

Vol. 42 No. 1 January 2008

Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



Valco Ponds in Pueblo

Falcon Guide to Birding Colorado

Colorado's First Lawrence's Goldfinch



Colorado Field Ornithologists
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Front cover:
Flammulated
Owl, Boulder
County, 17
June 2007.
Photo by Paul
Bannick,
Seattle, WA.

To scratch or not to scratch?

Nathan Pieplow

For the record, when I ran my fingernails across the bark of the aspen with the likely-looking cavity this past May, I didn't really expect to make a Flammulated Owl pop out of it. I certainly didn't expect to ignite any debate about the ethics of my birding. But I managed to do both.

The discussion that ensued when I posted my Flammulated find to COBirds was, for the most part, civil, reasonable, and valuable. But I was a little taken aback that more than one birder felt I had crossed a line in scratching on that tree. The episode raises some difficult questions: how much disturbance can a bird tolerate? How much disturbance can the ethical birder generate? And how does one stay on the right side of ethics in the quest to know birds ever better?

Here is a concession to my critics. I caused that family of Flammulated Owls this summer far more disturbance than I have ever yet publicly admitted. What follows is my confession, such as it is.

Two weeks after finding the nest, on 11 June, I received an email from Paul Bannick, a Seattle-based wildlife photographer who was writing a book about the habitats of North America focusing on owls and woodpeckers as metaphors for diversity and the need for conservation. My earlier plan to take people to see the nest had fallen through due to a busy schedule at the summer camp where I work, and I hadn't been back, but Paul was ready to book a flight to Denver specifically to photograph this bird if it was still there, so on 14 June I went out and confirmed its continued occupancy with a quick daytime scratch. On the afternoon of the 16th Paul and I went out, he set up his equipment, and I scratched the trunk. The owl popped out too briefly, and in poor light—so the following day Paul returned without me and snapped the photo on the cover of this journal.

That night we visited the nest together to get action shots with artificial light. The male owl visited the cavity several times an hour with moths to feed the female, who stayed mostly in the nest. Since we could hear no chicks, Paul guessed the female was probably incubating—meaning that the owls were in a sensitive period and that the risk of nest abandonment was relatively high. The owls did seem somewhat wary of our presence—if I was standing too close to the cavity, or if Paul's bicycle light was focused directly on it, the male would hesitate for a minute or two before coming in, and the female would do

the same before coming out. After the hesitation, though, the feeding usually still took place, even if I was right there—and eventually, although a nearby stream created background noise, I was able to record the female's high-pitched vocalizations from only eight feet away.

Nevertheless, we indisputably changed the course of the owls' evening on at least one occasion, when the male, after a particularly long hesitation in a nearby tree, moth in mouth, eventually just swallowed the thing and flew off rather than feeding his mate. When that happened, Paul and I agreed we had probably given the birds enough trouble for one night. But any fear that we'd overstressed them was allayed when, as we were packing up to leave, both adults flew into a tree six feet above our heads and began to allopreen, grooming each other like chimpanzees, the female making very soft noises that I was only able to record because of the ridiculously short distance between us. Few humans have been privileged to observe this behavior. It was one of the most exciting birding experiences of my life.

Not wanting to disturb the incubating female, I waited until 30 June to return to the nest. For the first time, the quiet begging screeches of two fledglings were audible from the cavity. My visit must have hit the absolute pinnacle of parental activity, because I have never seen such a feeding frenzy. In the 90 minutes after dark, the adult owls brought a moth to the nest, on average, twice a minute. Most of these visits lasted only a second or two, and then the birds were off again, hunting with an efficiency that boggled the mind. It was a terrible time to be a night-flying insect in that neck of the woods.

I relayed news of this extraordinary night to Paul, who opined that the chicks must be at the peak of their growth period, and might therefore fledge within a week or ten days. He made plans to return to Colorado to try for photos of fledged or nearly-fledged young.

Fledged they weren't, when Paul and I visited on 6 July, but both chicks were much louder now, and the parents fed frequently, albeit with nothing like their prior speed. Accustomed now to the bike light, or perhaps too busy parenting to bother with it, they both posed for photos more obligingly than before. Near the end of the night one chick briefly poked its head out of the hole, looking like a tiny fluffy version of the monster from the movie *Alien*.

On 12 July, the young were active: their faces appeared in the nest cavity at regular intervals, and at least one of them, the more adventurous and vocal one, stretched its wings experimentally for a "test

flight.” The following night, while I watched, it clambered all the way out of the cavity, clinging to its lip with zygodactyl feet, face smushed up against the tree trunk, butt sticking into space, wings beating the air in what started to look like false bravado as the bird hung there working up the courage to take the fatal leap. For almost an hour it sat there, keenly eyeing the distance to nearby low branches with snake-like weavings of its head, engaging in fits of flapping that recalled a propeller airplane trying, and failing, to start.

And then, suddenly, finally, a flying featherball careened through the air at a 45-degree downward angle, passing within two feet of my head as it hit the lowest hanging frond of the aspen I was leaning against—evidently not the destination it had been aiming for. Instead of a proper branch, it had grabbed a handful of leaf stems, and so it swung immediately upside down to within six inches of the ground, where it alternated indignant flaps and screeches with bemused wrong-way-up head swiveling. For ten minutes it tried in vain to right itself before finally plopping down into the grass, a black-eyed insolent puffball, while both its parents called from nearby trees.

What does an observer do in this situation? I wasn’t prepared to handle the bird, to lift it to a safer perch. No doubt it had taken a standard first flight for a Flammulated Owl, but I felt a little responsible for it and worried about its chances. I didn’t have great confidence that it would be able to get off the ground under wing power, nor climb up any of the trees in the area using its tiny feet and beak. I weighed the advantages of leaving, so as not to attract predators to the fledgling, with the advantages of staying, so as to deter predators from approaching. In the end I retreated, leaving the owl to its own devices.

The next day, in the late afternoon, I came back to the nest. Nobody popped out of the cavity when I scratched the trunk, but I heard the faint wheezing of the younger owlet inside—it hadn’t yet fledged. Optimistically I scrutinized all surrounding trees for its older sibling—and found it ten minutes later, fifteen feet up in a ponderosa pine, doing its best to imitate a knobby branch. Somehow it had survived the night.

A couple of hours later, after sundown, I decided to guide a group of twelve- to seventeen-year-old boys up to the site with their counselors, promising them an evening campfire activity they wouldn’t soon forget. As we approached the nameless spot in the woods that nobody else would know, I put my hands together and made the low hoot of the male Flammulated Owl. I got an answer in kind—and four flashlight beams illuminated the male Flamm sitting almost on top of us, initiating a staring contest between the wide-eyed bird looking down and the wide-eyed boys looking up.

"Up this way," I said. "Hear that screech?" They followed me on a crazy uphill bushwhack in the dark, almost 100 yards away from the nest, to the tree where the fledgling was calling. Again the four flashlight beams. We sat beneath it for almost an hour, watching the transfer of moths as an adult arrived to feed it every five minutes or so. "Shh shh shh...here it comes!" "Whoa!" "That's the coolest thing I've ever seen!"

It was my last visit to that wonderful family of owls.

The ethics of my summer could be debated forever. There was risk in bringing a photographer with bicycle lights and flashes to the cavity during incubation—but the risk paid off with spectacular photos for a conservation-minded book, not to mention this journal. There was risk in my frequent close-range recording forays—risk that paid dividends in the form of rare sounds on tape for the researchers at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Bringing teenage boys to the nest? Tramping a path to the tree through the grass? Scratching on its trunk in daylight on multiple occasions? I could have caused the nest to fail. But I didn't.

Whether we scratch trunks or not, we birders always walk the fine line between appreciating and disturbing wildlife. If we get too close, we can do great harm—but if we stay too far away, we can do harm then too, by treating wildlife like an abstraction you can't interact with. Birds deserve respect, but they aren't made of porcelain. I think we need to be willing to tolerate some risk to them if we are to advocate risk on their behalf.

I imagine that skeptics will ask: what would happen if every finder of a Flammulated Owl nest were to act the way I did? Would we be better off? Would the birds? These are good questions; I don't happen to know the answers.

I do know this. After that last night, the counselors told me, when they were on their way back to camp, the bus was full of owls—every kid doing his best to imitate the noise he'd heard me make. Would it be good to let a gang of rowdy teenagers loose in the woods with a newfound ability to imitate Flamms? Perhaps not. Would it be good to send that Flamm-calling gang back at the end of the summer to their homes in Denver, Kansas City, Houston, Los Angeles, with a vivid memory and a new appreciation for at least one tiny piece of the natural world?

Yes. It would be. And it was.

Nathan Pieplow, 4745-B White Rock Circle, Boulder, CO 80301, npieplow@indra.com

Onward Online

Bill Schmoker

Hi, folks. I hope this message finds you well and enjoying our winter birds. Perhaps you were able to participate in a Christmas Bird Count or two. Maybe you enjoy feeder-watching in your backyard, habitually scanning the remaining open water for gulls and waterfowl, or cruising back roads looking for wintering raptors (I get my birding kicks doing all of these in the winter). If you haven't tried it, take a ski or snowshoe birding trip in the mountains or visit one of your favorite birding spots in the "off season"—the contrast between the busy migration and breeding seasons and the more austere wintry

birding scene isn't bad, just different (I think pleasantly so).

The Records Committee page now accepts sound and video files, and allows full-featured electronic circulation of records among committee members.

Over the last year, CFO has made a concerted effort to improve its web presence, making it more user-friendly for the folks who maintain and update the information. Our three web-

sites—the main site (<http://www.cfo-link.org>), the County Birding site (<http://www.coloradocountybirding.com>), and the Colorado Bird Records Committee site (<http://www.cfo-link.org/CBRC/login.php5>) have successfully been moved to a new server. Doing this will save CFO hundreds of dollars per year in hosting fees, and many improvements on the administrative side of the pages will facilitate updates, edits, and changes. Additionally, the Records Committee page now accepts sound and video files in addition to photos, and allows full-featured electronic circulation of records among committee members, streamlining the process of reviewing records and thus making the volunteer committee members' jobs easier to do. If you haven't tried it yet, I would encourage you to submit a record through the site—it is an easy process that will contribute to the scientific ornithological record as Colorado's birding landscape continues to evolve.

On behalf of Colorado Field Ornithologists, I would like to acknowledge and thank Mark Peterson for his work on accomplishing these updates to our three database-driven sites, and for overseeing the move to our new server. He volunteered services and expertise that would have cost CFO thousands of dollars to contract for. Oh, and he somehow did all of this in between family duties, his career, and a little bit of birding now and then.

I would also like to thank Rachel Hopper for continuing to main-

tain and update the CFO website and for her hard work on the server move. Thanks, Rachel!

Once the ability to update the County Birding database came online, CBRC chair Larry Semo uploaded the committee's latest county and state list database, enabling the web update that reflects the newest additions. Link to the checklists page (<http://www.coloradocountybirding.com/checklists/index.php>) to print out the newest state list (now with 485 species—see the CRBC report in this issue, page 38.) You can also print out any county list you are interested in. (And hey, members—pass along a copy to a prospective member, would ya?)

Now that the County Birding Site administrative side has been upgraded, information on birding sites can also be more easily modified. Nathan Pieplow and Andrew Spencer, the driving forces behind the creation of the site, have finally plowed through the long back-

Call for Nominations

CFO would like to encourage its members to submit nominations for its three major awards. Email nominations to awards@cfo-link.org. Awards will be presented at the annual convention.

The **Ron Ryder Award** is awarded for:

- distinguished service to the Colorado Field Ornithologists' organization and its goals;
- scholarly contributions to the Colorado Field Ornithologists and to Colorado field ornithology;
- sharing knowledge of Colorado field ornithology with the people of the state of Colorado.

The **CFO Appreciation Award** thanks those who:

- have hosted large numbers of birders on private property, or
- have performed special service to CFO or to the Colorado birding community.

The **CFO Lifetime Achievement Award** recognizes birders who:

- are long-time contributors of distributional (seasonal and geographic) data on the avifauna of Colorado;
- have spent a considerable amount of time in the field, locally and/or statewide;
- have mentored or assisted others in the Colorado birding community.

log of updates. Please contact them via the site with suggestions for further changes so that we can keep the information as current and accurate as possible.

Finally, CFO contracted the skills of Brian Gardel and Craig Capel for the programming needed to realize our vision of a sustainable web presence. We got great value and results from their services. In particular, Craig worked far beyond the time we paid him for as he and Mark completed the upgrades and server move. We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Thanks to all the people who work hard to make CFO a strong and ambitious organization.

CFO BOARD MINUTES

8 September 2007

Bonny Reservoir State Wildlife Area

DOW Bunkhouse

Lisa Edwards, CFO Secretary

The meeting was held at 11:00 a.m. Board members present were President, Bill Schmoker; Treasurer, Maggie Boswell; and directors Connie Kogler, Mark Peterson, Nathan Pieplow, Larry Semo, and Glenn Walbek. Secretary Lisa Edwards and directors Rachel Hopper, Jim Beatty, and Kim Potter sent their regrets. Guest Tony Leukering was also present. The minutes of the April meeting were approved.

President's Report

Jon Dunn had been in state a few weeks back and mentioned that Western Field Ornithologists would be interested in partnering with CFO on various projects. Publishing material might be a particular strength of the WFO's that we could rely upon. Cross inserts or promotional articles in the journals might also be worth considering.

Archiving of Colorado Birds was discussed. Gaps in the collections of various directors were discussed.

Posting an abstract of Colorado Birds on the CFO website was discussed.

Treasurer's Report

Current assets are \$31,026.54.

There was an extended discussion of the costs of putting out Colorado Birds and some suggestions for economizing were put forth. These included changing the editor's stipend, limiting pages per issue, and addressing the supply of free issues provided to CSU.

Multiple-year memberships need to be individually tracked.

The Treasurer's Report was approved.

Committee Reports

A. CBRC—Larry Semo. The committee is awaiting use of the website. Mark Peterson reported that now that the County Birding site is completed, the CBRC site is progressing and expected by the end of September or early October. Membership on the committee was also discussed. Larry's term is listed as ending in 2010, which should be sufficient for full implementation of the CBRC website.

B. Awards—Kim Potter will chair responsibilities here. The President reported very positive feedback on the CFO Lifetime Achievement Award. It was generally accepted that this should be an annual award. A Landowner Appreciation award was moved for Larry Arnold.

C. Nominating—Glenn Walbek. Only one new committee member needs to be found during this year.

D. Field Trips: President Schmoker reported that Ted Floyd will be leading an upcoming trip to the Fox Ranch.

E. Project Fund/Youth Scholarship—Bill Kaempfer. Information is being gathered in order to push these projects forward.

F. Membership—Connie Kogler. Connie will contact Davis for his information and investigate the mass contribution to the CSU library.

G. COBirds—Mark Peterson. Membership is just below 900.

H. Website: Mark Peterson reported that the move to GoDaddy on the website is progressing well. President Schmoker noted that Mark has provided enormous amounts of extremely valuable volunteer tech help to CFO and its website. A goal of putting CBRC records online was endorsed.

I. Colorado Birds—Nathan Pieplow. October issue to be turned over for completion within five days. A discussion about topics for future articles followed.

J. 2008 Convention: Richard Crossley has agreed to be the keynote speaker. Mark Peterson is working with Cañon City people on facilities. Room is available for vendors and a paper session. Mark has contacted an artist for a logo. Special trips on "birds and other things" and "digiscoping" were suggested. A paper session on documentation was suggested.

K. The next meeting was set for 1 December at Larry Semo's office in Broomfield. Cañon City was suggested as a site for the February meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Glenn Walbek

Bill Schmoker

It was 1998 when Glenn was introduced to birding by friend and co-worker Gregg Goodrich. On a business trip to Cheyenne, the two stopped at a woodlot along Highway 85 near the Pawnee Grasslands, where a brightly-plumaged American Goldfinch caught their attention and interested Glenn enough to convince him to tag along on some other birding expeditions. Soon, with field guide in hand, Glenn became obsessed with finding, identifying, and enjoying birds.

Another early contributor to Glenn's obsession was Larry Modesitt. In a serendipitous meeting, Gregg had happened across Larry's stalled Chrysler at the bottom of a Colorado fourteener and Gregg's "I want to help" attitude brought the two of them together. "Gregg met Larry via a failed alternator and became a birder because of it, and shortly thereafter, so did I," says Glenn. "Had Larry driven a Toyota, I'd be playing golf on weekends."

