

Vol. 42 No. 4 October 2008

# Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



*Arctic Loon in Colorado*

*Mountain Plover Nest Defense*

*Colorado's First Brown-crested Flycatcher*



Colorado Field Ornithologists  
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# Colorado Birds

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Vermilion Flycatcher, Highline SP, Mesa County, 31 March 2008.  
*Photo by Dona Hilkey*

## Five Great Things About the SLV

*Bill Schmoker*

I hope this note finds you all enjoying the fruits of autumnal birding, whether the objects of your attention are lingering warblers, early wintering arrivals, or even perhaps a first state record. I love the fall birding season for its ability to blur both the end of summer and the beginning of winter. The drawn-out waves of migrants—beginning with the first shorebirds and hummingbirds in July, tapering off with gulls and waterfowl arriving through December—sustain a long, interesting season. Fall migrants don't always seem to be in such a rush to clear out as migrants do in the spring, when the urge to arrive on territory and breed pounds innately away in those avian brains. As some birds hang around in fall, perhaps longer than they should, it postpones my entry into winter birding mode. Don't get me wrong—I think winter birding is fantastic, too—but when fall migration finally winds down I definitely feel like something good is over for another year.

In case things get a little slow for you once the winter sets in, I'd like to give you a few things to look forward to at our convention next spring in Alamosa. Here's a little countdown of five reasons I think it is going to be awesome:

**5) The Piñon Hills**—Near the border with New Mexico, this hilly region of the southern San Luis Valley boasts a combination of great birding and isolation (don't expect to cross paths here with anyone outside of your group). It is the only place where I've ever seen singing Sage and Black-throated Sparrows within a few meters of each other. I'd make sure I reviewed the song of Bendire's Thrasher before embarking on a hike in this wilderness study area...you never know!

**4) The Blanca Wetlands**—An amazing array of shallow lakes and playas with 207 numbered water bodies, this nearly 10,000-acre BLM-managed refuge can host truly astonishing numbers of shorebirds and waterfowl, both migrants and breeders. Can you imagine over 100 breeding Snowy Plovers? They're here, all right. The refuge is closed to the public from mid-February through mid-July, but we'll work on getting access for trips during the convention.

**3) The Medano-Zapata Ranch**—Part of a mosaic of connected large tracts (in the 100,000-acre range each), this working cattle and

bison ranch is one of The Nature Conservancy's most stunning properties in the state. TNC was instrumental in the recent addition of the neighboring Blanca Ranch to the local tapestry of protected lands managed by the BLM, US Fish & Wildlife Service (Blanca NWR), the State of Colorado (San Luis Lakes State Park & SWA), the National Forest Service (Rio Grande and San Isabel National Forests), and the National Park Service (Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve). As a result, uninterrupted native habitats stretch from alpine tundra to the closed drainage basin of the northwestern San Luis Valley, including the entire drainages of Medano and Sand Creeks. From their headwaters in the Sangre de Cristos to their reentry into alluvial sediments west of the Great Sand Dunes, these creeks run unfettered and intact, symbols of what is essentially a mega-preserve encompassing this entire portion of the valley. We'll work on gaining access to the privately-accessible ranch and the fantastic birding it supports.

**2) Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges**—The combined 25,000 protected acres in these two refuges are best known for their wetlands but also harbor productive grasslands, sage scrubland, and a few woodlots. While many of us have visited in the fall to experience five-digit numbers of Sandhill Cranes, spring will be a fantastic time to prowl these refuges, potentially even accessing areas off the beaten path.

**1) Getting to know Colorado's "Third Slope"** —At around 8,000 square miles, the San Luis Valley is bigger than three states (Rhode Island, Delaware, and Connecticut) and nearly as big as New Jersey. Lots of publicly accessible lands provide access to most parts of the valley, but outside of a small corps of dedicated valley birders, few people bird the SLV. I'm sure that everyone from outside the valley (which will be most of us) will enjoy visiting unique birding areas that don't fit into the entrenched East vs. West Slope birding paradigm. Plenty of "new" birds should be out there for birders of any level, whether they are lifers, state birds, county birds, year birds, breeding birds, or simply old friends providing new experiences. I hope you will add to the excitement by joining us in Alamosa in the spring!

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

## Connie Kogler, Membership Chair

*Bill Schmoker*

I'm very pleased to have Connie Kogler on the CFO board of directors. Among her strengths as a board member is her strong connection to communities on both sides of the divide in Colorado. A stay-at-home mom for the balance of her married life, Connie raised and home-schooled most of her eleven children while running a small hobby farm and garden on the Western Slope. Now living in the Loveland area, she is home-schooling her youngest daughter Maggie in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, while her daughter Anna is embarking on her senior year in high school. Her husband Al and three mini Dachshunds (one of which she is preparing to show) round out the Kogler household.

Connie's dedication to service and leadership is evidenced by her involvement in several other organizations. She was a founding board member of the North American Packgoat Association, board member and newsletter editor of the Colorado Dairy Goat Association, and newsletter editor of the Oberhasli (a dairy goat) Breeders Association. Connie held a seat on the Montrose County Fair board for a couple of years, and was also on the board of the Black Canyon Audubon Society. In her professional life, she operated The Dog-Crafter in Montrose for three years, helping people train their dogs, and she also spent time working at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Fort Collins.

When asked what brought her to Colorado, Connie blames John Denver. In 1971, her parents and some friends living in Connecticut bought busses, fixed them up, and headed west looking for the "Colorado Rocky Mountain High." Connie ended up staying in Colorado because of the great weather, the fantastic people, and, of course, the birding. She loves spending time with her family and God, and enjoys photography, hiking, gardening, and dog training as well as birding.

Connie recalls camping near the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum outside of Tucson in 1971 as a major reason she got into birding. There she met an old, thin, white-haired lady who shared her Dodge camper with a free-flying parakeet. She would take Connie on birding walks in the desert and talk about birds, sparking the interest in birding that Connie still holds strongly today. Connie also mentions a 2004 trip to Cordova and the Kenai Fjords of Alaska as a major birding highlight, along with a Black Swift as a yard bird in Montrose in 2001.

Of course, many of our faithful readers shared another of Connie's

birding highlights when she opened up her house for the mother of all yard birds last winter. “Pedro Maria,” Colorado’s first Streak-backed Oriole, spent about a month at her feeders enjoying the buffet of live mealworms, suet, and jelly. It bears mentioning that, in a great example of “luck happening to those who are ready for it,” Connie has maintained backyard feeding stations and wildlife habitat for over 28 years. Connie couldn’t get out as much as she would have liked while raising and home-schooling her kids, so she brought birds to her yard through these efforts.

As CFO’s membership director, Connie spearheads our efforts to maintain & grow our membership. She works closely with Raymond Davis, our volunteer membership coordinator—the guy who cashes your checks and reminds you when your membership expires. One of Connie’s recent initiatives was supplying the state’s birding shops with membership fliers and copies of this journal. Connie touts our Colorado County Birding website and our COBirds mailing list, both of which do a great job of bringing the Colorado birding community together. She would love to see a searchable online database for Colorado avian records information, and she sees CFO continuing to bring birders together to learn and study birds in the future, perhaps even offering classes.

While new to the CFO board, Connie is always ready and willing to help with tasks as they emerge. Her willingness to share Pedro Maria with the 450 birders who made the trek to Loveland mirrors her desire to help spread the good word of Colorado birding, increase CFO’s membership, and showcase what a wealth of information CFO has about Colorado birds. I hope you will share my appreciation by thanking Connie for her service when you get the chance.

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## Ron Ryder Award Recipient: Tony Leukering

*Rachel Hopper*

Tony Leukering, the 2008 recipient of the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Ron Ryder Award, is well known to birders in Colorado and throughout the United States. Among his many accomplishments, one of the most important is that through his work in the state, he has vastly improved our knowledge of the status and distribution of Colorado birds. He is one of Colorado's most knowledgeable birders and best writers, and he is certainly our local grammar expert.

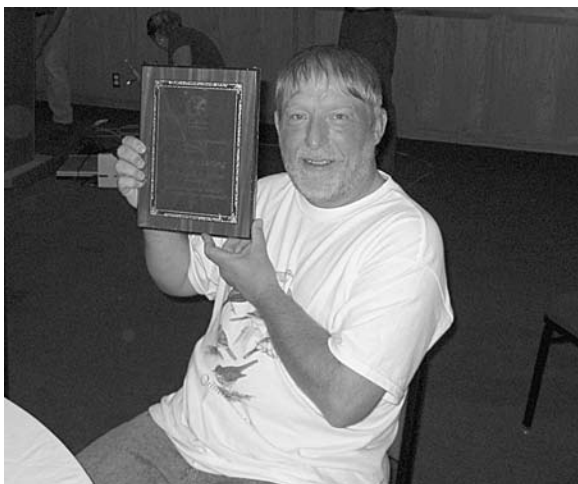
Tony was born on the Fort Carson Army Base and spent six months in the state before leaving. His family moved around a lot when he was a child, living in Connecticut, New York, and Baghdad. With his mom and brother, Tony eventually settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he did most of his schooling.

