomea* giving the impression of being warmer and browner than the colder and grayer/blacker *solitaria*. The lighting in the two pictures is different, but these pictures still present a good comparison of this feature—the warmer lighting in the California picture is just enhancing the warm tones of the bird, not creating them.

Vocal Differences?

None of the literature that I consulted while researching this essay noted any vocal differences between the two subspecies, but observers should pay attention to the *weet weet weet* alarm call that the species gives in flight as well as the sharp *pik* alarm that it gives from the ground, to see whether consistent differences exist. If they do, they would not only make subspecific identification easier, but also provide another reason to believe that the two forms may be more distinct than they are currently recognized to be by taxonomic authorities.

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Juvenile *solitaria* Solitary Sandpiper, Cape May Point State Park, Cape May County, NJ, 3 October 2009. Photo by Tony Leukering



Juvenile *cinnamomea* Solitary Sandpiper, near Lee Vining, Mono County, CA, 30 August 2005. Photo by Len Blumin