Larry's propensity to travel afar looking for cool birds only served to further Glenn's behavioral imbalance. Although Glenn grew up in bird-rich South Florida, he did not ogle feathered creatures until moving to Colorado. He recalls birds from his childhood, but a backyard Say's Phoebe was the first bird ever scientifically identified by Glenn and his daughters, and it occupies the first recorded entry in his Peterson's Guide to Western Birds. The buffy and vocal neighborhood flycatcher continues to bring him joy as one of his early "spark" birds. From his beginnings with relatively easy ID challenges like goldfinches and phoebes, Glenn has become known in the state for his expertise in finding and identifying difficult birds. For example, Glenn has a knack for finding rare larids on lakes like Cherry Creek Reservoir, one of his main stomping grounds. In fact, many of his birding friends have called him "Larus Walbek" with a mixture of admiration and good-natured envy. Glenn is always willing to share his scope and his expertise with other birders and nature lovers, whether by chance encounter or on a field trip that he is leading.

Glenn's wife Laurie, their five kids, and their three grandchildren will all testify to Glenn's obsessive birding behavior and how it has impacted them. Family trips, graduation ceremonies, weddings, childbirths and even funerals now all incorporate birding. Even their home purchase was influenced by the quality of habitat surrounding their lot. This has paid dividends for Glenn, as one of his favorite birding experiences is watching the backyard birds from his deck with his friends and family. This enables him to do at least some birding ev-

ery day, and he's even seen and photographed a couple of write-up birds from this sanctuary (and no, this is not a result of any beverages he may have been enjoying at the time).

As nominations director of the CFO, Glenn is responsible for recommending new board members from the large pool of excellent Colorado birders and CFO members. His goal in

this regard is to recruit a diverse mix of birders both geographically and philosophically, to keep the organization fresh and viable. Glenn is also the photo editor of *Colorado Birds*, the journal you are now holding. This is truly a labor of love, as photography has become a large part of his birding. Glenn's photos have been featured in this journal as well as in national publications such as *Birder's World* and *North American Birds*. As Glenn states, "Returning from a day in the field with a camera full of bird images as a permanent trip record is incredibly rewarding. Enjoying and learning from the photographs of others while sharing their excitement is nearly as much fun as having been there myself. The number of outstanding bird photographs coming from the growing number of Colorado birders/photographers is impressive. Seeing all of a season's rarities in photographic form in one magazine is a thrill—it brings to light the outstanding diversity of bird species our state enjoys. If we can't see them all in person, this journal is the next best thing. Colorado bird photographers, keep up the good work!"

Glenn, I know you'll keep up the good work, too! On behalf of the rest of the CFO Board and our membership, I'd like to thank you for your important roles in the Colorado birding community.

Bill Schmoker, 3381 Larkspur Drive, Longmont, CO, bill.schmoker@gmail.com



Glenn and Laurie along Hanging Lake trail.

The Falcon Guide to Birding Colorado

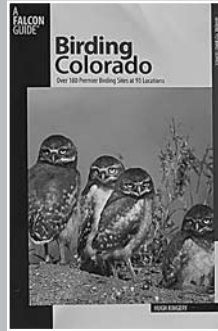
by Hugh Kingery

Tom McConnell

For many birders, *Birding Colorado*, a new addition to the Falcon Guides series, will probably replace the now ten-year-old ABA/Lane *Birder's Guide to Colorado* by Harold Holt. Of course, *Birding Colorado* will also need updating one day, but it will always accompany me in the field for now.

The new guidebook is well laid out and easy to use; it divides Colorado into ten geographical regions. In each region, the author describes individual sites, giving information on habitat types and birds to be expected, along with rarities that have occurred in the past. In addition, symbols advise the user about whether a fee or a habitat stamp is required, whether the site is handicapped-accessible, whether Audubon has designated it an "Important Bird Area," and whether a bird checklist is available. The guidebook then gives a detailed description of each site and directions to it, explaining what birds to expect there and where to look for them. Black-and-white photographs are provided.

At most sites, the guide describes roads and trails in great detail, and black-and-white maps accompany the text. Site descriptions include a small section advising birders about DeLorme grid, elevation, hazards, the nearest food, gas, and lodging, camping, and how to find more information. With the excellent maps that ac-



Birding Colorado: Over 180 Premier Birding Sites at 93 Locations

Hugh Kingery
Pequot Press, 2007
336 pages, 6x9, paperback
ISBN 978-0-7627-3960-8

company most popular birding sites, I navigated around Larimer, Weld, and Boulder Counties in early November 2007 with *Birding Colorado* and found that directions and information about all of the sites visited were accurate.

Kingery also has included three appendices. The first is a list of specialty birds by habitat. The second is a Colorado checklist, presented in three sections: regular breeders and visitors, rarities, and casual and accidental species (those seen twenty or fewer times). The author has pro-

vided information on birding organizations, books, and web resources in the third appendix.

There are a few potential limitations of the guide. As I read about my home area around Glenwood Springs and Aspen, I wondered why some of my favorite local birding spots weren't included. Then again, as I thought about their omission, I realized that if all our favorite spots were included, *Birding Colorado* would have become too large and heavy to carry around. Kingery has done a nice job of selecting productive and accessible sites, and the volume in its present size will fit in everyone's birding pack.

I was confused by directions in northeast Colorado and some of the

mountain areas, where maps of individual sites were not provided, but a visit to my DeLorme atlas solved my difficulties since page and grid were provided by the author. In contrast, the author has done a really outstanding job with maps of the Front Range, Rocky Mountain National Park, southeast Colorado, and Grand Junction areas.

I do miss the species bar graphs that the Lane guidebook uses for seasonal abundance, elevation, and habitat preference, a feature that I have become accustomed to.

On the whole, the book is really nicely done. Thank you, Hugh Kingery, for this great contribution to birding in Colorado.

Tom McConnell, Glenwood Springs, immac@rof.net.



Valco Ponds and Rock Canyon, Pueblo

Brandon K. Percival

Introduction:

Valco Ponds and Rock Canyon in Pueblo, below Pueblo Reservoir Dam, are part of Lake Pueblo State Park. You'll need a valid Colorado State Parks Pass. There are three Valco ponds. Valco Pond #1 is along Highway 96; Valco Pond #2 is just east of the Valco Ponds parking lot, between the Arkansas River and Valco Pond #1; and Valco Pond #3 is east of Valco Pond #2. All three ponds are on the south side of the Arkansas River. There are also two small fish hatchery ponds located a mile west of the parking lot that are surrounded by a chain link fence. All of these ponds and riparian areas along the river are very good for birds.

On the north side of the Arkansas River, there are two more ponds. One is the Rock Canyon Swim Beach pond, which has a big light blue waterslide, and the other is at the Kestrel and Redtail Picnic Areas. These ponds have had a few rarities and normal waterfowl species.

Where to look for birds:

The main access to the birding areas is from the Valco Ponds parking lot along Highway 96, 2.7 miles west of its intersection with Pueblo Boulevard in Pueblo. From this parking lot you can easily explore all of the Valco Ponds to the east and walk as far west as the Lake Pueblo

Dam. The large cottonwood trees and bushes in the Valco Ponds parking lot itself can sometimes produce interesting birds. To access the ponds from this parking lot, walk northeast along the edge of Pond #2 to a narrow gravel path along the river that leads to Valco Pond #3. Also, there's a small path that goes around the south side of Pond #2 and the north side of Pond #1. You can also



Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, Colorado. Photo by Brandon Percival

bushwhack around the south side of Pond #1. Don't forget to check the river for ducks, shorebirds, swallows, pipits, and other birds.

One of the more popular birding locations is the entire area west of the Valco Ponds parking lot. You can bird close to the river as you walk west, then try walking closer to the bluff on your return. Listen for birds: if you hear Black-capped Chickadees, check the flock for other species.

There are a lot of tall cottonwoods, Russian-olives, and other trees and bushes to look through. Be careful: poison ivy is common in this area. If you have time, try to get at least to the Fish Hatchery ponds before you turn around.

Unfortunately for the birds, some of the Russian-olives have been removed in this area because there is a movement to return the riparian habitat to its historic state (V. Truan, pers. comm.). It appears that the salt cedars (a.k.a tamarisk, *Tamarix* spp.) in this area provide cover and some food for birds, and we see rarities quite often in them. The Salt Cedar Leaf Beetle (*Diorhabda elongate*) was released to eliminate the salt cedars below the fish hatchery in 2000 and 2001 (K. Lewantowicz, pers. comm.). It is not known whether all of the salt cedars will be removed.

Other access to birding areas can be found at the two picnic area parking lots below Pueblo Reservoir dam on the south side of the Arkansas River. From here you can walk on the south side of the river east to the Fish Hatchery Ponds and to the Valco Ponds parking lot, or you can cross a footbridge over the Arkansas River and walk east to bird in Rock Canyon Picnic Area.

The north side access point is the Rock Canyon Picnic Area. This includes the Redtail and Kestrel picnic areas and the Osprey Picnic Area, which is farthest east. There are lots of cottonwoods, willows, Russian-olives, and other trees and bushes to look around in these areas. Paved bike trails run through the entire area, but these have more



Barrow's Goldeneye, Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, 26 December 2006. Photo by Bill Maynard

people on them. The whole place is worth birding, if you have the time (two hours or more to walk it all).

Birding by month:

Now that you know the area, what are the birds that you could see? I'm going to start with fall (August-November), then move on to winter (December to February), spring (March to May), and summer (June and July).

The best birding seems to be in the fall and winter. In early August, the first signs of migration are Black-headed Grosbeaks and Western Tanagers, as well as Red-breasted Nuthatches that have started coming out of the mountains. By mid-August there are usually some non-breeding warblers around, including Wilson's, MacGillivray's, and Virginia's, with the breeding Yellow Warblers being overwhelming at times. By late August anything can show up. Usually Townsend's Warblers and Cassin's Vireos start to appear and are possible for a few weeks. Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, and Red-eyed Vireo can be found in August and September in low numbers most years. While looking for rarities in late August, you'll see a lot of Wilson's and Yellow Warblers. Rarities in August have included Yellow-crowned Night-Heron; Upland Sandpiper; Tennessee, Nashville, Black-throated Green, Pine, "Western" Palm, Mourning, and Hooded Warblers; and Summer Tanager.

The entire month of September is good for birding; it is probably the best month to bird here. The best days are normally cool days following north-east winds at night, with some sort of rain or drizzle during the early morning hours. Of course, that doesn't happen too often, so if you are there on a warm day, start birding early, as it will probably be too hot by noon to find much bird activity. By mid-September you'll start to see more Orange-crowned Warblers along with



Rusty Blackbird, Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, 26 December 2006. Photo by Bill Maynard

many Wilson's Warblers, but very few Yellow Warblers. If mountain birds are going to come down for the winter, they can start appearing in mid-September. Also, mid-September is usually when White-crowned Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Green-tailed Towhees, Red-naped Sapsuckers, and other mountain breeding species migrate through. In late September, you'll have to start looking though



Black Phoebe, Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, 3 January 2007. Photo by Brandon Percival

gobs of Yellow-rumped Warblers for a few weeks at least. The Song and White-crowned Sparrows are all over, with a few migrant Lincoln's Sparrows as well. Usually the first White-throated Sparrows of the fall start to show up in late September too. Pinyon Jays and Lewis's Woodpeckers seem to show up at this time, though they don't stick around. Flycatchers can be very common in September, mostly Western Wood-Pewees, although Olive-sided, Willow, Hammond's, Dusky, "Western", Gray, Least, and Ash-throated Flycatchers are also possible, as well as three species of phoebes and three species of kingbirds. Green Herons and Peregrine Falcons come through in small numbers, as do shorebirds, mostly along the Arkansas River. September rarities have included Yellow-crowned Night-Heron; Broad-winged Hawk; Sabine's Gull; Williamson's Sapsucker; Great Crested Flycatcher; Bell's, Yellow-throated, Blue-headed and Philadelphia Vireos; Purple Martin; Tennessee, Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Gray, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Pine, "Western" Palm, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Black-and-white, and Prothonotary Warblers; Ovenbird; Summer and Scarlet Tanagers; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Painted Bunting; Bobolink; and Baltimore Oriole.

October birding is hit-and-miss, I would say. You never know what you'll see. Some days there are not a lot of birds around and some days there are. There should be more sparrows around and mountain birds in some years. It is a good idea to start looking at the ponds, since Pacific Loon and Surf Scoter have shown up toward the end of the

month. You'll start to see more Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, as well as Merlin and other raptors. Listen for Sandhill Cranes flying over. October rarities have included White-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos; Northern Parula; American Redstart; and Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, "Western" Palm, and Kentucky Warblers.

November birding can be really interesting. The ponds and river are usually better than the trees, though surprises can always appear. After November 15th, much less water is let out of Pueblo Reservoir (due to winter storage), so the Arkansas River below the dam gets low. You'll want to look along the rocks for late shorebirds along with the Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe. American Pipits start to show up and, amazingly, both Say's and Black Phoebe (in 2005 and 2006) have started to winter along the river here. It is a good idea to look for Rusty Blackbirds, which start to show up in November and can be around all winter long. Duck numbers are usually pretty good from late November through early February. Eastern Bluebirds are regular here starting in November and continuing through March. November rarities have included Black Brant, Pacific Loon, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green and Prairie Warblers, and Northern Cardinal (three of them seen in 1988).

December and January can be fun birding too. On the Pueblo Reservoir Christmas Bird Count in December, the Rock Canyon/Valco Ponds area usually yields at least 70 species. Shorebirds should be looked for on the river, as Greater Yellowlegs, Dunlin, and Least, Baird's, and Spotted Sandpipers have been found in recent Decembers. Some of the Spotted Sandpipers and Dunlins have spent the winter. The American Pipits also winter in good numbers along the river, and one was even seen eating a small fish (V. Truan, pers. comm.). In some winters warblers will be around, including a large number of Yellow-rumpeds. Amazing December warblers here have included Pine, "Yellow" Palm, Cape May, Prairie, Black-throated Green, MacGillivray's, Orange-crowned, and Wilson's. Some of them were eating *Chronomides* midges that come off the water along the Arkansas River in winter (V. Truan, pers. comm.). There can be a lot of ducks on the river and on the ponds if they aren't frozen (the Fish Hatchery ponds never freeze). Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, all three scoters, and Greater Scaup, among other ducks, can be seen at this time of year. Also, if the ponds have some ice on them, you'll have a chance to scope gulls. Colorado's first Iceland Gull appeared at Valco Pond #1 in early January. Other gulls that can be seen among the Ring-billed, California, and Herring Gulls in winter include Tayer's, Lesser Black-backed, Glaucous, Great Black-backed, Mew, and Glaucous-winged. The win-

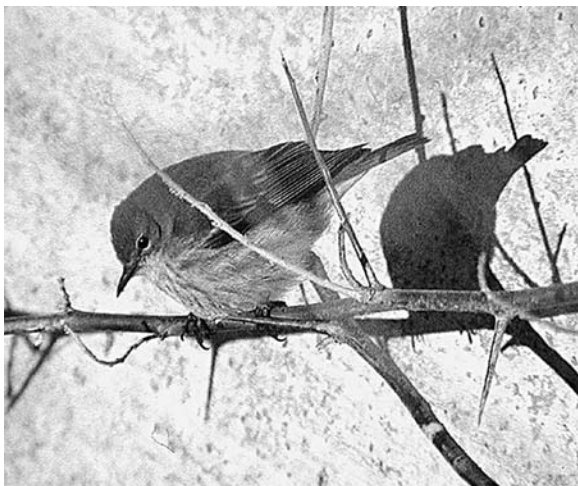
tering sparrows can include White-throated, Harris's, Swamp, Lincoln's, and rarely Golden-crowned. Also, Winter Wrens can be found sometimes along the river or in the bushes. Along Highway 96, adjacent to Valco Ponds, Wild Turkeys are usually present, and once a Gyrfalcon and Rufous-crowned Sparrows were seen here on the Christmas Bird Count. Other December/January rarities

have included Northern Goshawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Woodcock, Sedge Wren, and Purple Finch.

February and March can be slow for birding, since most of the wintering birds start to leave, and only a few migrants start to appear. You'll have a chance to see Cinnamon Teal during this time of year, however. Two wintering "Yellow" Palm Warblers, a Pine, and a Wilson's all stayed into February. The other warblers did not. A very surprising adult Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was seen on the last day in March one year.