He took up birding in 1977, when he was 17, and was immediately hooked. His college career began at Michigan State University, where he was a Fisheries and Wildlife student for two years, but he couldn't seem to go to class all that often if birding was an available option. After deciding to get some field experience and return to school when he was more settled, he began working.

After a few field jobs, he took a full-time position with the National Audubon Society at its New York headquarters as the Christmas Bird Count Editor. He stayed for two years in NYC before heading back to the field. From 1989 to 1994 he racked up an amazing resume of field jobs, working at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory and at Cape May Bird Observatory as a hawk counter, passerine bander, and seabird counter; surveying birds at Dartmouth College; conducting winter point counts in Athens, Georgia for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; banding dispersing Kirtland's Warblers in central Michigan; studying the effects of Red-cockaded Woodpecker management on breeding neotropical migrants in Florida and Georgia; conducting bird transects in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains; and assisting with studies of nesting Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Willow Flycatchers, and Song Sparrows at California's Kern River Research Center.

On his way home to Ohio in August of 1994, Tony decided to stop in Colorado to see an old friend, Susan Craig. Susan mentioned that there was a fall banding job open at Colorado Bird Observatory (CBO), now Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO). Wanting some western bird experience, Tony applied for and got the seasonal

job, planning to return home in November. That idea did not work out as planned. During his 13 years at RMBO, Tony's work included running the "Monitoring Colorado's Birds" program, participating in the Dinosaur Ridge Hawkwatch, overseeing all banding operations, and conducting long-term research on aspens, aspen cavities, and cavity-nesting birds in the elk-wintering area in eastern Rocky Mountain National Park.



*Tony Leukering displays his Ron Ryder Award, presented to him at the 2008 CFO Convention.*

Tony finally left RMBO in July of 2007. Since then, he has spent time working for Point Reyes Bird Observatory trapping Burrowing Owls (and also doing various and sundry other tasks) on Southeast Farallon Island. Since January 2008, has worked in the private sector for the first time with Geo-Marine, Inc., conducting at-sea bird transects in New Jersey and Delaware waters.

The Ron Ryder award is given to individuals who meet three criteria: distinguished service to Colorado Field Ornithologists and its goals; scholarly contributions to Colorado field ornithology; and the sharing of knowledge with the Colorado field ornithology community. Tony has an exceptional history in all three areas. In the category of distinguished service to CFO, he has served on the CFO board of directors, served on the Colorado Bird Records Committee as a member and as chair, helped pioneer the development of the CBRC's on-line documentation system, and served numerous times as a CFO field trip leader for both the annual convention and other regularly scheduled trips. Furthermore, Tony is the volunteer quizmaster of CFO's weekly photo quiz, where he posts difficult bird photos and then writes advanced and very educational short articles on the identification of each species. Tony's long-lasting commitment to the CFO photo quiz has been a remarkable effort on his part. Everyone that participates in or just reads the quizzes cannot help but become a better birder with an increased understanding of bird identification.

In the category of scholarly contributions, Tony has authored or co-authored over 40 articles since 1999, including “Ageing Green-tailed Towhees (*Pipilo chlorurus*) by eye color” in *North American Bird Bander* (25), “Comments on counting techniques for estimating landbird abundance” in *The Auk* (119), and “Black Phoebe breeding range expansion into Colorado” in *Western Birds* (36). In addition, he was an author for the *National Geographic Complete Guide to the Birds of North America* and currently serves as a “News from the Field” editor for *North American Birds*.

Finally, in the category of sharing knowledge with the birding community in Colorado, Tony worked on the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas I project and was the initial coordinator for Colorado’s Breeding Bird Atlas II project, developing the Breeding Codes Manual, Field Worker’s Handbook, and Daily Field Cards; conducting presentations; getting agency interest and support; and rallying the troops to get involved. He writes the “In the Scope” column for this journal (see page 302 for another fine installment). And he is an active participant on COBirds, where he not only reports birds but, more importantly, offers very educational and insightful comments about their identification, their biology, and frequently the spelling of their names.

I’m sure that I have missed some of Tony’s accomplishments and contributions, but I think it is obvious that he is a vital and important part of Colorado birding. CFO is deeply grateful to Tony for all of the contributions he has made to the organization as well as for the advances he has made in Colorado’s field ornithology. I am honored to call him a friend and was truly privileged to present the Ron Ryder Award to him at the 2008 CFO Convention in Cañon City.

Rachel Hopper, 1721 Cottonwood Point Dr., Fort Collins, CO, r-hopper@comcast.net

## Field Trip Reports: Spring 2008

*Jim Beatty, Joe Roller, and Ira Sanders*

### **Upper Texas Coast, 16-27 April 2008**

One of the most exciting birding destinations in North America is the upper Texas Coast during spring migration. It can showcase one of the most thrilling North American birding events: a “fallout” of spring passerines, as migrating birds seek land after their long and exhausting flight across the Gulf of Mexico. What is great for birders is a matter of life or death for the birds. Coastal fallouts occur when migrants already underway on their 500-mile flight encounter adverse northerly winds or storms that slow their progress. Exhausted and hungry, they seek the first land that they see. The result can be trees and bushes on the upper Texas Coast that look like they’re decorated for Christmas, covered with unbelievable numbers of brightly-colored buntings, warblers, vireos, tanagers, orioles, and others searching for food and fresh water or just resting.

Raymond Davis (“Davis”) and John Vanderpoel led the CFO field trip in April to the upper Texas Coast, where they and fourteen others spent an exciting seven full days of birding. Some participants stayed longer, and some even drove the whole 1100 miles south, though most flew and then rented cars. Participants rented beach houses or stayed in RV parks. From 16-27 April they birded Sabine Woods and southwest Louisiana, Piney Woods, San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Anahuac, Brazos Bend, High Island, Bolivar Flats, and Rollover Pass, and then backtracked to some of the best spots again.

They tallied well over 200 species. Highlights included Anhinga, Magnificent Frigatebird, and fifteen species of long-legged waders, including both bitterns and Roseate Spoonbill. They saw both whistling-ducks and, somewhat surprisingly, all three species of scoters, even though most ducks and geese had already departed for more northerly climes. The last day produced two American Swallow-tailed Kites for those lucky enough to still be around to see these beautiful and graceful raptors. Other raptors included White-tailed Hawk and Crested Caracara. They recorded all seven expected plovers and 24 species of sandpiper, including Hudsonian Godwit. They cleaned up on the terns, seeing all eight species, plus Black Skimmer. Six species of vireos were tallied, as well as 28 different warblers including Cerulean, “Brewster’s,” and Louisiana Waterthrush. Sparrows included Bachman’s, Nelson’s Sharp-tailed, and Seaside.

While they didn’t experience a fabled fallout—good news for the birds, if not for our birders—they returned home very satisfied, with

many participants recording several lifers. Each day they tallied at least 125 species, sometimes more than 150. Even the unpleasant critters of south Texas—ticks, chiggers, and mosquitoes—were tolerable.

Many thanks to Davis and John, who led a very successful trip. Maybe someone reading this report will be inspired to organize and lead a complementary trip next year to the lower Rio Grande Valley, or Big Bend, or another place where some ABA rarities can be found and the birding is great!

*- Jim Beatty*  
CFO Field Trip Coordinator

### **The Three Ranch Trip, Prowers and Baca Counties, 9-11 May 2008**

The Colorado Field Ornithologists/Colorado Birding Trail Three Ranch Trip was very successful, thanks to some good migrants and especially thanks to our welcoming hosts—Lars and Kathryn Grahm at the Rocking 7K Ranch, Carl and Barb Taylor at the Taylor Ranch, and David and Cheryl Frank at the Frank Ranch. They took us ten birders in like kinfolk, and the home-style food was superb, with country barbecue Friday night and all the “fixin’s.” The whole community, man, woman, and child, brought over side dishes, pies, and cheesecake—the Taylors’ kitchen was humming like an Archilochomotive. On Saturday evening the Grahms’ tables seated over a score of hosts and guests, and then John Drummond entertained with images of birds from around the world. We learned about the family histories of these hardy ranchers and their way of life going back to homestead days. Stories were told and laughs shared.

Judi Ogle, our local guide, was the “super glue” who held everything together; I can’t thank her enough. The birders met Friday at 5:00 p.m. in Lamar, then drove down for the first of two visits to Turks Pond SWA, where the variety of shorebirds was great, especially for Baca County. On Friday and Saturday nights we stayed at the ranches and at Judi’s home. On Saturday, 12 May, there was an exciting fallout of migrants. After turning up White-eyed and Bell’s Vireos, Veery, Northern Waterthrush, White-throated Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, and other “goodies” at the Rocking 7K Ranch migrant trap, we climbed into the cabs and beds of two big pickups for a tour of the ranches’ extensive short-grass prairie. In every direction the prairie view stretched to the horizon. The weather was good, though windy on Saturday afternoon—a part of the local ambience. Carl Taylor shared his Killdeer experience with us—on Friday he had seen

the eggs hatch, releasing the precocious downy ping-pong balls on matchsticks to literally hit the ground running! The birders were congenial, keen to see the local specialties and soak up the novel experiences. On Sunday morning we visited Two Buttes and the Lamar College grounds before departing for home.