In April you'll start to hear more birds singing. Bewick's Wrens, which are resident, start singing on top of bushes and trees. On a rainy or cloudy morning in April, all six normally occurring swallows can be found flying over the Valco Ponds and the Arkansas River. Migrant shorebirds are possible anywhere in April and May, though they aren't very regular, except for Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers. A couple of exciting finds in April have included a female Lucy's Warbler from 13-15 April 2005 and a Zone-tailed Hawk, which was seen flying from Pueblo City Park west to the Valco Ponds area (D. Leatherman, J. Mammoser, pers. comm.).

May is the best month during spring for rarities, as well as a good time for migrants heading up to the mountains, including warblers, flycatchers, and other birds. Rarities found in May have included American Bittern; Little Blue Heron; White Ibis; Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks; Caspian Tern; Black Swift; Alder Flycatcher; White-eyed Vireo;



Cape May Warbler, Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, December 1994. Photo by Van Truan

Blue-winged Warbler, Northern Parula; Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Prothonotary, Hooded, and Kentucky Warblers; Northern Waterthrush; Summer Tanager; and Bobolink.

In June and July the breeders are here in force: Yellow Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Western Wood-Pewee, Western Kingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Black-chinned Hummingbird, to name a few. Black Phoebe's nested here during the summer of 2007, and probably in 2006 also. It is possible at any season to see Canyon Towhee, Scaled Quail, and Curve-billed Thrasher, with Greater Roadrunner and Ladder-backed Woodpecker being less regular.

Often a pair of Cassin's Kingbirds breeds in the area, as well as a few pairs of Orchard Orioles. Yellow-billed Cuckoos have bred here, though they aren't found every year. A singing male Kentucky Warbler found in Rock Canyon in late May 2005 stayed through mid-June.



Eastern Bluebird, Rock Canyon, Pueblo County, 4 February 2007. Photo by Joey Kellner

Summary:

As you can see, Valco Ponds and Rock Canyon in Pueblo can be an exciting place to bird. I've compiled a list of 319 species of birds that have been found there over the years, including an amazing total of 36 species of warblers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the many Pueblo area birders who looked over the bird checklist for Valco Ponds and Rock Canyon, and who bird this area regularly and keep me updated on what is around: Mymm Ackley, Leon Bright, Rich Miller, Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, Dave Silverman, Clif Smith, Van Truan, and Mark Yaeger. Also, thanks to Dave Leatherman, Kara Lewantowicz and Van Truan for giving me important information about the insects mentioned in this paper, and to Dave Leatherman and Joe Mammoser for answering my question about the Zone-tailed Hawk. Thanks to Van Truan for reviewing earlier drafts of this paper and for his helpful comments on Russian-olives and salt cedars.

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A Record of “Type 3” Red Crossbill in Colorado

Andrew Spencer

Few subjects in North American bird taxonomy are as vexing and complex as that of the Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*). The most current research shows the presence of up to nine broadly sympatric populations, distinguished in some cases by structural characters, but most reliably by flight call (Groth 1993). Hybridization between at least some of the sympatric “types” is extremely rare (Benkman 2007), and some believe that multiple species comprise what is currently considered Red Crossbill.

In the Colorado mountains two types of Red Crossbill are widespread: type 2 and type 5 (e.g., Benkman 2007, Pieplow 2007). Additionally, type 4 birds have occurred, though they are far less common (Adkisson 1996, T. Hahn pers. comm.).

On 3 July 2007, I was hiking in spruce-fir forest just below treeline near Slumgullion Pass in Hinsdale County when I encountered a flock of five crossbills. I obtained a brief (ca. 45 second) recording of their flight calls. Upon analyzing the calls with sonograms, I was surprised to find that they did not match type 5, the expected type for spruce-fir forest, but rather type 3, hitherto undocumented in the state. Two slight variations on the type 3 calls were recorded from the flock (Figs. 1-2); no calls of other types were recorded. Documentation of this record has been submitted to the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC); if accepted, it will provide a first record of type 3 Red Crossbill for Colorado.

Figure 3 shows a typical type 3 flight call for comparison with the Hinsdale County birds. Note the inverted “N” shape of type 3, somewhat like a kinked type 2 call (e.g., Fig. 4, rightmost calls) without the longer downslurred components at the beginning and end. A very few type 2 calls can approach the shape of type 3 (Fig. 4, leftmost calls), but they do not show two peaks that are even with each other at a frequency of around 5.5 kHz, nor the large frequency range from approximately 3 to 5.5 kHz in both downslurred components. To human ears, type 3 calls sound much like those of type 5 (Fig. 5), and they can be difficult to distinguish from that type without the aid of spectrographic analysis.

Type 3 crossbills are among the widespread North American types; they are adapted to feed on the cones of hemlock (*Tsuga* spp., Groth 1993; Benkman 2007) and also feed frequently on Sitka Spruce (*Pi-*

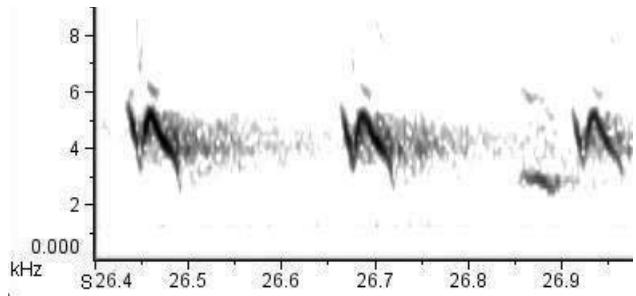


Fig. 1. First example of Type 3 flight calls, Hinsdale County, 3 July 2007. Recording by Andrew Spencer

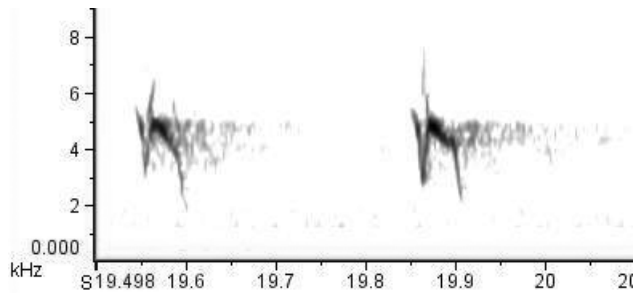


Fig. 2. Second example of Type 3 flight calls, Hinsdale County, 3 July 2007. Recording by Andrew Spencer

cea sitchensis, T. Hahn, pers. comm.). Visually, this is the type with the smallest bill, but in practice it probably cannot be reliably identified on that character alone. Close to Colorado, type 3 crossbills are most commonly found in the Pacific Northwest, but there are specimens from both Arizona and New Mexico (Benkman 2007). Groth (1993) also lists a sound recording from the Pinaleno Mountains of southeastern Arizona. At least occasionally, this type also shows up in northern Wyoming; the summer of 2006 through the spring of 2007 saw an invasion into the Jackson Hole area, with type 3 birds “all over the place and breeding” (T. Hahn, pers. comm.). Anecdotal evidence exists for records of type 3 in Colorado, but documentation, to my knowledge, does not. Since hemlocks do not occur naturally in Colorado, it is unlikely that this type breeds or is even regular in the state. It could, however, potentially feed on seeds from other small-coned trees such as spruces and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*, Benkman 2007).

The summer of 2007 was characterized by an excellent Engelmann

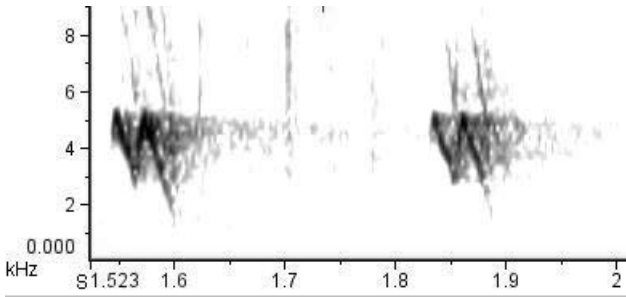


Fig. 3. Typical Type 3 flight calls for comparison. Captive bird, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, 20 August 1989. Recording by Craig Benkman

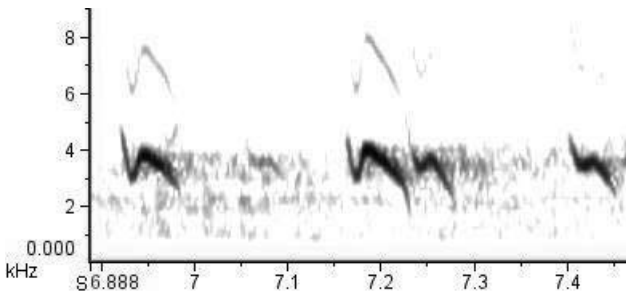


Fig. 4. Aberrant Type 2 flight calls, 13 July 2007, Montezuma County. Recording by Andrew Spencer. The calls of the foreground bird (leftmost two calls) resemble Type 3 in shape, but note difference in frequency. The calls of the background bird (rightmost two calls) are more typical of Type 2.

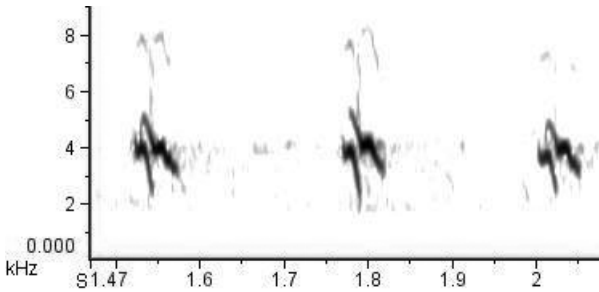


Fig. 5. Typical Type 5 flight calls for comparison, Conejos County, 2 July 2007. Recording by Andrew Spencer

Spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) cone crop, and crossbills were correspondingly abundant (pers. obs.). The type 3 birds that invaded Wyoming in 2006 and 2007 were utilizing spruce cones and “apparently doing very well” (T. Hahn, pers. comm.). Given the extremely nomadic nature of Red Crossbills in search of seed crops, it is likely that type 3 crossbills wander into Colorado at times; the excellent spruce cone crop may have enticed the birds I recorded to stay in Colorado at least for a while. Over the course of the summer I observed and recorded approximately fifty flocks of crossbills; the calls of all of these other flocks were composed of either type 2 or type 5 birds.

Birders looking for future occurrences of type 3 crossbills in Colorado would probably be best served by looking in areas with abundant spruce or Douglas-fir cones. Since crossbills rarely if ever feed on the cones of true firs (*Abies* spp.) due to resins in the seeds (C. Benkman, pers. comm.), cone crops in those trees are unlikely to affect crossbill populations in the state. Given the erratic nature of the occurrence of any Red Crossbill population, the next record could occur at any time of year, but perhaps winter would offer the best chances. From what is known of the range of type 3, the northern part of the state would perhaps be the best place to look. Audio recordings would be important in identification.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors thank Craig Benkman, Tom Hahn, and Larry Semo for their technical reviews of this paper.

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Colorado's First Record of Lawrence's Goldfinch

Larry Arnold

Abstract

This account details the occurrence of Lawrence's Goldfinch (*Carduelis lawrencei*) in Mesa County, Colorado, between 23 May and 24 July 2007. The bird, a male, was observed by nearly 200 birders from 14 states across the country, and was likely photographed more than any other individual of this species. Although seasonal movements of this species are unpredictable, it often moves eastward from southern California during winter months, so most birders would have considered winter to be the most likely time of year for this bird to appear in western Colorado. The Colorado bird appeared at least 250 miles north of the nearest documented occurrence of this species at Shiprock, New Mexico. Of further interest, this male Lawrence's actively pair-bonded with a female Lesser Goldfinch (*C. psaltria*); hybridization was suspected but not confirmed. Documentation of this record has been submitted to and formally accepted by the Colorado Bird Records Committee (see page 38 of this journal).

Introduction

The odd-looking goldfinch I saw atop my thistle feeders for a few seconds at 8:00 p.m. on 23 May 2007 left me in a predicament. How could a male Lawrence's Goldfinch possibly be in my backyard in Grand Junction? Who would believe me, especially if the bird never returned? After living in England, Germany, and Alaska, taking thousands of photos and slides, I had given up my photography addiction and equipment years before, so I was not prepared to "snap" or "shoot" this bird. But I had seen male and female Lawrence's Goldfinches in Arizona and California on at least six prior occasions, so I was certain of its identification. However, the nearest location in which I had ever seen one was along the Santa Clara River in Tucson, Arizona during an eastward winter irruption early in 2003, and that was at least 500 miles west-southwest of Grand Junction.

Within ten minutes of my original sighting I called Coen Dexter and told him that a) I should probably find another hobby (passion? obsession?) because I could not believe what I had just seen, and b) I needed serious psychotherapy! Eventually, 30 minutes later, he convinced me that I should "put out the word" on this bird. I posted a blurb locally but decided I needed an obsessive birder, a county

lister perhaps, to come see and possibly photograph this bird as soon as possible. When the bird returned at 6:00 a.m. the following morning, I started calling “normal” people who were trying to sleep, then finally decided to call Vic Zerbi in Glenwood Springs. I started the phone call with an apology about calling him so early and waking him. Ha! He wasn’t in bed. He wasn’t even home. He was exiting I-70 at nearby Clifton to look for an American Bittern that Ron Lambeth had found on the Mesa County Spring Count. So he swerved right instead of left and came directly to our house in the Redlands. It required several hours, I believe, and two visits that morning before Vic got to see our Lawrence’s Goldfinch, but he saw it well for five-plus minutes. “A spankin’ male,” he proclaimed!

Vic immediately called several other West-Slope birders because he and I were both away from our computers and neither of us could post his confirmation sighting. Late that morning I got a call from Forrest Luke requesting permission to post the bird on the West Slope Birding Network (WSBN). For the remainder of the day (24 May), there was quite a gathering of West-Slope birders on my patio and they all got to see the bird. A little later that day, Front-Range birders began showing up and they too eventually all saw the bird, though a few had to stay overnight and try again the following morning. Soon the bird was being listed on the state Rare Bird Alert (RBA) and must have shown up on national lists, because people began coming from the east coast to see it. Per our guest log, 93% of visiting birders saw our bird, and many claimed it was a life bird.

OBSERVATIONS

Physical Description

The subject bird was of the same general size and proportions as Lesser and American (*C. tristis*) Goldfinches, but at first look in good light, the male *lawrencei* was strikingly different from the other two finches in being mostly pale gray with obvious splashes of yellow and in having a black face. On closer study, the black face accented a flesh-colored, conical bill, and the black face area included the crown, forehead, lores, chin, and center of the throat. The back was subtly tinged with olive-green, and the central portion of the chest was bright yellow, as were the wingbars. In flight, a large amount of yellow on the wings was obvious. Note that this species does not have an alternate plumage; recent research has shown that Lawrence’s has only one molt per year, a prebasic molt in fall (Willoughby et al., 2002). The more extensive black cap and yellow breast of a spring bird results from abrasion and fading.

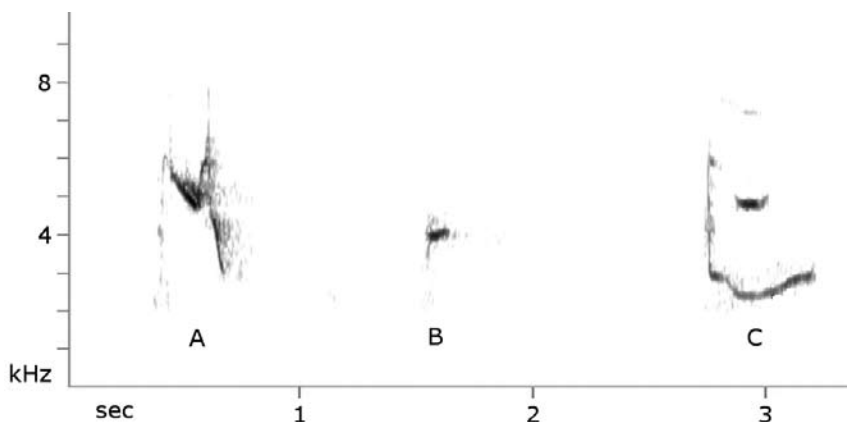


Fig. 1. Sonogram of three calls given by the Lawrence's Goldfinch, Grand Junction, CO, 12 July 2007. Recording by Andrew Spencer

Vocalizations

Descriptions of Lawrence's Goldfinch vocalizations in the field guides did not help me with identification, because to me this bird sounded much like a Lesser Goldfinch, especially in its call notes, described as a nasal "too-err" (Sibley, 2000) and in its flight calls, described as "tink-ul" (Davis, 1999) or "ti-too" (Sibley, 2000). A few visiting birders said they could tell the two species apart, but after I was fooled a few times I decided to be careful when calling this bird by vocals alone and to check the thistle feeders and plants every time I heard an apparent Lesser Goldfinch vocalization. Both Lawrence's and Lesser are accomplished at copying calls and song segments of other species of birds, which might serve as an index of fitness to females of their respective species (Remsen et al., 1982). Lawrence's is a more accomplished vocalist than Lesser and copies segments of vocalizations of as many as 47 species of birds (Davis, 1999; see also Coutlee, 1971).