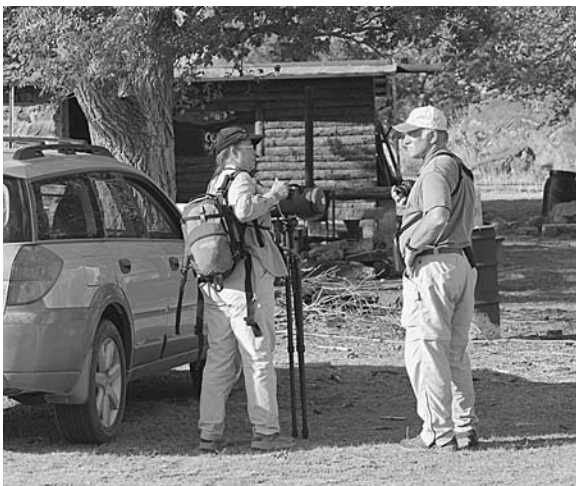
- Joe Roller

### **Kim Area Ranches, Las Animas County, 30 May to 1 June 2008**

Southeast Colorado was unbearably dry this past spring and summer and it definitely affected the birds and ranchers in that part of the state. Drought, in addition to the ongoing fight against the Army's seizure of private land for the Piñon Canyon expansion, resulted in a palpable pall over that entire area of the state. You could feel it when you talked to the ranchers and in the anti-Piñon Canyon signs we saw everywhere.

Everett and Flo Jackson and their family were excellent hosts on their Lazy UO Ranch just east of Cottonwood Canyon. We stayed in a modern mobile home just 2 miles from the canyon on 30 and 31 May. The Jacksons own about 40% of the old Carrizo Ranch that had belonged to Mrs. Jackson's family, including about 12 miles of beautiful Carrizo Creek.

On Friday, we birded our way to Kim, Colorado, stopping at Lake Henry and Lake Meredith along the way. Breeding Clark's and Western Grebes were plentiful despite the drought. We met up with Flo Jackson in Kim and followed her to the trailer on the ranch. Everett Jackson took us on a tour of Cottonwood Canyon and some of their land Friday before dinner. There we saw one of only two Curve-billed Thrashers of the trip (it was really dry) along with a flock of Blue Gros-



*Margaret Smith and Ira Sanders at the Jackson Ranch, Las Animas County, 31 May 2008. Photo by David Waltman*

beaks and some Wild Turkeys. Friday night we tried some night birding in Cottonwood Canyon, but came up empty for birds. However, I was able to “call in” Andrew Spencer with my Whip-poor-will imitation. He was camping nearby.

Saturday we met up with Andrew in Cottonwood Canyon and he showed us Rufous-crowned Sparrow, which was a target bird for trip participants David Waltman and Margaret Smith. That evening, Everett led us to their land on Carrizo Creek for a BBQ and more birding. The pictographs fascinated us, and we scanned Cliff Swallow colonies for Cave Swallow nests. No luck on that. However, as we were finishing dinner with the Jackson family, we had the best bird of the trip. All of us heard “Peter, Peter, Peter” right above the stone picnic table (the stone is quarried on the Jacksons’ ranch). Unfortunately, it called only once, preventing us from recording the call, and as it was past dusk, we couldn’t get a look at the bird. We all reviewed all the recordings of all the birds related to titmice that we had (Margaret had quite a few) and concluded that it was, indeed, a Tufted Titmouse. We considered Northern Mockingbird, but ruled it out. I had been in the Midwest in April, and the call of the Tufted Titmouse was fresh in my mind. I’m convinced that’s what it was.

On Sunday, we birded the Bader Ranch about seven miles north of Kim. The target bird was Hepatic Tanager, which we heard. Unfortunately, I was the only one lucky enough to see it. We worked our way to the bottom of the canyon, but still couldn’t find the bird. We did have a Northern Cardinal calling in the canyon and a leucistic Lark Sparrow near the highway.

All told, we had 88 species over the three days. At least two factors accounted for the low number of birds: the extremely dry conditions and the late date of the trip, as migration had passed and nesting was underway for those birds that could tolerate the drought. Still, we had a terrific time and enjoyed birding on two of the nicest private ranches in the state.

*- Ira Sanders*

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*Ira Sanders, greatauk@msn.com*

# The Land of No Mountains: Minot, North Dakota

*Saraiya Ruano*

Vast prairie speckled with blossoms stretched out before my eyes as the plane landed at the Minot airport, a small building with only two gates. A few trees stood alone in the distance. As I met up with the group, I asked, “we are taking a trip to mountains, right?” Our schedule listed a trip to the Turtle Mountains. The Turtle “Mountains,” however, are no more than a gentle swell from the prairie, vegetated heavily with aspen and underbrush. They are no more of a rise than the gentle bulge of a turtle’s shell.

Situated beneath the border of Canada, in a place where the eastern and western ranges of many birds overlap, North Dakota offers a rich diversity of wildlife. An ideal place for the 2008 Young Birder’s Conference, Minot is surrounded by grassland, marshland, and deciduous forest. Ferruginous Hawk, Lazuli Bunting, and Western Meadowlark allure birders from the east, while Black-and-White Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Eastern Towhee enrapture birders from the west. Strange to my ears, the sliding whistle of Eastern Wood-Pewee replaced the husky “beer” of the Western Wood-Pewee. Here at the crossroads for many species, hybrids between Lazuli and Indigo Buntings and Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks were common.

The group visited Lostwood, Des Lacs, and J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuges, as well as the Turtle Mountains and Garrison Dam. A stop for Chestnut-collared Longspurs on the way home from J. Clark Salyer proved one of my favorite trip experiences. In sharp contrast to their rarity in Colorado, Chestnut-collared Longspurs flourished out on the grasslands. In one brief pan with the scope I counted six longspurs. They flew to nearby posts, sitting long enough to be scoped, then obliged us with their wispy songs of tinkled nonsense. I also enjoyed our search for Le Conte’s Sparrow at J. Clark Salyer. We trampled through wet grass, which stood up to my knees in places, lugging scopes and cameras. My black rubber boots shimmered as sun bounced off their slick, wet surface. Le Conte’s and Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrows could be heard singing softly, far outmatched in volume by boisterous Sedge Wrens. Above us, Wilson’s Snipes performed flight displays, air rushing past their tails to make winnowing sounds. Two Sandhill Cranes flew in to feed, their grayish bodies stained with a rusty red-brown.



*Baird's Sparrow, Kidder County, ND, 7 June 2007. Photo by Andrew Spencer*

The group itself was dynamic, a fair mix of photographers, artists, and note-takers. We all shared one thing—a passion for birds. Our leaders, Michael O'Brien, Steve Howell, Louise Zemaitis, and Ron Martin, were informative as well as fun-loving. A day of serious birding was always spiced with a touch of humor. Among the workshops were lessons in the use of sonogram sketches to

describe bird song and a detailed description of molt. As in all ABA events, the floor remained open to study all types of wildlife, including squirrels, butterflies, and snakes.

Scholarships from several organizations enabled me to attend this conference. I owe a thank-you to Colorado Field Ornithologists, the Aiken Audubon Society, and the American Birding Association. Attending the conference allowed me to broaden my views as a birder, enhance my skills, meet other young birders, and learn from accomplished professionals. Furthermore, I have developed a new appreciation for the Rocky Mountains—*real* mountains.

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## Colorado's First Record of Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)

David Leatherman

On 29 October 2007 I birded reservoirs north of Fort Collins, hoping for unusual waterfowl. Not finding much and not wanting to go home, I decided to make the one-hour drive to Crow Valley Campground near Briggsdale in Weld County. My friend Ken Ecton had been to this location on a very windy day a few days earlier and reported seeing not a single bird in the campground proper. It was my wondering how much things had changed, as much as anything, that made me decide to turn east.

On this calm, mostly sunny day, the campground proper, while not crawling with birds, had 13 species, including at least six Mountain Chickadees. Autumn can be a good time to find unusual species in the scattered trees north of the campground, and so I headed that direction. Soon after opening the gate which accesses the Mourning Dove Trail, I heard vocalizations—familiar ones, but not something I could immediately put a name on—from within the cattle enclosure in the northwest part of the area. While walking to see the singer, I noticed a small group of American Robins in a Russian-olive. Passing these birds by, I relearned the winter territorial vocalizations of Northern Shrike for the umpteenth time and turned around, figuring my visit was basically over.

When Ken had reported zero birds in the campground, to console him somewhat that this sort of thing happens and to satisfy my own curiosity, I had checked my journals to see my low species totals for Crow Valley. On 17 December 2006 I'd had only five species in the campground, but one of them was a Varied Thrush. Remembering this, I decided to carefully check all the robins in the olive. That proved to be a good idea.

There in the shady middle of the Russian-olive crown, with five American Robins, was a most unexpected sight—a large *Myiarchus* flycatcher. From the onset of this episode, I recall thinking that there was something odd about the bird beyond the location and date, but I convinced myself that it had to be a Great Crested Flycatcher. Because it was cooperative, and because I was bothered by a twinge of uncertainty, I spent approximately 24 minutes with this individual, taking many photographs.