The following discussion was provided courtesy of Nathan Pieplow (pers. comm.). Both Lawrence's and Lesser Goldfinches have distinctive call notes that are rarely mimicked by the other species, and then only in song. The sonogram provided by Andrew Spencer (Figure 1) reveals three calls that the Grand Junction Lawrence's gave (A, B, and C). B is the typical Lawrence's flight call. C is somewhat similar to the Lawrence's courtship call and may be a variant of it. Call A does not match known calls of Lawrence's. Since this Lawrence's was apparently paired with a female Lesser, it is possible that the Lawrence's could have been mimicking a Lesser call, since cardueline



Lawrence's Goldfinch, Grand Junction, Mesa County,
25 May 2007. Photo by Andrew Spencer

finches of both sexes have been shown to match the call notes of their mates even when paired with a mate of another species (Mundinger, 1970). However, call A does not match any known calls of Lesser either, so it remains a mystery. It was only recorded once, while B and C were given more frequently.

Other Behaviors

During the first few days that our male Lawrence's Goldfinch was in Grand Junction (23-25 May), the bird arrived at our thistle feeders by itself at one- to three-hour intervals and fed for periods ranging from 15 seconds to more than five minutes. On 26 May, it began arriving with a male-female pair of Lesser Goldfinches; it fed comfortably with the female but consistently worked on displacing the male from the feeders and nearby area. On 27-28 May, the male Lawrence's Goldfinch routinely followed a female Lesser Goldfinch to and from our feeders at 30- to 60-minute intervals, not departing until she did even though it appeared he had finished feeding before she had. He followed her into nearby Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) trees, perched a few feet away from her, and continued to displace the male Lesser Goldfinch that was also following her.

On the morning of 1 June, he came to our feeders all day long, following a female Lesser Goldfinch everywhere she went. At 11:00 a.m. that day, the pair was in view for nearly five minutes, and when she departed, he followed her to a Siberian elm tree and perched close beside her, about 15 feet away from me. They soon displayed "rapid mandibulation" (also termed "billing"), which is reportedly an important step in the process of pair bonding among cardueline finches (Coutlee, 1968a). After billing for 5-10 seconds they departed, with the male Lawrence's Goldfinch following the female Lesser.

On some occasions, my wife Missy and I observed the male Lawrence's Goldfinch and the female Lesser Goldfinch perching, resting,

and grooming together in honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) trees in our yard. We have observed Lesser Goldfinches nesting in these particular trees in prior years, so we watched these locations intently but found no evidence of nesting therein.

Between 3 and 8 July, multiple entries appeared in our visitors' log regarding observations of odd-plumaged juvenile goldfinches and of begging birds being fed by our male Lawrence's Goldfinch. I have done the math and worked through the time requirements for a complete breeding phenology (Ehrlich et al., 1988; Kaufman, 1988; Sibley, 2001), and projected that hybrid juveniles could have been present by the first week in July. In sum, our male Lawrence's could have been involved in an interspecific mating, and it appeared that he was feeding begging juvenile goldfinches that had an overall grayish coloration rather than the olive color that is typical of *psaltria* juveniles.

During the course of its stay, the Lawrence's Goldfinch made use of our drip water source two times that we are aware of, hanging upside down to catch water drops at the source, just like other finch species do. We also observed it foraging among our plantings for seed, feeding on chocolate flower (*Berlandiera lyrata*), *Delphinium*, and *Agastache* species very much like the other goldfinch species, gleaning seeds while perched on the seed-bearing plant or a suitable nearby support.

On one rainy day (12 June) we had four cardueline finch species, (Pine Siskin, *C. pinus*, and Lesser, Lawrence's, and American Goldfinches) at our feeders within a 45-minute period, which is a highly improbable event given their diverse breeding ranges and habitat preferences.

Habitat

Our immediate area in the Redlands is arid (averaging about 8" precipitation annually), and our backyard ravine is about 70% open with a few scattered wooded areas. There are rock outcroppings with depressions that I drip water into for wildlife. Local vegetation includes cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), Russian-olive (*Elaeagnus augustifolia*), a few juniper (*Juniperus*) and poplar (*Populus*) trees, big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), skunkbush (*Rhus trilobata*), crescent milkvetch (*Astragalus amphioxys*), cactus species, native bunchgrass species, numerous shrubs we have planted like serviceberry (*Amelanchier*), *Viburnum*, *Lonicera*, chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*), and more than 20 species of hummingbird or "ornithophilous" (bird-pollinated) plants, the favorites among our

hummingbirds being *Salvia*, *Penstemon*, and *Agastache* species. We have also planted several patches of chocolate flower, also known as lyreleaf greeneyes (*Berlandiera lyrata*), because they are xeric and smell like chocolate; we had no idea they would become a preferred seed source for our goldfinches, Lesser Goldfinch in particular. I routinely feed birds year-round with black oil sunflower seed, niger thistle, cracked corn, and sometimes peanuts (shelled and unshelled) and typical songbird mixes containing other seeds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Breeding Behavior

(from Coutlee, 1968a and 1968b, except where noted):

Two populations of Lesser Goldfinch have different annual cycles (phenologies) of molt, breeding, and migration (Watt and Willoughby, 1999): those in California and Oregon (*C. p. hesperophila*) breed from April to August and do not migrate, whereas those in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Mexico (*C. p. psaltria*) breed from May to October and show probable migration from April to July and September to November. Note, however,

that our Colorado Lesser Goldfinch population demonstrates features of both subspecies, and very few individuals may be referable solely to one subspecies or the other (B. Maynard pers. comm.); in fact, recent work on this topic suggests that current subspecific designation of this species in North America may be invalid (Willoughby, 2007). I mention these points only in the context of whether Lawrence's could breed on the same cycle as Lesser Goldfinches breeding in Colorado.

In southern California (Placerita Canyon), Lawrence's and Lesser Goldfinches are sympatric and their breeding cycles overlap almost perfectly between April and September. Pair formation in both species follows a similar course: a) "following flights"

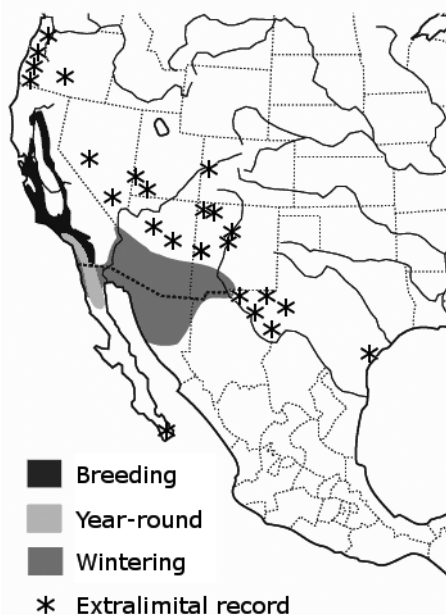


Fig. 2. Range of Lawrence's Goldfinch, showing approximate distribution of extralimital records. Adapted from Davis (1999)

accompanied by courtship calls, b) high-intensity “chasing flights” followed by perching in close proximity, c) “billing” and “rapid mandibulation” as male and female become more tolerant of each other, and d) courtship feeding accompanied by contact calls.

In its usual breeding range, Lawrence’s Goldfinch typically nests from April to September in arid and open oak (*Quercus*) woodlands with chaparral or other brush, tall annual weed fields, and a water source within 500 meters, whereas Lesser Goldfinch will nest in a broader range of habitats, including chaparral, with water farther away (up to 800 meters). Lawrence’s Goldfinch breeding territories are generally smaller (10-15 meters in diameter) than those of Lesser Goldfinch (30 meters in diameter). Both species show a tendency to nest in loose colonies. Although Lawrence’s Goldfinch usually nests higher above the ground than Lesser Goldfinch does, there is some interspecific competition for nest sites in Placerita Canyon. Sometimes they are found nesting in the same tree. Nevertheless, there is no record of interbreeding between Lawrence’s Goldfinch and other goldfinch species, either in the wild or in captivity, whereas Lesser Goldfinch and American Goldfinch have interbred in captivity (J. Davis, pers. comm.).

Occurrence of Lawrence’s Goldfinch Outside of California

Figure 2 shows the typical seasonal distributions of Lawrence’s Goldfinch and also shows approximate locations of extralimital records. Note that “extralimital” records within California are excluded from this discussion.

Mexico—This species breeds as far south as 30° N in the state of Baja California and winters occasionally in Sonora and northwestern Chihuahua (Davis, 1999). There is an extralimital specimen record from southern Baja California, 5 November 1968 (Davis, 1999).

Oregon—There are six known occurrences of Lawrence’s Goldfinch in the southwestern part of the state (H. Nehls, pers. comm.). Two records have been accepted by the state records committee (OBRC): 1) one in Lane County, 24 December 1991 through 11 January 1992 (this is the northernmost accepted record for the species); and 2) one bird in Jackson County in May 1997. Three other reports are being evaluated by the OBRC, all backed up with photos: 1) one in Roseburg, Douglas County on 28 August 2003; 2) one at Goose Lake, Lake County, on 11 August 2007; and 3) one bird at Winston, Douglas County, 17 September to 3 October 2007. Another bird was reported on 29 September 2007 in Jackson County; documentation has not yet been submitted to the OBRC.

Nevada—There have been several occurrences of Lawrence’s

Goldfinch in the state (NBRC 2007, M. Meyers, pers. comm.). One report has been accepted by the records committee (NBRC): a bird at Corn Creek, Clark County, on 17 October 2002. Three additional reports are pending action by the NBRC, but all three look like very good records, as two of them are backed up by photos and the third comes from an experienced birder (M. Meyers, pers. comm.): 1) a bird at Dyer, Esmeralda County, on 23 September 2007; 2) a bird at Corn Creek, Clark County, on 28 September 2006; and 3) a bird at Spring Mountain State Park, Clark County, on 30 September 2007. Two other records may be credible sightings, but were not reported to NBRC: 1) a female in Tonopah, Nye County, on 22 May 2001; and 2) a male seen by many birders over several days in Fernley, Lyon County, 9-29 March 2003. A search of NVBirds archives at <<http://list.audubon.org/wa.exe?s1=nvbirds>> reveals a few other reports that have not been submitted to the NBRC.

Utah—There are five known occurrences of Lawrence's Goldfinch in the extreme southwestern part of the state (T. Avery, pers. comm.). Records for two birds were submitted to the state records committee (UBRC): 1) a male at Chekshani Cliffs, Iron County, 2-3 October 2002; and 2) a male in Dammeron Valley, Washington County, 20-31 March 2007. A male was reported at the same locality in Dammeron Valley, 3-5 September 2007; this is suspected of being the March bird returning to the same locality. Three other credible reports originate from the same general area: 1) a pair of birds at Kanarraville, Iron County, 12-15 October 2004; 2) a male at Lytle Ranch, Washington County, on 16 October 2004; and 3) an adult male that was netted and photographed below Gunlock Dam, Washington County, on 7 May 2004.

Arizona—Lawrence's Goldfinch occurs irregularly in southern and central Arizona between October and April, but during the summer of 2002, an unprecedented 12 individual birds were detected in eight scattered southeast Arizona localities between 23 June and 26 July (Corman and Radamaker, 2005). Through mid-2005, there were fewer than five credible records of Lawrence's Goldfinch from north of the Mogollon Rim, and Apache County (bordering Colorado at Four Corners) remains the only county without a record. There have been nine records of breeding activity from 1952 through 2005, all in the southwest quadrant of the state. Arizona's breeding records have come primarily from lowland riparian woodlands dominated by Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), Goodding willow (*Salix gooddingii*), tamarisk (*Tamarix*), and mesquite (*Prosopis*). All sites were directly adjacent to perennial water sources, and ranged in elevation from 50 to 970 meters.

New Mexico—Outside of the breeding season, Lawrence's Goldfinch occurs irregularly in the southwestern part of the state, and rarely into the central part of New Mexico. There are two records of Lawrence's Goldfinch from San Juan County in the northwestern corner of the state, adjacent to Colorado (S. Williams, pers. comm.): 1) a male well described at Shiprock on 24 May 1975, following a large invasion into Arizona; and 2) a male photographed at Bloomfield on 17 October 1996. Otherwise, the most northerly New Mexico records are 1) a male well described at Sandia Knolls, Bernalillo County, on 26 October 1968; and 2) a male well described in the Rio



Lawrence's Goldfinch, Grand Junction, Mesa County, 20 July 2007. Photo by Dave Leatherman

Grande Valley at Corrales, Sandoval County, 9-12 March 2005. More recently, a male was present for a considerable period, 19 July through 6 September 2007, ten miles northwest of Datil in Catron County (J. Hardie, pers. comm.). This bird, like ours, was absent for a period of time (6-17 August), but returned and stayed for a while.

Texas—Most occurrences of Lawrence's Goldfinch have been in El Paso County, but occasionally they have occurred east to Hudspeth County and south to Presidio County, all during winter months (Davis, 1999). Searching online among the TBRC Annual Reports since 1994 (TBRC 2006), I found 39 records in El Paso County, six records in Hudspeth County, one record of a male in Guadalupe Mountains National Park in Culberson County (this is the state's only summer record, from 5-7 June 2002), two records in Jeff Davis County, ten records in Presidio County, and nine records in Brewster County, for a total of 67 records in the Trans-Pecos region of the state since 1994. Finally, the most interesting and easternmost record is of a male at Rockport, Aransas County, 21-22 February 2005.

Discussion

When extralimital records of Lawrence's Goldfinch are mapped

(Figure 2), it looks like our western Colorado occurrence is a natural extension of recent reports in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. In my humble opinion, there is much underbirded territory west and south of Grand Junction, so who knows if our bird was that exceptional?

Considering the seasonality of the nearest known reports of this species, it seems much more likely that our bird should have been here during the period of October-April rather than May-July. Away from its usual breeding range in California (and occasionally in southern Arizona), nearly all sightings of Lawrence's have been single-day events. Only three sightings have been documented during June-July, and of these the sighting in Texas was for three days only. The two long-term sightings occurring in June and/or July both happened during 2007: the Colorado bird (male staying 63 days) and one in Catron County, New Mexico (male staying 50 days).

Our backyard ravine is not unlike the open oak woodlands of southern California. Although Lawrence's Goldfinch shows a strong preference for the seeds of fiddleneck (*Amsinckia*) when available in spring and summer, their diet in fall and winter varies mostly by region and includes chamise (*Adenostoma*), pigweed (*Amaranthus*), thistle (*Centaurea*), and other plants (Davis, 1999). In our yard, I believe Lawrence's Goldfinch developed an appreciation for seeds of *Berlandiera lyrata* by observing Lesser Goldfinch individuals feeding on these plants.

Some of the interactions we observed between Lawrence's Goldfinch and Lesser Goldfinch have not been reported in the literature. According to Coutlee (1968a), male Lawrence's Goldfinch is generally submissive to male Lesser Goldfinch (18 of 19 interspecific encounters), even though Lesser Goldfinch is the smaller of the two species. Note that this is the opposite of what I observed at my thistle feeders, where the male Lawrence's Goldfinch consistently displaced male Lesser Goldfinches (17 of 19 encounters).

This paper is apparently the first to document and report inter-specific pair-bonding behaviors between Lawrence's Goldfinch and Lesser Goldfinch, e.g., following-flights and billing, and these behaviors suggest possible interbreeding. We were very attentive to where the birds were going when they departed from our yard, trying to establish whether they might be nesting. On several occasions we observed the male Lawrence's feeding other birds that appeared to be fledglings. As intriguing as this was, we were unable to locate a nest, nor were we able to show that hybrid offspring were produced. I have found nothing in the literature to suggest that cardueline finches feed offspring of sibling species they did not produce.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Hosting this Lawrence's Goldfinch for two months, sharing it with so many birders, and hearing of their travel adventures in getting here has been a great experience, at times exciting, energizing, and entertaining. I owe sincere thanks to the following persons. Coen Dexter and Dick Filby convinced me to post the bird. My wife Missy calmed me down and confirmed the bird's identification on its second appearance on 24 May. Vic Zerbi was the first person known by the birding community to confirm my sighting (24 May). Brenda Wright was first to get photographic evidence (24 May). The interactions between the male Lawrence's Goldfinch and the female Lesser Goldfinch were first noted in our guest book (the LAGO log) by Bill and Inez Prather. Special thanks to all visiting birders who recorded their observations, and to visiting photographers who emailed me photos of the bird. Communications with Tim Avery, Jeff Davis, Gregg Goodrich, Joan Hardie, Rich Levad, Bill Maynard, Harry Nehls, Mark Peterson, John Toolen, Martin Meyers, and S. O. Williams were particularly instructional and insightful. Nathan Pieplow provided insightful research for the section on vocalizations and provided a thorough review of this paper. Finally, thanks to Jeff Davis and Larry Semo for their technical reviews of this paper.