Fig. 1. Brown-crested Flycatcher, Crow Valley Campground, Weld County, 29 October 2007. Photo by Dave Leatherman

After returning to Fort Collins, I posted the results of my trip online, including the “Great Crested Flycatcher.” That evening, still bothered by this bird—mostly by its large bill—I checked every reference I had and searched images on the internet. At some point late that night, I dared to believe that this bird was quite possibly a Brown-crested Flycatcher—not an easy conclusion for a person whose normal role at the discovery of a potential rarity is that of “devil’s advocate.” A Brown-crested Flycatcher photo online by Greg Lasley (see below) was the clincher. I sent photos to a small set of folks in the middle of the night soliciting their opinions, and posted to the

COBirds listserv about the change in my thinking, just so interested persons could have a chance at this bird the next morning. Several of us did go out to Crow Valley on the morning of 30 October, but the bird was a no-show. Subsequently, expert opinion accumulated in favor of the bird’s belonging to the Arizona subspecies (*M. t. magister*) of Brown-crested Flycatcher. A document was prepared for the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) and the bird was accepted in early 2008 as Colorado’s first record of Brown-crested Flycatcher (Semo 2008).

## IDENTIFICATION

The following sections on Description, Behavior, and Similar Species are taken, with slight modification, from the report submitted to the CBRC on 14 December 2007.

### Description

The bird was immediately recognizable as a large flycatcher, about the size of a kingbird but appearing slimmer, perhaps because its tail was a bit longer (Fig. 1). Its upperparts were brown and rust, its underparts yellow and light gray. My other early impression was

that it was big-headed and somewhat crested. The bill was mostly black, with the basal 1/3 of the lower mandible being pinkish. In addition, this pink coloration extended along the very top edge of the lower mandible from its base halfway to the tip. The upper mandible was tipped with a sharp, fine hook, visible only at close range. The base of the upper mandible was gray. The bill was long and basically straight and appeared to be thick, both in depth and width, at its base.

The side of the face, a broad swath defined above by the level of the middle of the eye and below by the level of the gape, extending from the lores through the auriculars to the front of the nape, was medium gray. In good light the side of the face contrasted with the forecrown, supercilium, crown, nape, and mantle, all of which were a uniform gray-brown. The forecrown sloped gently to the peak of the crown, which was well behind the eye. The rear of the crown was steep and distinctly shaggy or ragged. The malar region was gray, a shade lighter than the side of the face. The throat was a shade lighter gray than the malar region, appearing almost white in poor light. The upper breast was light gray, similar in color to the malar region. The lower breast, belly, flanks, and undertail coverts were evenly pale yellow. The transition from the light gray of the upper breast to the pale yellow of the lower breast was gradual.

The scapulars were the same brown-gray as the mantle; they were broadly, diffusely edged in light gray. The centers of the median coverts were slightly darker than the mantle and diffusely edged in light gray, the tips of these feathers being broadly pale and forming the upper wingbar. The greater covert centers were dark gray-brown and broadly edged with light gray, the tips being pale and forming the lower wingbar. The lower wingbar was not as prominent as the upper wingbar due to comparatively wider pale tips on the median coverts. The secondary centers were a shade of gray-brown similar to the centers of the greater coverts, and were likewise broadly, diffusely edged in light gray (see "Similar Species" section for a discussion of this character). The primaries appeared to be dark gray-brown from the base to the tip on the inner side of the shaft midline and bright rusty brown on the outer side. The primaries got gradually somewhat darker toward the tips. Two, perhaps three feathers (primary coverts?) showed at the base of the outer primary. The upper one (or two) showed a medium brown center edged broadly and diffusely in light gray, while the lower one had a rusty-brown center with pale edging. The primary extension was short.

The tail was generally rusty brown but I did not get a good look at it, particularly from behind (above or below). It was apparent, how-

ever, that the outer tail feathers were very narrowly edged with tan or light yellow. The tail was fairly long and rounded and appeared to be of an even width throughout, perhaps a bit wider at the tip. This apparent “flare” might have been due to the tail’s being concave through its upper portion and somewhat flattened at the tip. The legs and feet were dark gray, appearing black in the field.

## Behavior

The bird was initially found sitting quietly in the interior of a medium-sized, open-grown Russian-olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*). Also in the tree were five American Robins. Presumably both species were feeding on the olives, although I did not witness the flycatcher eating them. All the *Myiarchus* flycatchers regular in North America are reported to feed on berries and other tree fruits, particularly in migration and winter. Either because of my approach or on its own, the bird left the first Russian-olive and flew ten meters to the east down to a low limb of another Russian-olive, only inches above the grass. There it sat quietly for a time and then flew down into the grass, presumably in pursuit of an insect or perhaps fallen olives. It remained out of sight for at least a minute, returned to the lower limb, and then flew around the tree. I next discovered it sitting just inside the outer edge of the crown about 15 feet off the ground. The way it silently, inconspicuously moved around the tree crowns, often back inside the tree crowns, reminded me of a cuckoo. My pursuit of photos apparently forced it to fly back around to the opposite side of the tree, where it sat for a time. Then, unprovoked, it calmly flew out of this tree to the northwest toward the fenced grazing enclosure planted decades ago by the Boy Scouts. I did not pursue the bird further.

## Similar Species

This bird was clearly within the flycatcher genus *Myiarchus*. Given that it was too big and large-billed for Dusky-capped (*M. tuberculifer*) and too yellow for La Sagra’s (*M. sagrae*), the birds to consider here are Ash-throated (*M. cinerascens*), Great Crested (*M. crinitus*), and Brown-crested Flycatchers.

Ash-throated apparently can overlap in all characters with Brown-crested, particularly with its Texas subspecies, *cooperi*. However, Cardiff and Dittmann (2000) state that considering the whole suite of characters, no individual bird ever shows multiple characters that fall within the range typical of the other species. In other words, an Ash-throated with a longer bill than, say, a smallish *cooperi* Brown-crested would not also be yellower underneath. At no time after the

first few seconds did Ash-throated seem a possibility for the identity of the bird at Crow Valley. It was just too big-billed and too yellow underneath.

Thus, it seems the question of identity falls within the twosome of Great Crested and Brown-crested. In terms of structure and bare parts, the bill of the bird seemed too big for Great Crested, not so much in length as in bulk, especially in the depth and width of the base (consistent with the Arizona subspecies *magister*). The bill tip was more hooked than Great Crested's should be, a character consistent with Brown-crested. Initially the pale color of the lower mandible base seemed to match what Sibley shows for Great Crested, but in looking at photos (particularly one by Greg Lasley at <http://www.greglasley.net/browncrfc.html>) and talking with others (particularly Chris Benesh), I found that this character is not all that helpful as a separation point, especially in the fall.

Great Crested is a long-distance migrant, and like most passerine species with this habit, has a long primary extension. Brown-crested does not typically travel long distances within its known range and has a comparatively short primary extension. This bird had a short primary extension. I did not see, or at least did not note, the color of the mouth lining, which Pyle describes as "flesh to buffy yellow" for Brown-crested and "yellow-orange" for Great Crested.

In terms of plumage, the contrast between the gray side of the head and the browner crown was right for Brown-crested, with Great Crested showing a similar shade of gray on both portions of the head. The mantle was brown-gray on this bird and would be more olive in Great Crested. The throat of this bird was very light gray, appearing almost white in poor light, rather than dark gray, as expected for Great Crested. The breast was lighter gray than a typical Great Crested's should be. The shade of yellow on the belly and bordering underparts was "in between" what would be typical of Great Crested and Ash-throated. The amount of gray on the chest (that is, how far down towards the belly it comes before changing to yellow) is apparently variable and overlaps for both species. The field guides are not particularly good on this character, usually showing the gray on Brown-crested being more extensive than on Great Crested. My checks of study skins at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science did not find this difference to exist to a degree that would make it useful in the field.

Other than voice, which is of no help with this silent bird, perhaps the single best feature for separating Great Crested and Brown-crested Flycatchers is the extent, sharpness, and brightness of the light edges to the innermost three secondaries (the "tertials"). In this



Fig. 2. Great Crested Flycatcher of the boreus subspecies (DMNS #27511) showing extensive, sharply-defined inner secondary edges. Photo taken 6 November 2007.

bird, the innermost secondary appeared to have a brighter edge than the bordering two secondaries, but the sharpness, brightness, and extent of this pale edge was within the range of Brown-crested; it would be much more conspicuous on Great Crested. See the accompanying photos of specimens of the Great Crested (Fig. 2) and Brown-crested Flycatchers (Fig. 3) from the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and compare with the photograph of the Crow Valley bird (Fig. 1).

I have been unable to find any mention of behavioral differences between these two species (other than habitat preference, which is mostly irrelevant in this case). But, as stated above, the sluggish,

“gentle” demeanor of this bird seemed in contrast to the rather wary and hyperactive behavior I have observed while trying to photograph Great Cresteds in southeastern Colorado. Also, I have never seen a Great Crested perch within a foot of the ground and hop down into the grass for prey, but must admit I have not seen a lot of “out-of-context” late migrant Great Cresteds away from tall trees.