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CBRC REPORT

The 45th Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee: New Additions to the State List

Lawrence S. Semo

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

Introduction

This 45th report presents the results of deliberations of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) on records of three species previously unknown from the state: Black-chinned Sparrow (*Spizella atrogularis*), Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*), and Lawrence's Goldfinch (*Carduelis lawrencei*). 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 4 or 5 accept votes have transcended to a second round of deliberations, and results of those records will be published at a later date.

The documents reviewed bring the state total to **485**. One potentially new species to the state list is still pending within the CBRC: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*).

Committee members voting on these reports were Coen Dexter,

Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Rachel Hopper, Joey Kellner, Ric Olson, and Larry Semo.

Committee News

The second consecutive term of Ric Olson expired at the end of 2007. Bill Maynard has been selected as a new Committee member and can serve two consecutive three-year terms. Bill's first term will expire at the end of 2010. Doug Faulkner and Joey Kellner finished their first terms at the end of 2007 and will remain on the Committee; their new terms will expire in 2010.

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, 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 48th Supplement (Banks et al. 2007). 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 that submitted videotape are indicated by a lower-case, italicized "v" (v), and those who submitted sonograms 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 that 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 three rounds of voting, the first-round vote was four "accept" votes and three "do not accept" votes, the second-round vote was 5-2 in favor of accepting the report, and, since this report was listed in Part I, the report was accepted at a CBRC meeting. 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 (e.g., Semo and Wood 2003). 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.

Errata

The accession number for the accepted record of Black Rail (*Latrallus jamaicensis*) from *Prowers* published in Semo (2007) was erroneously noted as 2005-96. The actual accession number for that record should be 2005-153.

The Black Brant photo on p. 245 of issue 40:4 was incorrectly credited to Doug Faulkner; it was taken by Jay Gilliam.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

HOODED ORIOLE – *Icterus cucullatus* (1/1). An alternate-plumaged male foraged among Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), and trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), often elusively, at and near the residence of Sheldon Zwicker near Cortez, Montezuma, between 18 June and at least 14 July 2006. Although the bird was originally found on 18 June, the CBRC received documentation only for the period starting 19 June (RH †, JK †, BM †, BKP †, NP, AS †, CW †, NE, JR; 2006-102; 7-0). The typical icterid structure was well noted and documented, as were the black face and throat, yellow-to-orange body, and black wings with a large white shoulder bar along the median coverts. The subject bird differed from Altamira Oriole (*I. gularis*), the most similar species, by being considerably

smaller and longer-billed, by the pattern of the black mask, and by the lack of white at the base of the primaries.

Hooded Orioles normally range from southern Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and western California south to southern Mexico and Belize and are racially segregated into five subspecies: *I. c. cucullatus*, *I. c. sennetti*, *I. c. igneus*, *I. c. nelsoni*, and *I. c. trochiloides* (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). The nominate race (*cucullatus*) ranges from the central Rio Grande in Texas south through Mexico to Oaxaca and Veracruz. It is very orange overall and has a relatively short bill and longish tail. The *sennetti* group occurs from the lower Rio Grande south along the Gulf Coastal plain into central Tamaulipas in Mexico. *Sennetti* birds are similar to *cucullatus*, except that males are distinctly paler and more yellow. The northwestern form of Hooded

Oriole, *nelsoni*, ranges from central California south to northern Baja California and east through southern Nevada, extreme southwestern Utah, central and southern Arizona, and southwestern New Mexico south to southern Sonora, Mexico. *Nelsoni* populations are noticeably more yellow than *cucullatus* (even yellower than *sennetti*), have longer and more slender bills than the other two



Hooded Oriole, McElmo Creek, Montezuma County, 19 June 2006. Photo by Brandon Percival

aforementioned races, and have longer wings and shorter tails than *cucullatus* and *sennetti*. The other two subspecies (*igneus* and *trochiloides*) are restricted to areas south of the U.S. Male *igneus* are even brighter orange than *cucullatus* and occur from southern Mexico to Belize. *Trochiloides* are found in southern Baja California and, although similar in color to *nelsoni*, are even longer- and thinner-billed (Jaramillo and Burke 1999).

Although its subspecific identity was not established, the Colorado bird was likely most closely allied with populations of *nelsoni* based on its plumage and structural components, including its long bill, relatively short tail, and yellow pattern. The location of the bird also suggests *nelsoni*, as that is the race that breeds immediately south of and nearest to the discovery site. Hooded Orioles have demonstrated patterns of vagrancy relatively often, with presumed *nelsoni* wandering northward to Washington and British Columbia (Jaramillo and Burke 1999).

LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH – *Carduelis lawrencei* (1/1). An alternate-plumaged male graced Larry Arnold's feeder in Grand Junction, Mesa, where present and documented between the period 23 May and 24



Hooded Oriole, McElmo Creek, Montezuma County, 19 June 2006. Photo by Brandon Percival

July 2007 (LA, PG, GG †, RH †, BM †, NP; 2007-38; 7-0). As the bird was in alternate plumage, the Committee had no concerns over its specific identity. Lawrence's Goldfinches occasionally irrupt eastward during the winter, and this species had been predicted to occur in Colorado, but not during the summer period. Examination of photographs of the bird did not provide any indication of captive origin, as feather shape was excellent and consistent with the time of year. Review of nearby states indicated that other late Lawrence's Goldfinches were present out-of-range as well in 2007. A male was present at Dammeron Valley, Washington, in southwestern Utah during late March (Davis 2007), with the same or a different bird photographed at the same location in early September. In New Mexico, meanwhile, an alternate-plumaged male turned up at a feed-

er in the Datil Mountains, *Catron*, which is in the west-central portion of the state, on 19 July and remained at that location until 5 August (UA 2007). Considering that other Lawrence's Goldfinches were present earlier out-of-range and out-of-date, the presence of an individual in western Colorado is at least somewhat supported by a seasonal vagrancy pattern of the species.

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW – *Spizella atrogularis* (1/1). One was photographed on private property south of Lamar, *Prowers*, on 16 September 2006 (JS †; 2006-128; 5-2, 6-1). Although little narrative description was provided to the Committee, the photograph, though of poor quality, convinced the majority of members through a second round of voting to accept the record as the first confirmed for the state. Based on the photograph, the sparrow had a solid charcoal-gray head, the color of which extended to the chest, then faded slightly whiter on the lower belly. The mantle and wings were medium brown, and the greater coverts showed pale tips that provided a very weak single wingbar. The tail appeared gray and very long. Those features are entirely consistent with Black-chinned Sparrow and not any age/sex combination of any other North

American emberizid. An enlargement of the photo showed a pale bill, although the extent and precise color were not obvious due to shadowing and low resolution.

Black-chinned Sparrows inhabit brushy, arid slopes across fragmented areas of the southwestern and western U.S. and western Mexico. Three races are currently recognized: the nominate, which occurs in Mexico only; *S. a. cana*, the widespread southwestern U.S. type; and *S. a. caurina*, a subspecies occurring along the central California coast. Plumage and morphometric differences between the races are weak and clinal, and separation is considered difficult (Pyle 1997). The species is regular in suitable habitat from central California east to southern Nevada, southeastern Utah, southeastern Arizona, and southwestern New Mexico; northeastward to north-central New



Lawrence's Goldfinch, Grand Junction, Mesa County, 25 May 2007. Photo by Andrew Spencer

Mexico; and southward through westernmost Texas to central Mexico. Although vagrancy is infrequent, the species has occurred extraliminally in southern Oregon and central Texas and episodic invasions have occurred into northern California (Tenney 1997). A possible sighting of one came from near Boise City, Oklahoma, on 21 June 2001 (Shackford 2003). In New Mexico, breeding records extend north to Taos County, San Miguel County, and probably San Juan County (New Mexico Partners in Flight 2007); Taos and San Juan counties border southern Colorado. Historically, the species has bred along the Canadian River Gorge north to Colfax County and in the Rio Grande Gorge at least as far north as the Orilla Verde area; it may also breed along the Canadian escarpment in San Miguel and Harding Counties (J. Oldenettel, pers. comm.). Extralimital records in New Mexico include one in December 1994 near Clayton, Union County, and one in May 2004 at Amistad, Union County (J. Oldenettel, pers. comm.). The species may also be increasing in population in New Mexico (Tenney 1997). Based on adjacency, it is presumed, although not proven, that the Colorado bird was a member of *cana*, the southwestern race.

As the species occurs near southern Colorado, it was not unexpected that the species would eventually be confirmed for the state. The CBRC has reviewed, but not accepted, three prior reports of the species: from near Louisville, *Boulder*, on 15 December 1973; from near Berthoud, *Larimer*,

on 26 November 1980; and from Hotchkiss, *Delta*, in mid-May 1998. During this current circulation, the CBRC also reviewed a 2005 heard-only report of a Black-chinned Sparrow from Colorado National Monument in *Mesa*. That report was not accepted and a discussion of that record is presented below.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

The Committee recognizes that its decisions may upset some observers. We heartily acknowledge that those who make the effort to submit documentation certainly care whether or not their reports are accepted. However, non-accepted records do not necessarily suggest that the birder misidentified or did not see the species. A non-accepted record only indicates that the documentation was not complete or convincing enough to catalogue on the list of confirmed bird records for the state. Non-accepted reports may provide evidence that do not mention certain requisite field marks or indicate that the conditions of the observation did not permit the proper study of all necessary traits. All non-accepted records are archived at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. We summarize below why the following reports were not accepted.

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW
– On 24 May 2005, a highly experienced Colorado birder detected a trill song emanating from within Colorado National Monument near Grand Junction. Based on the observer's experience with the species and its song, the song was believed to be that

of a Black-chinned Sparrow. Unfortunately, the observer was able to see the bird in flight only briefly and was not able to make any field determinations based on visual traits. Although

the species certainly may have been at that location, the description of the song provided little evidence to determine the veracity of the record (2005-151; 2-5).

Reporters and Cited Observers

The CBRC graciously thanks the following individuals for submitting records of rare species in Colorado that prompted this circulation: LA: Larry Arnold; JB: Jason Beason; NE: Norm Erthal; PG: Peter Gent; GG: Gregg Goodrich; RH: Rachel Hopper; JK: Joey Kellner; BM: Bill Maynard; BKP: Brandon Percival; NP: Nathan Pieplow; JR: Joe Roller; AS: Andrew Spencer; JS: Jane Stulp; and CW: Cole Wild.

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Bushtit Nest Log

Mike Henwood

Ed. Hugh Kingery

We saw Bushtits in Bear Creek Lake Park (BCLP), Jefferson County, Colorado, in the fall of 2006. The first fall date was 17 August 2006, and we saw a small flock regularly in September and October. Snow blanketed BCLP during the winter (December – February), and we saw very little bird activity. On 21 March 2007, Rob Raker (RR) and Mike Henwood (MH) discovered a pair of Bushtits building a nest near the top of a boxelder tree (*Acer negundo*) covered with a vine all the way to its top. The nest was about 10-12 feet off the ground and the opening near the top of the large, gourd-shaped hanging pocket faced east. It was at 5,600 feet elevation, approximately 42 yards directly south of Fitness Station # 7; UTM coordinates: 13S 0486473 43888786.

The boxelder tree was at the base of a slope which could best be described as a boxelder thicket. Other habitats close by include, within 40-50 yards, short grass prairie (which grew waist high this spring) interspersed with rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* sp.); within approximately 60 yards, a marshy area with willow (*Salix* sp.) and some cattails (*Typha* sp.); and within about 80 yards, the riparian area along Bear Creek. Other birds nesting close by include House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow Warbler, and Spotted Towhee.

Following are the notes taken by RR, MH, and Mike Foster (MF).

21 March 2007—Discovered a pair of Bushtits building a nest, early a.m. (MH, RR).

22 March 2007—No activity, but nest looked more complete than previous day (MH).

23 March 2007—Pair of Bushtits entering and exiting nest, early a.m. (MF, MH, RR).

4 to 15 April 2007—No activity (checked early a.m. on seven days; MH).

16 April 2007—Bushtit activity, about 8:00 a.m.: each bird brought a blue fan-shaped feather to the nest. Leaves had just opened on the boxelders (MH).

20 to 24 April 2007—No activity (checked early a.m. on three days; MF, MH).

26 April 2007—One bird at nest about 7:15 a.m.; between 11:40 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., one bird entered nest and left. Second bird came out of nest, lingered at entrance, then left. One bird came back and

entered the nest, stayed about 10 minutes, then left (MH).

27 April 2007—Between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m., two birds came into nest; did not see them leave. One worked on inside of entrance before dropping into nest (MH).

2 May 2007—Between 10:15 and 10:40 a.m., one Bushtit actively visited nest four times in 15 minutes, at least once with food in bill (MF).

3 May 2007—Between 9:45 and 10:15 a.m., one Bushtit active again; visited nest four times in 30 minutes; couldn't tell if it was carrying food (MF).

7 May 2007— About 12:30 p.m., both Bushtits came to nest and entered, one carrying a small feather (MH).

8 May 2007—Both Bushtits came and entered nest at 8:30 a.m.; one seemed to stay longer than the other (MH).

9 May 2007—Both Bushtits entered and exited nest at about 9:30 a.m.; one stayed inside for about 12 minutes (MH).

10 May 2007—Both Bushtits foraging about 15-20 yards from the nest between 6:30 and 6:45 a.m. No activity between 10:15 and 10:45 a.m. (MH).

11 May 2007—Between 6:30 and 6:45 a.m., both Bushtits entered and exited the nest, one carrying a feather; one bird stayed inside about 8 minutes, while the other exited quickly (MH).

12 May 2007—Between 6:15 and 6:30 a.m., one bird entered the nest and stayed about 15 minutes; the other bird then arrived and the two switched places; less than one minute later, the first bird returned and they switched places again (MH).

14 May 2007—Between 6:15 and 6:30 a.m., both birds were seen entering and exiting the nest every few minutes; one carried a green caterpillar on one trip. Between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m., both birds entered and exited the nest, but not quite as often as during the morning (every 4-5 minutes); saw one bird with a green caterpillar (MH).

The Bushtits flew into the tree below the nest, hopped up on twigs



Bushtit nest tree with Mike Henwood for comparison, 21 March 2007. Photo by Rob Raker

and branches once or twice, then entered the nest from below. At times the birds entered the nest but stayed in the exit with their tail sticking out, then went inside and came right out. When exiting, the birds flew straight out of the nest horizontally. Once the boxelder tree and vine had leafed out, the nest was very difficult to find.

Unfortunately, MH was away on family business from 15-23 May.

24 May 2007—No activity between 7:00 and 7:30 a.m. (MH).

25 May 2007—No activity between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m.; at dusk there was no activity, so I played a tape; a Bushtit responded immediately, flew into a bush about 10 yards away from me, then up to the nest for a quick look, then flew away (MH).

29 May 2007—No activity from 7:00 to 7:15 a.m. (MH).

The next time I saw Bushtits in BCLP was a small flock on 30 August 2007. I spent quite a bit of time in BCLP doing Breeding Bird Atlas work over the summer, so I'm sure I would have run across the Bushtits had they remained in the area. I presume the birds moved to higher ground in the foothills.

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FIELD NOTE

Progression of Avian Scavengers on a Fresh Elk Carcass

Kirk Huffstater

Ed. Hugh Kingery

On Monday, 5 November 2007, I was in the vicinity of an open meadow surrounded by aspens at an elevation of approximately 8,500 feet in the Routt National Forest in Rio Blanco County, Colorado; the location was near Wilson Mesa, about seven miles SSE of Hamilton (DeLorme p. 25, section C-5). The terrain at that location is quite hilly, with a mixture of aspen, fir, Gambel oak, and miscellaneous shrubs. It was an unusually warm, sunny day for that time of year, with a temperature in the low 50s.