## RANGE AND EXTRALIMITAL RECORDS

According to Cardiff and Dittmann (2000), Brown-crested Flycatcher breeds locally in southeastern California, extreme southern Nevada, extreme southwestern Utah, and extreme western Arizona. Such nesting is mainly at desert oases and along the lower Colorado River and its tributaries in mature riparian habitat. It breeds more extensively from south-central and southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico south and east along the Pacific Slope of Mexico to western Chiapas, and from eastern Coahuila and southern Texas south and east on the Atlantic Slope of Mexico to the Pacific lowlands of El Salvador, western Honduras, western Nicaragua, and northwestern Costa Rica. It also breeds in South America, gener-

ally east of the Andes, south to southern Brazil, Paraguay, and northern Argentina, except in western and central Amazonia (Cardiff & Dittmann 2000).

Brown-crested Flycatchers basically winter within the southern half of the breeding range. The normal northern limit for wintering birds on the Pacific Slope appears to be Guerrero, Mexico (though the species is rare to uncommon as far north as central Sonora). On the Atlantic Slope, the limit appears to be northern Oaxaca (though some may occur north to southeastern San Luis Potosi and the Yucatan Peninsula).

Brown-crested Flycatcher is a “regular” winter vagrant (40+ records since the 1960’s) to Florida. Louisiana has several winter sight records and specimens (Stevenson & Anderson 1994, Stedman 1998).

It probably also warrants mentioning that the difficulties of *Myiarchus* identification no doubt have influenced the historical record, particularly those records comprising the extralimital category (Banks & McCaskie 1964).

## DISCUSSION

The occurrence of a Brown-crested Flycatcher at Crow Valley Campground was not expected, at least not by me. It was, however, a species predicted to show up in the southwestern part of the state in a forward-looking article in this journal on “next Colorado species” (Cairo & Righter 1987). Other new Colorado state records in “The Class of 2007” are Hooded Oriole (seen in 2006, accepted in 2007), Black-chinned Sparrow (same), Lawrence’s Goldfinch, and Streak-backed Oriole. Thus, all five 2007 additions have distinct southwestern affinities. This individual Brown-crested Flycatcher perhaps represents the northernmost record of its species anywhere and certainly furnishes one of the highest-elevation records. Apart from the issue



Fig. 3. Brown-crested Flycatcher of the *magister* subspecies (DMNS #5054) showing diffuse pale edging of the secondaries. Photo taken 6 November 2007.

of how it got to this latitude, the habitat it chose this day is similar to a desert oasis, provided food in the form of insects and Russian-olives, and was otherwise hospitable.

The Crow Valley bird came very close to being the latest (in terms of calendar date) Colorado record of "Great Crested Flycatcher." Without email, the ease and speed of digital photography, and access to internet resources, its true identity might never have been known. Hunches always warrant thorough checking out, regardless of the outcome. My only regret about this bird is that others did not get to see it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank all those who offered opinions on the identity of this bird, particularly Chris Benesh, Chris Wood, and John Arvin. Janeal Thompson pointed out some websites that were very helpful. I also thank Rachel Hopper for posting my photographs on the Colorado Field Ornithologists website quickly, which greatly aided their distribution and the ensuing discussion. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science's Zoology Collections Manager, Jeff Stephenson, was very helpful in letting me examine study skins of the *Myiarchus* group. And I must mention Mark Peterson, who got me through the online CBRC report submission process at a time when I was a guinea pig and did not know it.

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# Arctic Loon in Colorado

Andrew Spencer

## Introduction: Arctic Loon in the Lower 48

Of the five species of loon that occur in the United States, Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*) is certainly the rarest and least seen. It breeds solely at the tip of the Seward Peninsula and around Kotzebue Sound in western Alaska, with migrants regularly seen on St. Lawrence Island and occasionally elsewhere in Alaska (Russell 2002).

In recent years, a pattern of vagrancy has been documented along the Pacific coast of North America, with a date range of 2 November to 18 June. Of the thirteen documented records, three pertain to fall migrants, four to apparent wintering individuals, and six to spring migrants (Russell 2002, OBRC 2008). The majority have been immature birds.

The first inland Lower 48 record of Arctic Loon was from Priest Rapids Lake, *Grant/Yakima*, Washington, from 16 January to 15 April 2000 (Russell 2002). The only other two inland records have come from Colorado. The first was the well-publicized occurrence in Douglas County of an adult in basic plumage found by Hugh and Urling Kingery and confirmed by Glenn Walbek et al. (Leukering & Semo 2004). That bird appeared at the Walker Gravel Pit near Franktown, *Douglas*, on 17 November 2002 and remained there for three days before moving north to Cherry Creek Reservoir, *Arapahoe*, for an additional four days.

The author discovered the second record of this species in Colorado on 28 September 2005; the account of the sighting is detailed below.

## The Second State Record

On 28 September 2005, Glenn Walbek and I planned to meet up at Chatfield State Park, *Douglas/Jefferson*, around 9:00 a.m. to look for passerine migrants. I arrived a few hours early to scan the reservoir. The weather was overcast, with a light drizzle and fog. As these weather conditions account for many a good bird at Chatfield, I started the day with a feeling of anticipation.

Starting from the Heron Overlook platform, I soon spotted what I believed to be a breeding-plumaged Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*). Having seen only two breeding-plumaged Pacific Loons previously, I was quite excited at this find. After watching the bird for only a short time, though, I noticed that it had extensive white on the flanks, despite lying low in the water. My excitement quickly spiked, and

I began looking for other field marks supporting the identification of Arctic Loon. In the next couple of minutes of studying the bird I became even more convinced that the bird could in fact be an Arctic Loon. I quickly made my way to a pay phone to call Glenn and encourage him to hurry up, and to call Joey Kellner to see if he could get off work to see the bird.

By the time Glenn arrived I had managed to see almost all of the field marks I knew of that supported Arctic Loon, and believed I was looking at the second record of the species in Colorado. After observing the bird for a while, Glenn arrived at the same conclusion, and Joey, upon his arrival, also agreed with the identification.

We continued to watch the bird for a couple of hours, at which point Glenn and Joey had to leave. I watched the bird for a while longer, and decided to make a quick trip home to pick up my camera and grab a bite of lunch.

Upon returning to Chatfield I found a few other birders searching in vain for the bird. It soon became apparent that shortly after I left the bird had flown, since Doug Faulkner, arriving about 30 minutes after my departure, could not find the bird. It is my belief that since the weather had been getting steadily better since the morning, the bird had decided to continue on its southward migration.

This record has been accepted by the Colorado Bird Records Committee as the second documented occurrence of Arctic Loon in Colorado (Semo 2008).

### **Identification of Arctic Loon**

Observers should be extremely cautious when identifying potential Arctic Loons. The identification of this species is by no means easy or straightforward, and more than one field mark should be seen before identifying a contender bird as an Arctic.

Identification is complicated by the existence of two subspecies of Arctic Loon, *G. a. viridigularis* and nominate *arctica*. Nominate Arctic Loon breeds in Europe and western Siberia, while *viridigularis* breeds in eastern Siberia and Alaska (Russell 2002). It differs from the nominate form in its bulkier proportions, larger size, and greenish rather than purplish sheen on the throat (Birch & Lee 1997). Due to the lack of Arctic Loon records on the Atlantic coast and the more proximate breeding range of *viridigularis*, I believe *G. a. viridigularis* to be by far the more likely form to occur in Colorado, and the field marks listed below (from Birch & Lee 1997) pertain to this subspecies.

The most frequently-mentioned field mark separating Arctic from Pacific Loon is the extent of white on the flanks, and this is the single

most useful and consistent difference. Observers should note, however, that depending on its position on the water, Pacific Loon can also show extensive white on the flanks. The key here is the shape of the white as it nears the tail. On Arctic Loon it appears to “bubble” up towards the rump, much as it does on Violet-green Swallow. This mark becomes far more noticeable when the bird is riding low in the water, at which point the white “bubble” should be the only white that can be seen. On a low-riding Pacific Loon, no white at all should be apparent.

Less well known as an identifying mark is the lack of a vent strap on Arctic Loon. On a Pacific Loon, the white vent area has a dark strap across it that is absent on Arctics. A few (ten percent or fewer) Pacific Loons have only a partial vent strap, as do a very few Arctic Loons, but there is no overlap in the extent of the partial strap (Birch & Lee 1997). Of course this is only noticeable when the bird rolls over to preen, but during an extended observation of a loon, a view of the vent area can usually be had.

In alternate plumage, some additional differences include the color of the head and nape. On Pacific Loon the nape is significantly paler and contrasts with the darker gray head. On Arctic Loon, the nape is the same color as the head, and the head is darker overall. This mark can also be useful in basic plumage, but is of less use then since some Pacific Loons do not show much of a paler patch on the nape in this plumage. The white lines on the side of the throat on Arctic Loon are bolder and slightly longer than those on Pacific Loon, making them easier to see at a distance. And, finally, the white markings on the scapulars of Arctic Loon are larger and bolder as well. The difference in throat color between the two species, while real, is very hard to see without an exceptional look, and is rarely useful in the field.

There are also a number of structural and behavioral differences that could be used to differentiate Arctic from Pacific Loon. The most obvious is the more blocky shape of the head, with a lump above the eye, so that the head shape approaches that of Common Loon (*G. immer*). In Pacific Loon, especially when the bird is at rest, the head looks very “puffy,” whereas the head on Arctic Loon rarely has this look. This mark is less useful on diving birds, however. The bill on Arctic Loon is, on average, larger than that of Pacific Loon, contributing to the Common Loon “jizz” of Arctic. Also, Arctic Loon typically holds its bill above the horizontal, much as Yellow-billed (*G. adamsii*) and Red-throated Loons (*G. stellata*), and unlike Pacific or Common Loons. Note that all these differences apply mostly to *G. a. viridigularis*, and that the differences in shape and behavior between Pacific Loon and *G. a. arctica* are less apparent.

An oft-mentioned, but misleading, field mark for Arctic Loon is the lack of the “chinstrap” present on basic-plumaged Pacific Loons. While the lack of a chinstrap can support the identification of Arctic, it does not necessarily confirm it. The bird in Franktown in 2002 had what appeared to be a chinstrap, which led some observers to question the ID, but later review revealed this to be the remains of the dark throat patch present in alternate plumage (Leukering 2002).

## Conclusion

A couple of facts about the Arctic Loons seen in Colorado seem to run counter to what has been learned of the occurrence of the species on the Pacific coast: both birds appearing in Colorado have been adults, and the second sighting occurred far earlier than the date range of fall migrants on the Pacific. However, since there are so few records of Arctic Loon in the Lower 48, and especially the inland Lower 48, the significance of these differences is unknown.

Since the majority of loon migration in Colorado takes place during the fall months, and since Arctic Loon has now been found twice in Colorado in the space of three years during these months, it seems quite likely that there will be future occurrences of this species in the state. The majority of loons in Colorado, especially Pacific Loons, occur on the large Front Range reservoirs and on the South Park lakes during October and November. Careful scanning of all Pacific-type loons found on these lakes would seem to be in order.

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## Defending the Nest: Mountain Plover Survival

*Larry Modesitt*

How have Mountain Plovers survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and how will they survive in the future? My wife Abby, my friend Gregg Goodrich and I decided that protective coloration must be part of the answer. We were visiting a known nest site on the Chico Basin Ranch during the CFO convention, but there was no plover, at least for us. The nest was said to be within fifty feet of an old tire, yet we still could not find it. All we saw was an open expanse of inch-high sparse grass, sprinkled with cholla cactus and cow pies. The tan plover's head would stick above those items on the tan bare ground, so why couldn't we see it?

Returning on Sunday with Bill Schmoker's group, we were the last car to get there, undoubtedly distracted by some other bird. Doug Faulkner mercifully pointed us in the direction of the Chico Basin plover sitting on its nest. We assumed at the time that it was a female, but the photos show that this plover had a strong black cap and lores, indicating that it was a male. This is not unexpected: a clutch of six eggs often is split into two nests. The male incubates the first clutch while the female lays and incubates the second (Knopf & Wunder 2006). Both Mountain Plover parents are painted in earth tones, matching the land they inhabit. It was interesting to see the whole scene: an arid prairie with an inch-wide head above a two-inch neck. Doug, Bill, and the group moved on to other birds.

How did Mountain Plovers survive over the ages on prairies blanketed with buffalo? We were soon to find out. Gregg announced his concern that a herd of cows was heading directly toward the nest. We watched in suspense as a black cow passed the plover first on the far side. Then a black-and-white cow passed by on the near side. One four-hundred pound cow after another—at least a dozen—passed only a few feet away from the minute four-ounce speck in our binoculars. With cows passing by so closely, we could not believe that the plover would not flush. He stayed on the nest, glued motionless to the ground. We hoped the worst would not happen. Why didn't the plovers nest under a cholla?

Suddenly, a brown cow headed straight for the nest. The plover's preferred adaptive response to predators, remaining motionless (Knopf & Wunder 2006), would no longer suffice. The plover calmly rose and advanced five feet ahead to the cow. We heard no distract-

ing calls, but a single wing protruded from the tiny body. Without slowing down, the cow stretched its neck down toward the plover, curious at what suddenly appeared in view. The plover then made a right-angle turn, moving directly toward us. As he moved in this new direction, at cow speed, so did the cow. It kept its nose hot on the trail of its new leader. The little leader drew the curious bovine away from the vulnerable nest. The left hoof missed the eggs by about twelve inches.

The whole interlude took perhaps three seconds. Three seconds in which perhaps three eggs were spared by the calm intervention of the parent. We describe him as calm because there was no frantic scurrying or frenzied shrieking such as we have often glimpsed when Killdeer lead us away from a nest. After the cow had safely passed, the plover waited a few seconds, then ambled back to the nest and sat on it. It was just another incident in the success of the Chico Basin plover protecting its progeny for another day. Three seconds of action. The right action for the right potential threat.

Mountain Plovers have evidently evolved more than one strategy to cope with the threat of cattle. The next day, John Drummond (pers. comm.) and his group saw a herd of 100 cows coming for the same plover. When a group of four headed directly for the nest, the plover used a different technique. It flew into the face of the cattle to distract them—again successfully.

When distraction doesn't work, the splitting of the clutch into two nests might. Interestingly, the Eurasian Dotterel, another species of plover, which often nests on the tundra where it must avoid caribou, has similar breeding behavior. The male incubates the first clutch of eggs while the female may find a second or possibly a third mate for additional nests (O'Brien et al. 2006).

Herbivore hooves are an age-old threat that Mountain Plovers are apparently well-equipped to deal with, but today the species faces many new threats. Mountain Plovers worldwide have declined to an estimated 9,000 birds (O'Brien et al. 2006). As recently as 1967, Weld County alone had an estimated population of 21,000 birds (Graul & Webster 1976). Much of their native shortgrass breeding habitat has been converted to cropland, often to winter wheat or other tall crops. As a result, plovers are attracted to the open habitats that some other types of farming and grazing provide. They prefer short vegetation with scattered patches of bare ground, as tall grasses obstruct their ability to see predators. Flat habitat is helpful, so that Prairie Falcons cannot surprise them when they suddenly appear, flying low over a ridge (Knopf & Wunder 2006). Also, fresh cow pies help provide a nice array of insects to feast upon.

A careless cow is one thing, but how does the plover cope with a John Deere tractor? To address this concern, beginning in 2002, Tammy VerCauteren of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) and biologists from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) began meeting with landowners and ranchers. They explained to the landowners the value of plovers on private land. Not only would birders pay to see them, but the plovers would eat insects. Pearson (1917) describes an examination of sixteen Mountain Plover stomachs: combined, they contained 720 grasshoppers. Their diet today is mostly grasshoppers, beetles, and other insects (Knopf & Wunder 2006), an appetite that pleases farmers.

Best of all, it's relatively easy for the farmer to avoid unintentionally destroying the nest and eggs with his tractor while maintaining his agricultural production. A counterpart to the simple uplifted plover wing is a couple of orange stakes. Working through voluntary partnerships with farmers, the Colorado Division of Wildlife contracted RMBO to mark nests using stakes. Once a nest is marked, the farmer then swerves the tractor to miss it by only a few inches. That's all.

Funded by CDOW, the nest marking program is a cooperative effort between CDOW, RMBO, landowners, the US Geological Survey, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The program has grown to hundreds of thousands of acres of private land and more than 150 willing producers. According to Ross Lock, RMBO's Mountain Plover Program Manager, a total of 374 nests has been marked (pers. comm.). Because more farmers are aware of the plover and have shown a willingness to help conserve it, the program is now transitioning into a landowner-led initiative. Nest marking by biologists will be phased out as farmers locate nests on their own and avoid them during routine cultivation practices.