Starting at about 11:00 a.m. that day, I had the opportunity to observe the progression of birds arriving at the remains of an elk that had been harvested by a hunter. The hunter had shot the elk a couple of hours earlier, after which he removed the meat and departed from the carcass. I moved to a location about 40 yards from the remains and settled in to watch what happened. I watched the site for around two hours, and was very interested by the sequence of avian species arriving at the carcass. Within less than two minutes after the hunter's departure, there were birds arriving for a meal of meat and fat from the remains.

It was a complete surprise to me that the first birds to arrive were Black-capped Chickadees. At least four of them fed for about ten minutes before any other birds arrived, eating animatedly as they always do; they would snatch a chunk of fat, then retreat to a nearby aspen branch to consume it. Within the subsequent five minutes or so, the initial chickadees were joined by a barrage of other small mountain species, including, in order of arrival, three Mountain Chickadees, one White-breasted Nuthatch, and three or four Red-breasted Nuthatches. For the next 15 minutes or so, these small birds were alone at the carcass, and they all got along with no inter-species issues. All four species were focusing on the same little chunks of fat, flying to nearby branches to eat them.

After this leisurely, peaceful period of commingling and consumption, the entire dynamics of the site changed. Steller's Jays arrived. At least seven of the jays moved in on the carcass within five minutes, making lots of noise and dominating the site for the next 45 minutes. The jays were quite bold and gregarious, often chasing and lunging at each other. Contrary to the smaller birds, the jays were focused on procuring small scraps of meat, not fat, and they typically ate them where they found them. Often, when a jay would obtain a larger piece, another jay or two would give chase and try to steal it away, being the mobsters that they are. The small birds stayed nearby, typically well up in the trees, and often zoomed in to grab a chunk of fat; however, the jays were definitely in charge, as evidenced by their frequent lunges at the smaller birds, chasing them away.

The next characters to arrive on the scene were three Black-billed Magpies. They were much more wary than the jays, and moved in more slowly to the carcass. The magpies were immediately understood to be the new masters of the site, with the less dominant jays keeping their distance. All the small species, as well as the jays, continued to slip in occasionally and quickly grab chunks, but the magpies were clearly not challenged by this. As with the jays, the magpies were also focused on scraps of meat, not fat, and ate them right there.

It was interesting to note that the jays stayed fairly close to the carcass when the magpies were there, as compared to the larger distance that the smaller species kept when the jays were in charge. Maybe the jays figured the magpies weren't fast or agile enough to catch them.

The final act was played out another 20 minutes later when a pair of Common Ravens arrived at the scene, taking charge in much the same way the magpies had, and going after scraps of meat. The magpies then generally hung around where the jays had been, the jays moved back accordingly, and the little species moved out a bit too; in a way, this all appeared quite orderly, although the general locations of all the different species were tough to keep track of, since they often overlapped. The nuthatches disappeared during this stage, although the chickadees continued to hang around and sneak in for little pieces as much as possible. The jays and magpies were doing their best to sneak in to the carcass as often as they could without interfering with the ravens; generally, the ravens seemed to ignore the chickadees, but they tried to keep the jays and magpies at bay. The ravens also appeared more wary than the other species, taking quite a while to move in on the carcass and constantly scanning around for signs of danger.

About 20 minutes after the ravens arrived, I needed to leave the site, which I did grudgingly. Never during those two hours did any mammals approach the carcass, possibly since it was midday, and most scavenging mammals in that area are primarily nocturnal.

Another curious observation I made during those two hours was that both Hairy Woodpeckers and Downy Woodpeckers repeatedly flew into the aspens above the carcass, looking down at it; they were getting a good view in any way they could, including tilting sideways, craning their necks around, and even hanging upside down on branches with their necks tilted around to look downwards. I saw as many as four up there at one time, including two of each species. I had to wonder what their intentions were, since it seemed like they wanted part of the action, but they never went down for a meal. Various ideas occurred to me to explain this, including their not feeling comfortable being that close to the ground, not being in a tree, or being among various other species, or some combination of these.

It was very interesting to me to observe the progression of species that arrived at the elk carcass, as well as the various relationships among them. At least in this situation, there appeared to be a relationship between the size of the bird species and several of their

habits, including how soon they arrived at the carcass, their relative dominance (or “pecking order”), the distances they maintained from each other, their apparent wariness, what they ate, and where they ate. There is much to observe and analyze out there in the bird world.

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THE HUNGRY BIRDER

Sterling: Gateway to Northeastern Colorado

Gary Matthews

Even though this article comes too late to help those who attended the 2006 CFO annual convention in Sterling, Colorado birders will have many more opportunities to return to the northeastern part of the state. Sterling is one of your last chances for nourishment as you rush northeast on I-76 or east from Fort Collins or Crow Valley on Colorado Highway 14 to popular birding spots in Logan, Sedgwick, and Phillips counties. Tamarack Ranch SWA, Jumbo Reservoir, Red Lion SWA, Ovid Woods, and North Sterling Reservoir are just a few of the nearby birding areas described on the CFO Colorado County Birding website.

Many of the 33 restaurants listed in the Sterling Yellow Pages are familiar franchise chains such as **Arby's**, **Burger King**, **Dairy Queen**, **Domino's Pizza**, **Kentucky Fried Chicken**, **McDonald's**, **Pizza Hut**, **Quizno's**, **Sonic**, **Taco Bell**, **Village Inn**, and **Wendy's**. I will not try to sway anyone's preference for these restaurants. Instead, I will describe some of the favorite choices of the local residents that I learned about from working with them on Christmas Bird Counts and from my ventures in the Sterling area with Bill Kaempfer's groups.

If you are looking for food very early—i.e., before 5:30 a.m. or after 9:00 p.m.—there is only one 24-hour restaurant, the **Country Kitchen**, which is located in the Ramada Inn, location of the 2006 CFO convention. This restaurant offers few pluses except for its hours and the fact that it is open every day of the year. In my few



TJ Bummers, Sterling, CO. Photo by Gary Matthews

visits, I have found the food tolerable and the service slow. Their prices are in the range of \$6.00 to \$9.00.

The better local options for an early breakfast are the **J&L Café** (open at 5:15 a.m.) and **T.J. Bummers** (open at 5:30 a.m.). The large number of pickups in front of these restaurants in the early hours attests to their popularity with the locals. The J&L Café is located just north of Highway 6 at 423 North 3rd Street (the one-way street north in Sterling). It has been at this location since 1939. T.J. Bummers is on the north side of Sterling near Northeastern Junior College at 203 Broadway (Highway 138) where it intersects 2nd

Street. The breakfast fares for these two restaurants range from \$3.45 to \$7.00 and they offer breakfast all day. Their closing hours vary between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m.. We have taken advantage of their ability to hold large groups, up to 16 to 18 people, for our CBC gatherings.

For a quick start with some good coffee, you may prefer one of two coffee (espresso) houses in Sterling. The **Hot Java Café** has been near the center of town at 118 North 2nd Street for nine years. The owner, Heather, offers brewed coffees starting at \$1.60 and a variety of espresso drinks, as well as croissant and bagel sandwiches for \$5.50 and hot soups at lunch for \$2.50. Another option, **Bean There**, was just opened by Ryan Virgil in January 2007 on the west side of town at 324 West Main Street. Bean There's brewed coffees start at \$1.50; they also serve "breakfast pockets," homemade pastries, and deli sandwiches. And if you are in a hurry to get out in the field you may call in an order (970-522-1031) and pick it up at their drive-through window. The hours for the Hot Java Café are 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Bean There opens at 7:00 a.m. and closes at 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and at 10:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Both places are closed on Sunday. Both offer Wi-Fi Internet connections for free (though of course they would prefer that users make a purchase).

During summer days you will want to keep your eyes to the sky for Chimney Swifts and Mississippi Kites as you explore Sterling. And in late spring and early summer you can reliably find Barn Owls near North Sterling Reservoir. Check the cavities in the cliff bank on the south side of County Road 46 behind the large tree just east of the intersection with County Road 33. In the fall these owls seem to move to the grove of trees on the south side of North Sterling Reservoir. Bill Kaempfer's group takes the trail over the bridge on the south side of the campground for about 0.5 miles to the large grove of trees; the owls usually flush as you walk through the grove.

One of my favorite places for a hot lunch on a cold winter day is the **Wonderful House Restaurant**. This Chinese cuisine restaurant is nestled east of JCPenney in the Broadway Shopping Plaza at 100 Broadway; this is on the north side of town and on the south edge of Northeastern Junior College. The Wonderful House opened in 1998 and the owner, Kevin Ha, is quite proud of the fact that his establishment has won the Sterling Journal-Advocate's "People's Choice Award" for restaurants every year since 1999. Mandarin, Hunan, Szechuan, and Cantonese selections are listed on the menu. The luncheon specials range from \$6.25 to \$6.75 and the dinner entrees range from \$6.75 to \$11.75. A favorite choice of the CBC group has been the Mongolian beef (for those who like beef and onions). The Wonderful House hours are 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (9:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday). Don't expect an elegant atmosphere.

The most exciting dining adventure to find and experience is **Delgado's Dugout**. With a little persistence you will find Delgado's in the basement of a seemingly deserted old church building. The frequent absence of any sign whatsoever to identify this restaurant only adds to the challenge. At most there will be a piece of colored paper with "Delgado's Dugout" printed on it tacked to the entry door. The location of this restaurant only



Hot Java Café, Sterling, CO. Photo by Gary Matthews

adds to the confusion. It is on the south side of downtown where Highway 6 splits into one-way streets (3rd Street going north and 4th Street going south) and on the east side of Division Street where the streets parallel the old railroad tracks going northeast (unlike the north/south, east/west grid of streets on the west side of Division Street). The address is 116 Beech Street (at the corner of Beech and 2nd Street).

The easiest way to find Delgado's may be to take Main Street east to 2nd Street, turn south, and go two blocks to Beech Street. Look for a brown door on the southeast corner of the old white two-story building. Enter and go downstairs to a pleasant surprise. This is a very economical Mexican restaurant with very good but not the best food. The margaritas start at \$3.50, the *a la carte* menu runs from \$2.50 to \$4.75, and the dinner platters run from \$6.75 to \$8.75. The owner, Luis Delgado, has been in business at this location for 30 years; to keep his overhead costs down, he doesn't advertise except on sports team equipment (though word of mouth seems to work quite well for him). The luncheon hours here are from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and the dinner hours are 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

Most of the birders visiting Sterling seem to agree that the highest-quality (and most expensive) meals can be found at **Gallagher's River City Grill** on the west side of town. The address is 1116 West Main Street (east of Walmart). The owners, Dennis and Renee Gallagher,

opened the River City Grill in May 2002. They offer a variety of appetizers, salads, sandwiches, melts, and "After Five Specialties." Their lunch prices range from \$6.95 up to \$14.95 for the rib steak sandwich. The evening contemporary dining specialties include steaks, prime rib, smokehouse ribs, salmon, halibut, Tuscan duck, and elk, with prices ranging from \$12.95 up to \$25.95 for the filet mi-



The Wonderful House, Sterling, CO. Photo by Gary Matthews

gnon. The restaurant features a full-service bar. If you visit the River City Grill you will see more Journal-Advocate awards: "The Best Place to Take Out-of-Town Guests" and "The Most Romantic Restaurant." The hours vary: 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Sunday. In the evening you might want to call ahead for reservations: 970-521-7648.



Delgado's Dugout, Sterling, CO. Photo by Gary Matthews

When you are ready to head home, you might find the cheapest gasoline in Sterling at the **Gasamat**, at the intersection of South 10th Street and Main Street (Highway 14) across the street from the River City Grill. The last time that I was in Sterling the prices here were \$2.79 per gallon for the regular grade, compared to \$3.19 at the stations on the east side of town near I-76.

I would like to add a "thank you" to Irene Gomez and Candice Havely of Sterling as well as to Bill Kaempfer and Bruce Bosley for their dining recommendations. They have enhanced the enjoyment of my visits to Sterling.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Summer 2007 (June – July)

Andrew Spencer

These introductions to the News From the Field seem to follow set guidelines. Writers of the spring and fall reports salute the wonders of bird migration while bemoaning the apparent continuing decrease in migrant numbers, and the ever hotter and drier weather conditions. The winter report typically comments on the presence or lack of cer-

Errata:

Spring 2007 report
(Vol. 41, no. 3):

- The Snowy Egret was seen 15 April, not 15 March.
- The Turkey Vulture at Orlando Reservoir on 21 March was in *Huerfano*, not *Pueblo*.

tain irruptive species, and continues to point attention to the hotter and drier conditions than normal. This, however, is the summer season—in which the writer usually extols the under-appreciated potential of summer birding, rebukes birders for what seems like a large drop in observer effort, and points attention to the hotter and drier conditions than normal.

Well, no reason to reinvent the wheel. So, let's start with the first item. Summer rocks! Sure, you don't get to see wonderful

eastern vagrants (well, usually not), and large flocks are but a distant memory of May, but summer is when the greatest contribution to Colorado's bird knowledge is made. It is the season when you can continue to monitor the health of the breeding population of most bird species. It is the season when you can find a range increase, or figure out which subspecies or type of bird breeds in the state, or maybe even find a first state breeding record! And just in case looking for breeding birds isn't your cup of tea, there's usually enough in the way of lingering (or early) migrants to keep you occupied.

So it's always a mystery to me why some birders don't bird more during the summer. Sure, there is still a lot of observer effort. But it's paltry compared to spring and fall. I'll admit that in winter you're justified in spending less time in the field (it's cold, after all), but in summer even the weather encourages you to go out and bird. Hopefully the recently begun Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II will increase the amount of time each of us spends outdoors. So pick up a block or two and see what you can find!

The weather story, alas, has changed little. Summer 2007 was hot, dry, and windy. In Fort Collins, the average temperature in June was 68.3° F, 3.6° above normal. For July the average was 75.3°, which was 4.8° more than normal. The rainfall totals for those months in Fort Collins were 16.5% and 46% of the normal precipitation. Relatively healthy winter snow and spring rain did account for lots of playas in northeastern Colorado, where the prairie was also far greener for longer than normal, but elsewhere in the state things browned out early and extensively.

But enough doom and gloom. Birdwise, a few trends were apparent this past summer. Excellent Engelmann Spruce cone crops in much of the state produced a corresponding abundance in type 5 Red Crossbills, as well as a smattering of White-winged Crossbills and other finches. American Three-toed Woodpeckers seemed to do

especially well, perhaps due in part to the large beetle kills of Lodgepole Pines in parts of the state. Ponderosa Pine cone crops, on the other hand, were poor, and fewer finches were to be found in those woodlands.

Unfortunately, since the birds don't realize that this is the summer report and that migration is for the spring and fall reports, I have to talk about migration here, too. Spring migration petered out the first few days in June, but they were an exciting first few days for those who made it out to the plains. The early fall migration seemed lackluster, though—mostly due to a lack of good mudflats, and thus a lack of good shorebird flocks, on the plains.

Finally, as always, a few rarities showed up to brighten the mood of people pining for migration. Best of the bunch was the continuing Lawrence's Goldfinch in Grand Junction, but goodies such as Red Phalarope, Harris's Hawk, and Common Black-Hawk helped.

As always, a huge thanks goes out to everyone who submitted reports for the season. News From the Field would not be possible without all your effort. I would like to encourage anyone who finds something noteworthy to submit it to the regional compilers at field_news@cfo-link.org, especially if you don't report it to COBirds or WSBN. Many reports never make it into this column simply because we never hear about them.

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. The Colorado Field Ornithologists' website (<http://www.cfo-link.org>) has a link to the Records Committee website, where rare bird records can be submitted electronically.

Note 2: The name of the county is listed in *italics* only the **first** time each location is mentioned in the report. County names are usually not mentioned in subsequent records except to specify the placement of birds within sites that lie within multiple counties.

Abbreviations: CVCG: Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*; doc.: documentation submitted to the CBRC; no doc.: documentation not yet received by the CBRC; m.ob: multiple observers.

Greater White-fronted Goose: The only report this summer was from perhaps the least likely place in the state: an adult from 26 June through 3 July at Williams Fork Reservoir, *Hin-*

sdale (PD, m.ob). Not only was this a rare southwest Colorado record at an odd season, it also provided a first for the county.

Eurasian Wigeon: Very few people

saw the only individual of this species to grace the state this summer, a male at a playa along CR 23 in *Sedgwick* that stayed from 2 through 10 June (HA, AS, doc.).

"Mexican" Duck: Reports of this southern form of Mallard have been increasing in recent years, and this summer was no exception. One was reported from Lower Latham Reservoir, *Weld* on 1 June (RO, m.ob), while another was reported from perhaps an even more unexpected location: a pond along CO 149, *Mineral* on 20 June (BKP, m.ob).