To see such a small bird turn a massive cow on a dime was amazing. Those few moments of action and their educational value will remain with the three of us observers for a long time. Learning that a later observer saw the Chico Basin plover feeding a fledgling built our confidence in its natural survival skills. More importantly, knowing that conservationists and landowners are working together to perpetuate this species in our landscape builds our confidence in its prospects.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my fellow observers of the intrepid plover, Gregg Godrich and Abby Modesitt, whose excitement knew no bounds, and John Drummond for his comments on the next day's sighting. I also thank Hugh

Kingery for his plover knowledge and Nathan Pieplow for encouraging and assisting my additional research into plover behavior. I'm also grateful for the editing, particularly regarding Mountain Plover conservation action, provided by Tammy VerCauteren & Ross Lock of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and Eric Odell of the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

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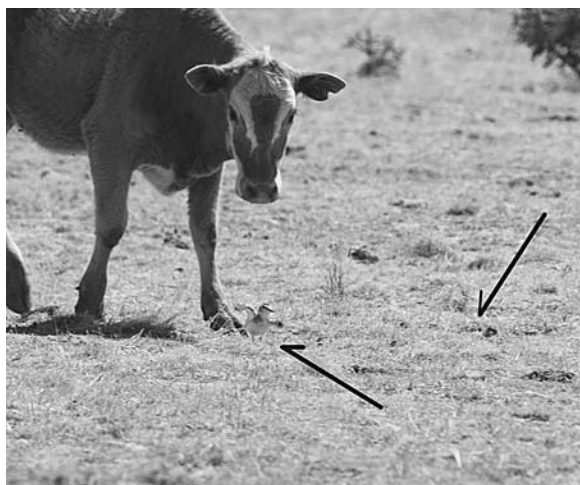
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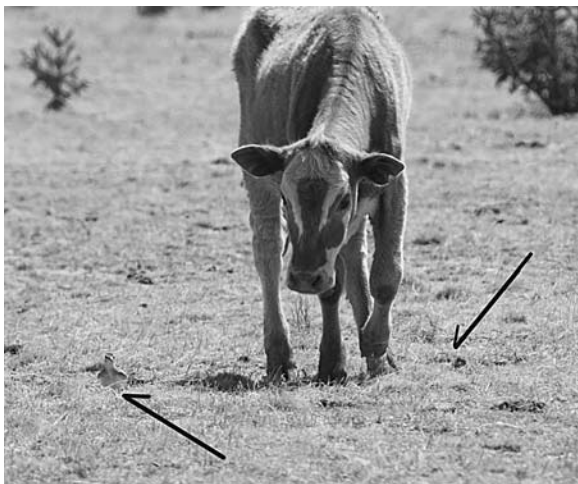
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*A Mountain Plover successfully guides a 400 lb. cow away from her nest. Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso County, 16 May 2008. Photo by Abby Modesitt*



# Assessing Potential Changes in Species Distribution

Lynn E. Wickersham

Project Manager, Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II

Breeding Bird Atlases are significant components of large-scale bird conservation strategies because they provide data on species distribution, abundance, habitat use, and breeding phenology. When repeated at regular intervals, atlases can also detect changes in these variables over time. These data are tremendously valuable to natural resource managers, including federal and state agencies, tribes, military installations, conservation organizations, and private landowners. Colorado's first Breeding Bird Atlas (COBBAI, Kingery 1998) provides baseline data that can be used for comparison for decades to come. The initiation of the second Breeding Bird Atlas (COBBAIL) in 2007 provides the opportunity to evaluate potential changes in populations of Colorado's breeding birds.

It is important to recognize that each atlas effort represents a snapshot in time; thus, apparent changes in distribution and abundance between a first and second atlas should be critically analyzed. Observed changes in distribution and abundance may be confounded by differences in observers' bird identification skills and the level of effort put forth during each atlas. These issues are particularly important when small-scale changes are observed between atlas efforts. Large-scale changes offer more evidence of true changes in distribution and abundance, especially when consistent with atlas data from adjacent states or other long-term monitoring data, such as the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). It will be essential to consider each of these factors when analyzing COBBAIL data and evaluating apparent changes in species distribution.

Given these caveats and the obvious limitations of analyzing a partial dataset, I present examples of apparent small- and large-scale changes in species distribution for two species breeding in Colorado. I also present information on several species reported as new breeders in Colorado since COBBAI. The data presented are based on COBBAI and data submitted to date during the first two years (2007–08) of COBBAIL.

## Small-Scale Distribution Change: Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*)

Preliminary data from COBBAIL suggest an apparent distribution

expansion of Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) in Atlas Region 17 south and east of Denver. During COBBAI, breeding evidence was recorded in only two blocks in this region, both within the same quadrangle (Fig. 1a). So far in Atlas II, Cassin's Kingbird has been recorded in 13 blocks in 13 different quadrangles in Region 17 (Fig. 1b). This species has also been recorded in several new blocks in other Atlas Regions (Fig. 1).

Evaluating whether Cassin's Kingbird is expanding its range in Colorado based on these data is challenging. We should take into consideration the level of effort, or field hours, exerted in these Atlas blocks during COBBAI and COBBAIL. In the final analysis, if significantly more hours are recorded in blocks reporting this species during COBBAIL, we should be cautious when making conclusions about changes in distribution. If Cassin's Kingbird is expanding its range in Colorado, we expect to receive more breeding evidence over the next three years of the project.

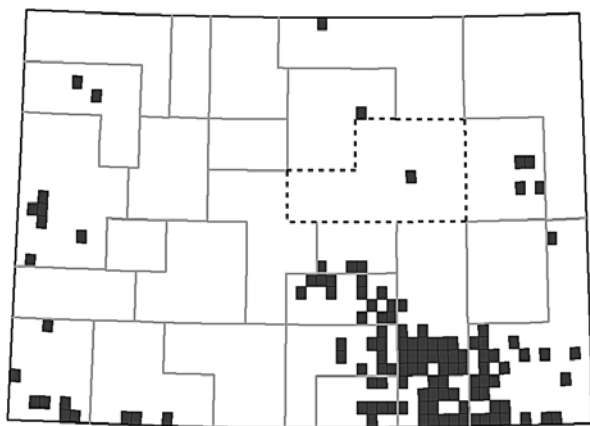


Fig. 1a

Fig. 1. Breeding evidence for Cassin's Kingbird reported during (a) COBBAI (1987-1995) and (b) COBBAIL (2007-08). Dark areas delineate US Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangles where breeding evidence (Possible, Probable, or Confirmed) was reported. Region 17 boundary is depicted by a dashed line.

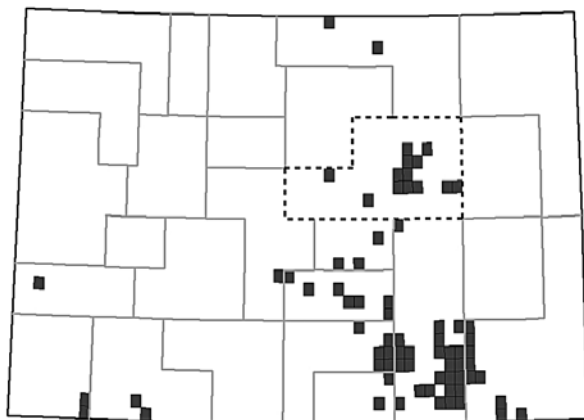


Fig. 1b

BBS trend data may provide additional support to COBBA data in evaluating potential changes in distribution of Cassin's Kingbird. BBS data collected after the completion of COBBAI (1996–2007) suggest that Cassin's Kingbird has increased by 2.3% per year in Colorado ( $P = 0.06$ , Sauer et al. 2008). However, these data may have important deficiencies stemming from, for example, low abundance or a small number of sample routes, and which may result in an inability to detect long-term changes (Sauer et al. 2008).

### Large-Scale Distribution Change: Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

At this stage of COBBAIL, the best example of large-scale distribution change is that of Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*). This species was not known to breed in Colorado during COBBAI. The first record of Eurasian Collared-Dove in Colorado was only 12 years ago (Truan and Percival 1996); however, since then the species has quickly expanded its range in the state. COBBAIL has been an excellent tool for tracking Eurasian Collared-Dove distribution in Colorado, as evidence based on only the first two years of data shows (Fig. 2).

Large-scale differences between the atlases provide much stronger evidence to conclude that there are true changes in species distribution. Survey-wide data from BBS suggest that Eurasian Collared-Doves have increased 35.6% per year between 1980 and 2007 ( $P < 0.01$ , Sauer et al. 2008). In Colorado, they have increased by 100.6%

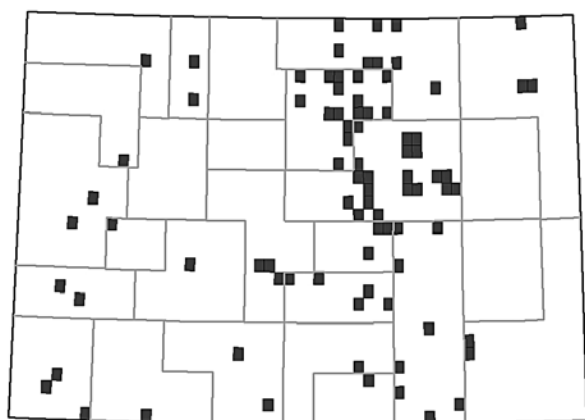


Fig. 2. Breeding evidence for Eurasian Collared-Dove reported during COBBAIL (2007–08). Dark areas delineate US Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangles where breeding evidence (Possible, Probable, or Confirmed) was reported.

year between 1980 and 2007 ( $P < 0.01$ , Sauer et al. 2008). Note that these analyses include the 16 years (1980–1995) before the species was known to occur in the state, as analyses for the time period 1996–2007 are not available. Trend data for Eurasian Collared-Doves may also be subject to the same deficiencies as data for Cassin's Kingbird (Sauer et al. 2008).

## Breeding Evidence for New Species in Colorado

The COBBAIL project has provided confirmed breeding evidence for five species not reported as potential or confirmed breeders in Colorado during COBBAIL. These species and their associated breeding evidence are summarized below.

**Hooded Merganser** – *Lophodytes cucullatus*. Hooded Mergansers were confirmed in two Atlas blocks in Region 16 in 2008. Both adult and young mergansers were observed in both blocks.