Lesser Scaup: Undaunted by their lesser status, a few remained on the plains this summer to garner greater interest than normal: a male and female were on Lake Cheraw, *Otero* on 16 June (BKP, MP), and two males were on Big Johnson Reservoir, *El Paso* on 20 July (MP).

Common Goldeneye: Per usual, a few of these typical winter residents remained in Colorado into the summer: this year there was a male in Cañon City, *Fremont* from 5-20 June (SeM), another male on 20 June at Sands Lake, *Chaffee* (SY), and a male on 27 July at Big Johnson Reservoir (BM).

Barrow's Goldeneye: The only report this summer was of two males at Trappers Lake, *Garfield* on 24 June (AS, AH); the Flattops have a small breeding population of this species.

Common Merganser: While the species is not an unusual sight along mountain rivers in summer, two birds at Jumbo Reservoir, *Logan* on 28 July (TL, TS, DF) must have been unexpected.

Common Loon: Perhaps feeling that choosing from among Minnesota's 10,000 lakes was too much pressure, a few Common Loons spent the summer in Colorado: two basic-plumaged birds were at Big Johnson Reservoir from 19 June through 27 July (BM, MP); one of unspecified plumage was at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent* on 3 July (CW, SRu); and finally a breeding-plumaged bird was at Cherry Creek Reservoir, *Arapahoe* on 23 July (LM).

American White Pelican: Only a few lakes in the state host breeding colonies of this species—in typical years these are Riverside Reservoir, *Weld*; MacFarlane Reservoir, *Jackson*; and Antero Reservoir, *Park*. This summer, though, birds did not breed at MacFarlane Reservoir; to make up for this terrible slight to North Park they bred for the first time at Walden Reservoir, *Jackson*.

American Bittern: Though this species breeds at a number of cattail marshes throughout the state, there were few reports this summer. A bird was heard and seen at Lower Latham Reservoir on 1 June (GW, m.ob), up to four birds were reported from Fruitgrowers Reservoir (m.ob), one was heard at Chico Basin Ranch, *Pueblo* on 25 June (LS, RJ), and one was reported on 9 July from the unusual location of Steamboat Lake, *Routt* (Vic Zerbi).

Great Egret: A single bird was reported from the unexpected location of Mt. Ouray SWA, *Chaffee* on 1 June (RM).

Cattle Egret: The only report for the summer was of three birds on 3

June from Lower Latham Reservoir (NK).

Green Heron: Seven reports were received for the summer season; this species is typically a rare and very local breeder in Colorado. Reports from west of the divide were from Connected Lakes State Park, Mesa for the entirety of the season (LA, m.ob), where they may have nested, and from CR 101 at Fourmile Creek, Moffat on 9 June (TL), a known nesting location. Nesting was also confirmed on 3 July in *Arapahoe* when an adult and a juvenile were seen (DC). Other counties with reports were *Bent*, *El Paso*, *Pueblo*, and *Larimer*.

Wood Stork: Among the most tantalizing reports of the season was a documentation received for this species on 9 June at a pond near Windsor, *Weld* (MD, doc.). If accepted, this would provide the first Colorado record in 73 years.

Mississippi Kite: Gone are the days when you had to go to Lamar or La Junta to see this species in Colorado. Nesting has been reported in a number of northeastern counties; one in Sterling, *Logan* on 28 July (TL, TS, DF), and a pair at the Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso* on 8 June (CW, SRu) were likely members of these outlying breeding populations. Far more unusual was one in Alamosa, *Alamosa* on 20 July (MP, BSt, BKP).

Common Black-Hawk: The two reported this summer, combined with the one reported in spring, tied for



Harris's Hawk, Pueblo West, Pueblo County, 1 July 2007. Photo by Brandon Percival

the best year on record for this rare vagrant. One was in Cottonwood Canyon, *Baca* on 12 June (DP, DW, no doc.), and the returning adult was reported from the MacKenzie Bridge in Cañon City, *Fremont* on 1 and 2 July (RM, m.ob, no doc.). The latter bird is significant in that this is either the third or fourth year that the species has been seen in this location.

Harris's Hawk: An immature molting into adult plumage was found in Pueblo West, *Pueblo* on 30 June and seen again on 1 July (BKP, m.ob, doc.). As always with records of out-of-range hawks, and this species in particular, questions of origin plague the record. In this case the bird was wary, showed no signs of captivity, and was in a plumage unusual among falconers. This would represent the

fourth state record, if accepted by the CBR.

Broad-winged Hawk: An adult seen 10 June through 21 July from the Bartlett Trail in Rye, *Pueblo* (DS) was reported to be "agitated." That behavior, along with the sighting of a juvenile in August, suggests breeding at this location.

Black Rail: Up to four were reported from the Nepesta Marsh in *Pueblo* from 16 June through 15 July (MP, BKP, m.ob); they were first found at this location during the spring season. Three were reported from the more expected location of Bent's Old Fort, *Otero* on 20 June (JD). No reports were received from Fort Lyon, *Bent*, though they doubtless occurred there in their usual numbers.

Sandhill Crane: Nesting birds were reported again this summer from *Paradox*, *Montrose* (CD, BW), but more significant was a pair near Norwood, *San Miguel* (CD, BW). Not only was this a first breeding record for *San Miguel*, it was also the southernmost breeding record for Colorado. One was also reported from Beebe Draw, *Weld* on 7 July (BSc, JSc); breeding has been reported from here in past years.

Semipalmated Plover: The first migrant of the fall barely squeezed into the summer season with a report on 28 July from I-76 at exit 68, *Morgan* (TL, TS, DF).

Black-necked Stilt: A report from Craig, *Moffat* on 2 June (FL) was the first report in the area for several years. One was also reported from Rio Blanco SWA, *Rio Blanco* on 8 June (DF, m.ob). A few have bred

at Browns Park NWR, *Moffat* in the past, but in general this is a rare species in northwestern Colorado.

Greater Yellowlegs: Two birds seen on 27 June in *Sedgwick* (HA) were the first fall migrants; one from *Archuleta* on 28 June (JBy) followed soon after.

Lesser Yellowlegs: The first of the season appeared on 7 July at Beebe Draw (BSc, JSc).

Solitary Sandpiper: The two reported from Prewitt Reservoir, *Washington* on 7 July (NE, TS), while belying their solitary status, were also the first fall migrants this season.

Willet: The first report of a fall migrant came from Prewitt Reservoir: a singleton on 7 July (NE, TS).

Upland Sandpiper: Far away from their northeastern Colorado stronghold (though I use that term loosely) was one in *Cheyenne* on 28 July (VT), probably an early migrant.

Long-billed Curlew: A report from Fruitgrowers Reservoir on 3 July (LA) provided a rare West-Slope record and tied the earliest fall migration report. The other 3 July report was of 37 from Blue Lake, *Bent/Kiowa* (CW, SRu), an excellent total for so early in the season.

Marbled Godwit: Blue Lake also produced the first summer report of this species on 3 July (CW, SRu). Another was at Fruitgrowers Reservoir on 12 July (AS, NK, CW); this species is considered casual in western Colorado during the summer season.

Sanderling: Two at Jumbo Reservoir, *Sedgwick* on 28 July (TL, TS, DF) were the first of fall migration.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: Prewitt



Red Phalarope, Pawnee Grasslands, Weld County, 3 June 2007. Photo by Bill Schmoker

Reservoir claimed another fall first in the form of a single individual of this species seen on 7 July (NE, TS).

Least Sandpiper: Six at Beebe Draw on 7 July were the first south-bound migrants this season (BSc, JSc).

Baird's Sandpiper: The previous species was not the only season first that Schmoker & son reported from Beebe Draw on 7 July; a single individual of this species also fit that bill (BSc, JSc).

White-rumped Sandpiper: Seven found on 3 June near Wellington, Larimer (AS) furnished the last report of this typically late spring migrant.

Stilt Sandpiper: One at Lower Latham Reservoir on 2 June (BK) was the last of the spring migration; no reports were received this summer of fall migrants.

Red-necked Phalarope: Four were reported from Beebe Draw on 2

June (BK), a typical last date for this late spring migrant.

Red Phalarope:

Most records in Colorado do a poor job of justifying the name *Red Phalarope*, so it was a joy to have a female in breeding plumage show itself this summer. Bill Kaempfer found it on the northwestern Pawnee National Grasslands, Weld on 2 June, and, unlike most members of its species in Colorado,

especially in this plumage, it stuck around for a week (m.ob, doc.).

Long-tailed Jaeger: An adult from Cherry Creek State Park, Arapahoe on 22 July (JC, no doc.) was the only jaeger report this summer.

Franklin's Gull: A flock of 2000+ must have been a spectacular sight at Jumbo Reservoir, Sedgwick/Logan on 28 July (TL, TS, DF).

Bonaparte's Gull: A second-cycle bird was reported from Hinman Reservoir, Grand on 7 June (LS), and another (or the same one?) from Walden Reservoir, Jackson from 16-20 July (LS, m.ob).

California Gull: One at a playa south of Ovid, Sedgwick on 27 June (HA) was quite a ways from the nearest breeding colony.

Herring Gull: Fruitgrowers Reservoir seems one of the less likely places to see an individual of this species during the summer season, so a first-

summer bird found there on 7 July (JBn) was a surprise.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: An adult at Pueblo Reservoir on 26 July (PHu) provided a first summer record for the Pueblo area.

Black Tern: One at Pueblo Reservoir on 12 June (BKP) was the first of the season, while 41 at Jackson Reservoir, *Morgan* on 28 July (TL, TS, DF) provided the high count.

White-winged Dove: Fourteen reports of 21 individuals came in for the summer season, a decent total. Counties with reports include *Las Animas*, *Prowers*, *Pueblo*, *Fremont*, *El Paso*, *Adams*, *Larimer*, *La Plata*, *Mesa*, and *Moffat*.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: The paltry total of three reports for the summer is probably due to a lack of looking in the traditional breeding locations on the eastern plains. The most significant report was from *Paonia*, *Delta* from 30 June through 24 July (JBn, AR); this species is very local on the West Slope.

Northern Pygmy-Owl: Proving yet again that this is among Colorado's most elusive breeders, there was only a single report from this summer: on 27 July from *Hahns Peak Reservoir*, *Routt* (FL).

Burrowing Owl: Nesting was again confirmed this year in *Dolores*, near Dove Creek, where three were seen 30 July (JBy); this species is very uncommon west of the Continental Divide, and the Dove Creek area is proving to be one of the better areas to look for it.

Black Swift: The Colorado City area is rapidly distinguishing itself as

one of the best areas to see this species at low elevations. This summer Silverman reported them three times: one on 7 June and five on 20 July from *Lake Beckwith*, *Pueblo*, and six on 20 July from *Frog Pond*, *Pueblo*. One of the potential sources of these birds was found on 23 July when three nests were observed in the Wet Mountains west of Pueblo, *Pueblo* (PHu).

Magnificent Hummingbird: A subadult male "Mag" was reported from *Crystal*, *Gunnison*, from 17 June through 26 July (TC, m.ob, doc.), though difficulty of access and the sporadic habits of the bird caused few birders to see it.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: The Stulp Farm south of Lamar, *Prowers* continues to pull them in, with an adult male reported on 13 July (JSt, no doc.).

Black-chinned Hummingbird: Reports of this species have increased along the northern Front Range in recent years. Whether this is a true range extension or only reflects increased observer effort is unknown. Even so, a male from *Bobcat Ridge*, *Larimer* from 16 to 18 July (SM, m.ob) was farther north than normal.

Calliope Hummingbird: Reports from 21 June at the *Arapaho NWR*, *Jackson* (DD) and 25 June from *Leadville*, *Lake* (TK) were unusually early.

Rufous Hummingbird: The first of the fall mob appeared on 23 June, when a male was reported from *Manitou Springs*, *El Paso* (BSt).

Lewis's Woodpecker: Two were reported from *Sixmile Hill*, *Jefferson* on 26 June (CB); this species is rare so far north in eastern Colorado.

Red-headed Woodpecker: While this beauty is fairly common on the far eastern plains, it is quite rare along the Front Range. One was seen at the Black Tiger Burn north of Boulder, *Boulder* on 14 June (*fide* JBn); two were reported from the Hayman Burn northwest of Cheesman Reservoir, *Jefferson* from 26 June through 10 July (CB); and one was reported from east of Watkins, *Adams* on 1 July (GG).

Acorn Woodpecker: The "classic" location of Rafter J, *La Plata* contributed the only reports for the season, with probable nesting observed on 13 July (NK, AS, CW).

"Yellow-shafted" Northern Flicker: While this form is not a rare sight on the eastern plains, it is quite unusual on the West Slope. A male showing all the plumage characteristics of this form was seen in California Park, *Routt* on 24 June (AS).

Eastern Wood-Pewee: The trend of summer reports continued this year, with three records: one hung out at Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso* from 8 to 16 June (CW, SRu, m.ob, no doc.); one was along Boulder Creek at 75th from 3-9 June (EZ, no doc.); and a singing male was at the Bobcat Ridge Natural Area on 22 June (EBa, no doc.). Alas, the trend of not documenting any of the summer reports also continued.

Alder Flycatcher: Observations by birders in recent years suggests that this is among Colorado's latest spring migrants, so one seen and heard calling at CVCG on 1 June (RO, AS, GW, m.ob, doc.) was right on time.

Willow Flycatcher: At least six were reported on 1 June from CVCG

(JK, m.ob), a large number for so late during spring migration. One reported from Pueblo West on 7 June (BKP) was the last migrant of the season.

Least Flycatcher: The big news for this little species was the number of reports on the West Slope. Up to four continued at Loudy Simpson Park, *Moffat* through the summer (FL, m.ob); nesting was suspected but never confirmed. Two were reported on 14 June west of Wuanita, *Gunnison* (LS, ML), and two were reported from 1 June through 4 July from the Neversink Trail, *Gunnison* (CD, BW). The latter birds were observed feeding young on 4 July, confirming breeding at the site (AS).

Black Phoebe: A total of nine reports came in for the season, most from the Arkansas River Valley and all from expected counties: *Chaffee*, *Fremont*, *Pueblo*, *Montezuma*, and *Delta*.

Eastern Phoebe: There were four records of birds away from their traditional breeding areas on the far eastern plains. A pair spent the summer at Scroggs Canyon, *Pueblo* (DS); three were along CR 120 in *Fremont* on 16 June (RM); one was at the Florence River Park, *Fremont* on 22 July (MP, BSt, BKP); and a late migrant was at CVCG on 1 June (AS, GW).

Ash-throated Flycatcher: There were a surprising three reports for this species along the northern Front Range, where it is rare at best. One was at McGraw Ranch, *Larimer* on 11 July (DT); a juvenile and two adults confirmed breeding in Poudre Canyon near Rustic, *Larimer* on 14 July (THa); and three were at Bear Creek

Lake Park, *Jefferson* on 19 July (MH). A pair reported on 10 June at Rye, *Pueblo* (DS) was at a high elevation for this species.

Great Crested Flycatcher: The only report of this scarce Colorado breeder was on 11 June at the Arkansas River at CR 13, *Prowers* (DL).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: One of unspecified sex was reported on 16 June from Hemmingway Road, *El Paso* (TB, no doc.), the only report of the season.

Bell's Vireo: This species is a fairly common breeder in far northeastern Colorado, but far rarer away from there, so a singing bird on 20 June at Oxbow SWA, *Otero* (JD) must have been a surprise.

Red-eyed Vireo: Seven were reported this spring, mostly from along the Front Range at possible breeding localities. Counties represented include *El Paso*, *Fremont*, *Douglas*, *Boulder*, *Adams*, and *Weld*.

Chihuahuan Raven: Among the most unexpected sightings of the summer came in the form of two of this species reported from CR U in *Montezuma* on 27 July (DL, no doc.). Whether this species occurs on the West Slope of Colorado is a continuing and perplexing question—nesting was reported in the first Breeding Bird Atlas, and there have been occasional other reports—but since this



Sedge Wren, *Boulder County*, 12 June 2007. Photo by Bill Schmoker

is among Colorado's hardest species to identify, the veracity of records is hard to judge.

Purple Martin: A male reported on 29 June from the KOA Campground in *Craig*, *Moffat* (DB) was quite unusual given the date.

Bushtit: A flock in the Mount Zirkel Wilderness, *Routt* on 11 July (Nkt) was significantly higher than normal.

Carolina Wren: Three birds were reported this summer: a singing male at the Cañon City Riverwalk from 2 June through 19 July (RM, SeM); another singing male from Cottonwood Canyon, *Las Animas* on 3 July (CW, SRu), and one from *Denver*, *Denver* 16-24 June (fide RBA).

Sedge Wren: Summer is perhaps the least-expected time to see this species in Colorado, so one that stayed at Steele Lakes, *Boulder* from 6-12 June (SRa, m.ob, no doc.) was

quite a find. Breeding has been suspected in Colorado before, but in this case the record seems more referable to a tardy migrant.

Veery: A few reports came in from traditional breeding locations in *Gunnison*, *Routt*, *Moffat*, and *Jackson*. Less expected was one from Edith, *Archuleta* on 3 June (JBy), perhaps a late migrant. Definitely a late migrant was an individual of the eastern race from CVCG on 1 June (AS, NE).

Golden-winged Warbler: Perhaps the highlight of the end of spring migration was a female of this species found on 1 June at CVCG by an out-of-state birder (JK, m.ob).

Orange-crowned Warbler: One at CVCG on 1 June (JK, m.ob) was later than normal for the eastern plains.

Lucy's Warbler: The now-regular birds at Yellowjacket Canyon, *Montezuma* were last reported on 13 July (NK, AS, CW, doc.).

Northern Parula:

A total of two singing males this summer was two more than normal. One was near Bear Creek Nature Center in Colorado Springs, *El Paso* from 20-23 June (VT, m.ob), and another was at the Cañon City Riverwalk on 24 June (RM).

Chestnut-sided Warbler: There were four reports this summer; though breeding was never confirmed, this species has bred

in the state in the past. A male was at CVCG on 1 June (AS, m.ob), another appeared to be on territory at Louviers, *Douglas* (THv, m.ob), a male was at Panorama Point, *Boulder* on 8 June (WS), and the most significant of the bunch was in Grand Junction, *Mesa* from 8-12 July (JCo).

Magnolia Warbler: Far, far away from the nearest magnolia (and likely from the nearest Magnolia Warbler) was a male of this species near Brainard Lake, *Boulder* on 3 June (WS, doc.). This may represent the first Colorado record above 10,000 feet.

Grace's Warbler: In most years one or two are found in southern Colorado east of the Continental Divide, but this summer far exceeded expectations. Two singing males were found on 17 June near Wetmore, *Custer* (SeM, m.ob) and observed through 22 July. More significant in terms of numbers were the three singing males



Hooded Warbler at nest, Cañon City, Fremont County, 16 July 2007. Photo by Rich Miller



Scarlet Tanager, Gregory Canyon, Boulder County, 30 June 2007. Photo by Bill Maynard

found on 20 June near Gulnare, *Las Animas* (TL); up to **seven** were observed in the area on 1 July, and a fledgling confirmed nesting for the site (AS).

Prairie Warbler: A singing male was a spectacular find on 11 June at the Red Mountain Ranch, *Larimer* (AP, no doc.).

Blackpoll Warbler: A singing male was observed on the unusual date of 22 June at the Carson Nature Center, *Arapahoe* (JK), representing perhaps the last spring migrant in Colorado this season.

American Redstart: There were only three reports this summer, none from the classic breeding location of Chatfield State Park. Two singing males were at Bear Creek Lake Park on 7 June (MH); a second-year male was at CVCG on 2 June (BK); and another second-year male was along the To-wheel Trail, *Boulder* on 10 June (PHA).

Ovenbird: A singing male was reported from the Deer Creek Canyon Open Space, *Jefferson* on 11 July (KMD), a known breeding locality. At least four, likely north-bound migrants, were reported from CVCG on 1 June (JK, m.ob).

Kentucky Warbler: A geographically confused individual of this species showed itself along the Dolores River in *Montezuma* on 6 June (SA, m.ob, no doc.).

Mourning Warbler: The bird may have been mourning, but the birders lucky enough to hear it on 1 June at CVCG certainly weren't (AS, m.ob, no doc.).

Hooded Warbler: Breeding was confirmed along the Cañon City Riverwalk this year, where the birds apparently bred last year as well. A singing male was observed from 19 June through 7 July (RM), and a female and four young were seen from 16-19 July (RM).

Hepatic Tanager: A singing male was reported from CO 109 north of Kim, *Las Animas* on 16 June (MP, BKP, no doc.), and two males and a female were reported from the Bader Ranch, *Las Animas* on 3 July (CW, SRu, no doc.).

Scarlet Tanager: A male, apparently on territory, spent 27 June through 23 July in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder* (KMD, m.ob, doc.). Perhaps more birders saw this individual than

any other of this species in Colorado history.

Cassin's Sparrow: Only one was reported from the northern plains this summer, from near Cornish, *Weld* on 6 June (ED), though this is likely due to lack of observer effort. Regardless, this was much less of an "invasion" year for this species than last year.

Brewer's Sparrow: Every year a few individuals are reported from above timberline. This year reports came from *Garfield*, *Hinsdale*, and *Boulder*. Spectrographic analysis of recordings from at least a dozen of these birds indicated that they were applicable to the normal lowland *breweri* rather than "Timberline" Sparrow, *ssp. taverneri* (AS).

Black-throated Sparrow: A singing male was reported from the Bader Ranch on 3 July (CW, SRu), and another from near Florence, *Fremont* on 22 July (MP, BSt, BKP). Black-throated Sparrow is a rare and local breeder in southeastern Colorado.

Sage Sparrow: Two were reported from east of Gunnison, *Gunnison* from 21-22 July (MP, BSt, BKP), which is a little higher than normal for this species.

Lark Bunting: On the eastern plains this is a ho-hum species. Along the Piedra Road in *Archuleta* it is anything but—and one was reported from there on 5 June (JBy).

Harris's Sparrow: Few realize that this species can occur through mid-May as a late spring migrant, but even so, one on 1 June from the Paulsen Farm, *Prowers* (LP) was later than normal.

Northern Cardinal: Only two were reported this season: a male at the Lamar Community College Woods 11-12 June (DL), and another at Chatfield State Park, *Douglas/Jefferson* on 22 July (JK, m.ob).

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Bob Steger reported an immature male singing above Manitou Springs, *El Paso* on 3 June, and another was reported at Last Chance, *Washington* on 2 June (TJs); both were likely late spring migrants.

Indigo Bunting: The only reports from the West Slope this summer were from Hotchkiss and Paonia, *Delta* (JBn, AR). Other counties with reports included *Las Animas*, *Pueblo*, and *Fremont*.



Northern Cardinal, Chatfield State Park, Douglas County, 22 July 2007.
Photo by Joey Kellner



Bobolink, Larimer County, 3 June 2007. Photo by Glenn Walbek

Painted Bunting: Everyone's favorite Painted Bunting returned to Cottonwood Canyon, *Las Animas* this year, with reports from 16 June through 3 July (BKP, MP, no doc.).

Bobolink: Four reports for the summer seems rather paltry. Up to six were reported from west of Gunnison, *Gunnison* from 21 June through the end of the season (JBr, m.ob); a singleton was seen on 1 June at the Bohart Ranch, *El Paso* (TF); up to three were at Cattail Pond, *Larimer* through 7 June (AS); and three males were near Castlewood Canyon State Park, *Douglas*, also on 1 June (GW).

Eastern Meadowlark: Directionally-challenged Eastern Meadowlarks have been noticed with increasing regularity in Colorado in recent years, and the reports from three locations this summer is about average. Two males of the eastern race coun-

tersang at Cattail Pond, *Larimer* from the beginning of the season through 7 July (CW, m.ob, no doc.), though females were never observed and the field where they were singing was cut soon after the last observation. Up to three, also of the eastern race, were observed singing near Poncha Springs, *Chaffee* on 22 July (MP, BSt, BKP, no doc.); they were first found at this location last year.

Finally, a single male of the *liliana* race was observed singing north of Walsenburg, *Huerfano* from 21 June to 1 July (TL, m.ob, no doc.).

Great-tailed Grackle: A male was found at Rio Blanco Lake SWA on 8 June (DE, CFO field trip); this species is fairly rare so far north in western Colorado.

Orchard Oriole: A male was seen at Walden Ponds, *Boulder* on 10 June (EZ), farther west than this species typically breeds in Colorado.

Baltimore Oriole: Joining its darker cousin at Walden Ponds on 10 June at Walden Ponds was a male of this species (EZ, no doc.); a female or young male was also observed in *Boulder* on 23 July (MMo). Slightly more in range were two on 30 July northwest of Windsor, *Weld* (MMA, no doc.).

White-winged Crossbill: Only two reports of one of Colorado's more

erratic breeders came in this summer: two near Seedhouse Road, Routt on 24 June (AS), and a female on 7 July from Stillwater Reservoir, Garfield (AS).

Lawrence's Goldfinch: Continuing to grace us with its august presence (almost until August) was Colorado's first Lawrence's Goldfinch, first found in May at Larry Arnold's house in Grand Junction. It was last reported on 24 July (LA, doc.).

Lesser Goldfinch: Typically foothills residents, a few wandered out onto the plains this spring: a male on 2 June at the Bohart Ranch (TF) and one heard and two seen in Lamar on 11 June (DL).



Eastern Meadowlark, Larimer County, 3 June 2007. Photo by Glenn Walbek

Contributing Observers:

SA: Susan Allerton; HA: Henry Armknecht; LA: Larry Arnold; EBa: Ellie Baker; DB: Debbie Barnes; JBr: Jason Beason; JBy: Jim Beatty; EBe: Elise Becker; JBr: Jim Berry; CB: Chris Blakeslee; TB: Tamie Bulow; DC: Deb Carstensen; TC: Tom Cole; JC: Jim Connell; JCo: Jacob Cooper; ED: Eric Defonso; PD: Peter Derven; MD: Mark DeWitt; CD: Coen Dexter; DD: Dave Dillman; JD: John Drummond; KMD: Kathy Mihm-Dunning; NE: Norm Erthal; DF: Doug Faulkner; TF: Ted Floyd; GG: Gregg Goodrich; THa: Tom Hall; THv: Tom Halverstadt; PHa: Paula Hansley; MH: Mike Henwood; AH: Allison Hilf; PHu: Paul Hurtado; RJ: Robbye Johnson; TJ: Tina Jones; BK: Bill Kaemper; TK: Tom Kalbach; JK: Joey Kellner; NK: Nick Komar; NKt: Nic Korte; DL: Dave Leatherman; TL: Tony Leukering; ML: Mark Lockwood; FL: Forrest Luke; MMa: Marcia Maeda; BM: Bill Maynard; RM: Rich Miller; SM: Sol Miller; LM: Larry Modesitt; MMo: Monte Montgomery; SeM: SeEtta Moss; RO: Ric Olson; AP: Arvind Panjabi; LP: Linda Paulsen; DP: Dick Payne; BKP: Brandon Percival; MP: Mark Peterson; SRa: Scott Rashid; AR: Andrea Robinsong; SRu: Saraiya Ruano; BSc: Bill Schmoker; JSc: Jim Schmoker; SL: Larry Semo; DS: Dave Silverman; TS: Tim Smart; AS: Andrew Spencer; BSt: Brad Steger; JSt: Jane Stulp; WS: Walter Szeliga; VT: Van Truan; DT: Dave True; GW: Glenn Walbek; CW: Cole Wild; DW: Dan Williams; BW: Brenda Wright; SY: Sherrie York; EZ: Eric Zorawowicz

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Immature and Female Surf and White-winged Scoters

Tony Leukering

In the previous issue of this journal, Pieplow and Spencer (2007) documented the occurrence of scoters in Colorado with particular reference to the phenomenon in South Park. In that paper, they suggest that determining the age and sex of the individuals found here might shed light on the question of why scoter numbers and species ratios have changed so much in the state in recent years. As anyone will know who visits the online photo quiz that I operate for Colorado Field Ornithologists (Mr. Bill's Mystery Quiz), I am all for determining such information—adamantly supportive. However, unlike for many birds where correct ageing is critical for correct species identification, for scoters, correct species identification might be of critical importance in determining the age and sex of birds.

Adult male scoters are, except under extreme viewing conditions, quite straightforward to identify. Unfortunately, like most other diving ducks and unlike most dabbling ducks, juvenile male scoters do not obtain male-like plumage until well into winter, and do not gain full adult male plumage until their second fall; thus, they wear female-like plumage for much of their first year and, importantly to us here in Colorado, throughout their first fall migration. In Colorado, birders mostly encounter female-plumaged scoters that may be some mix of adult females, immature females, and immature males. The plumages of these three age-sex classes are quite similar to each other in both Surf and White-winged Scoters.

With reasonable light and flying individuals, the color of the secondaries distinguishes these two species, but most scoters seen in Colorado are swimming out in the middle of large reservoirs, and they do not always oblige us by opening their wings enough to de-

The species: Surf (*Melanitta perspicillata*) and White-winged (*M. fusca*) Scoters.

The context: Fall migration on large reservoirs.

The problem: Most scoters seen in Colorado are swimming, distant females and immatures, which do not always oblige us by opening their wings.

(See photos on back cover.)

termine secondary color. Perhaps we would be better off if White-winged Scoter did not have white secondaries (but then what we would call it?), as their presence may have caused some other (more widely useful) identification features to be overlooked:

Bill and head structure: Reference to the pictures on the back cover of this issue will be helpful in understanding this section. In Surf Scoter, the meeting of bill and feathering is virtually vertical and very close to the eyes, except that feathering protrudes from the crown onto the top of the bill such that the feathering closest to the bill tip is on top of the bill, above the nostrils. In White-winged Scoter, feathering extends out the sides of the bill in a broad lobe, so that the feathering closest to the bill tip is on the sides of the bill, very close to the nostrils. The resultant bill-feathering edges form right angles facing in opposite directions on the two species (see back cover, inset). The direction of this angle should be sufficient to identify any female-plumaged scoter of these species, but the above also causes a considerable number of side effects that result in different appearances that can help nail down a tentative identification. In Surf Scoter, the nostrils are placed about halfway or more out toward the tip of the bill from the white patches in front of the eyes, whereas on White-winged, the nostrils are near the base of the bill, nearly adjacent to the forward white patches. On Surf, the extent of the white patches in front of the eyes is constrained by the bill, so that they tend to be taller than wide, while the opposite is true on White-winged.

Head color: Surf Scoter's crown tends to be blacker than the rest of the head, creating a more-or-less strong line of contrast that runs along the top edge of the rear white face patches. White-winged tends to have a more concolorous head, but many have at least some suggestion of a darker crown. I suspect that such White-wingeds are juveniles/immatures, as that age tends to be browner-plumaged in all three scoter species than are adult females. The White-winged Scoter depicted on the back cover shows, to my eye, no real suggestion of this feature, which works out quite well, as I aged it as an adult when I saw it flying (it had an all-dark belly).

Size: We tend to see scoters here with other late-season diving ducks, and that may be part of the reason that many of us think of scoters as pretty big ducks. Scoters are often seen with such species as Buffleheads and goldeneyes, or with the likes of scaup—and, of course, scoters (particularly the two foci of this essay) are much the bigger

ducks. However, this is not saying much, considering the diminutive sizes of those comparison species. Fortunately, White-winged Scoter is a relative bruiser for a scoter and its size can be used, with the right yardstick, to help ascertain identification. Relative to Northern Pintail, Surf Scoter is obviously smaller (at least in body length, if not in weight), while White-winged Scoter is similar to Pintail in size.

Ageing (at least males)

While writing this article, I stared quite a bit at the pictures that are reproduced on the back cover, and I thought that I would present further musings related not to species identification, but to ageing and sexing. Hopefully, you, like me, will notice that the tip of the Surf Scoter's bill is a bit orangey. I would suggest that since adult males of Surf (and of White-winged, too) have yellow-orange or orange tips to their bills and that females have dark tips, the pictured bird is a young male. Since the picture of the Surf was taken in November, the timing of this bird's initiation of bill-color change would be useful to us here in Colorado to ascertain ages of at least some of the occurring scoters. Also, though it is not greatly obvious in this picture, the Surf Scoter has at least a trace of white in the nape (I saw this well in the field). The white likely identifies this bird as a male, thus as an immature.

This species pair has been treated quite well in at least some of the identification literature, with useful treatments and drawings in Sibley (2000) and, particularly, Kaufman (1990).

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Above: immature male Surf Scoter, 21 November 2007, Bolinas Lagoon, Marin Co., CA. Below: adult female White-winged Scoter, 28 October 2007, Southeast Farallon Island, San Francisco Co., CA. Photos by Tony Leukering