**Franklin's Gull** – *Larus pipixcan*. In 2007, Franklin's Gull was confirmed in one Atlas block in Region 11, at Walden Reservoir in north-central Colorado. In June 2007, 39 adult Franklin's Gulls were observed on nests on an island in the reservoir. In July 2007, over 40 adults and 7 nests with young gulls were recorded.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** – *Streptopelia decaocto*. Eurasian Collared-Doves were reported in 88 blocks and 21 of 26 COBBAIL Regions in 2007 and 2008. This species has been confirmed in 18 of the 88 blocks reported, including blocks along the Front Range and on the West Slope (see Fig. 2b).

**White-winged Dove** – *Zenaida asiatica*. White-winged Doves have been reported in five blocks and confirmed in two blocks since 2007. In one of the confirmed blocks, a White-winged Dove was observed on a nest. In the other confirmed block, White-winged fledglings were observed.

**Prairie Warbler** – *Dendroica discolor*. The first breeding record in Colorado for Prairie Warbler was reported in an Atlas block in June of 2008 in Castlewood Canyon State Park in Region 17. This species was confirmed after several observers witnessed a female building a nest.

Two additional new species that have been reported but not confirmed in COBBAIL include Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) and Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). A pair of Common Goldeneyes was observed in June of 2008 in northeastern Colorado, in Region 15. No other observations of this species have been reported and no other breeding evidence was observed. An individual Merlin was reported perching and hunting in north-central Colorado, in Region 11. No breeding activities for this bird were reported.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Catherine Ortega for providing a preliminary review of this article. A sincere thanks to all COBBAIL volunteers and Regional Coordinators for the time and effort they have put forth to this project. COBBAIL would not be successful without you, and we hope you will continue your efforts through completion of the project.

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## CBRC REPORT

# The 48<sup>th</sup> Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee

Lawrence S. Semo

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

## Introduction

This 48<sup>th</sup> report presents the results of deliberations of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) on partial results of circulations held during the summer of 2008. This article provides results of the circulation of 49 reports submitted by 20 observers documenting 36 occurrences of 17 species. 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.

Three potentially new species to the state list are still pending within the CBRC: Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*), and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*E. flaviventris*).

Committee members voting on these reports were: Coen Dexter, Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Rachel Hopper, Joey Kellner, Bill Maynard, and Larry Semo.

### **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 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.php5>).

### **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 48<sup>th</sup> 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 submit-

ted 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, and the second-round vote was 6-1 in favor of accepting the report. The decision on most reports is completed in the first round.

In this report, county names are italicized in keeping with the style established for the *News from the Field* column in this journal. We have attempted to provide the full date span for individual records, with the seasonal reports in *North American Birds* and this journal being the primary sources of those dates. The Committee has not dealt with the question of full date spans as compared to submitted date spans when documentations do not provide such. The CBRC encourages observers to document the final date on which a rare species was seen, as that provides historical evidence of the true extent of its stay.

### **Committee News**

The CBRC has chosen Doug Faulkner to fill the role of Secretary of the CBRC. Per CBRC bylaws, the Chair, with the approval of the regular CBRC members, may designate a Secretary to assist the Chair with various Committee tasks, particularly as they relate to organization and the circulation process. This position may be filled by a current voting member of the CBRC or by any CFO member in good standing.

### **Corrigenda**

Three corrections are made to Semo (2008). The Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) accepted from Pueblo Res., *Pueblo* (2006-91), was erroneously reported as occurring in 2006; the actual year was 2005. The other finder of the Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) in Lamar, *Prowers* (2007-31) was Sherry Chapman, not Sherrie York. That bird was also published as occurring solely on 3 May 2007, but the documentation by Spencer was for 4 May, so the date span for the record should read as “3-4 May 2007.” The CBRC thanks Brandon Percival for pointing out those errors.

## RECORDS ACCEPTED

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** – *Nyctanassa violacea* (19/8). An adult at Rocky Ford State Wildlife Area (SWA) between 25 Apr and 22 May 2006 is the first for Otero (JBy, BKP †, CWi †, SO; 2006-41; 7-0). A juvenile below the dam of Bonny Res. on 4 Sep of the same year is the second for Yuma (PJ, CV; 2006-120; 7-0).

**Whooping Crane** – *Grus americana* (5/2). An outstanding find was an adult soaring with Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) above Nee Grande Res., Kiowa, on 1 Nov 2006 (BKP, JD, DN, JR; 2006-181; 7-0). This is only the fifth record of the species in the state from the naturally occurring Wood Buffalo National Park breeding population in Canada.

**Mew Gull** – *Larus canus* (39/26). The CBRC deliberated on a number of Mew Gull records stemming back to 2001, although most were from 2006. Establishing a first record for Yuma, a bird in definitive-basic plumage was at Bonny Res. on 2 Dec 2001 (AS †, JK; 2006-176; 6-1). Another adult was at Crown Hill Lake in Wheat Ridge, where it was documented between the period 5 Feb and 4 Mar 2005, although the bird was apparently discovered prior to 5 Feb (TL †, BKP †, LS †, PP; 2005-6; 7-0); this represents the second record of the species for Jefferson. Pueblo Res. has consistently been a hotbed of Mew Gull activity and the CBRC has

accepted four additional records from 2006 from that location. They include a first-cycle bird present between 25 Jan and 2 Mar (BKP †; 2006-13; 7-0), although the bird was apparently first found during the Pueblo Res. CBC on 17 Dec 2005; an adult on 2 Mar (BKP †; 2006-20; 7-0); another adult between 13 and 23 Dec (BKP †, BM †, TL †; 2006-167; 7-0); and a first-cycle bird on 15 Dec (BKP †; 2006-170; 7-0). One third of the accepted records of Mew Gull have been from Pueblo, with a little over 25% of the records from Pueblo Reservoir itself.



*Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Rocky Ford SWA, Otero County, 1 May 2006. Photo by Cole Wild*

### **Pomarine Jaeger –**

*Stercorarius pomarinus* (21/11). Establishing perhaps the first documented inland Lower 48 record of a juvenile in September, a light-morph juvenile was photographed at Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, on the extremely early date of 5 Sep 2006 (GW †; 2006-121; 7-0). Juvenile Pomarine Jaegers typically don't show up in inland areas of the Lower 48 until October. If not for the 5 Sep observation, the

dark-morph juvenile at Cherry Creek and also Chatfield reservoirs, *Douglas* and *Jefferson*, between 24 Sep and 5 Oct 2006 might have represented the earliest record (GW †, BM †, BKP †, JR; 2006-132; 7-0). Although present mainly at Cherry Creek Res., the bird was refound at Chatfield Res. on 4 Oct by JR, but not documented until the following day by GW.

**Williamson's Sapsucker** – *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*. Relatively common as montane breeders in Colorado, Williamson's Sapsuckers generally winter south of the state. Unusual, but perhaps regular at the location, were a female found on 20 Jan 2006 at Lakeside Cemetery, Cañon City, *Fremont* (BKP, BM †), and a male seen at that same location on 12 Feb 2006 (BKP †, RM), although apparently the male had been there from at least 18 Dec 2005. Both birds were assigned



*Williamson's Sapsucker*, Lakeside Cemetery, Cañon City, *Fremont* County, 20 January 2006. Photo by Bill Maynard

the same accession number (2006-9) and deliberation results were 7-0.

**Ladder-backed Woodpecker** – *Picoides scalaris*. Ladder-backed Woodpeckers are permanent residents across portions of southeast Colorado, ranging west rarely to central *Fremont*. Out of range was a female found at Yellowjacket Creek, *Montezuma*, on 4 Jul 2006 (AS, 2006-104, 6-1), which establishes the first record for southwestern Colorado. Vagrant records of Ladder-backed Woodpecker appear to be scant. The closest known vagrant record of the species is roughly 170 miles to the southwest of Yellowjacket Creek, near Desert View, *Arizona*, within Grand Canyon National Park (Chuck LaRue, pers. comm.). According to Mr. LaRue, the species only occurs regularly in central *Arizona* north to the Mogollon Rim, approximately 265 miles southwest of

Yellowjacket Creek. In New Mexico, the northwesternmost vagrant report of the species is from Farmington, *San Juan*, approximately 62 miles southeast of the Yellowjacket Creek sighting (Jerry Oldenettel, pers. comm.). The species is known to occur regularly in extreme southwestern Utah. An attempt was made to elicit response from knowledgeable birders in Utah regarding vagrant observations of the species in the southeastern portion of that state, but no response was provided.

**Vermilion Flycatcher** – *Pyrocephalus rubinus* (31/17). The spring of 2006 saw a flurry of Vermilion Flycatcher activity in eastern Colorado, out of which the CBRC has accepted an additional five records. An adult male was at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, between 18 and 19 Mar (BKP †, BM †, AS †, CWi †; 2006-25; 7-0). An

adult female was described from the Campo Cemetery, *Baca*, on 17 Apr (BG, MI; 2006-34; 7-0). On 21 Apr, a female was seen at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso* (BKP †, RO; 2006-38; 7-0). Campo had yet another female, this time a second-year bird seen at the City Park, on 26 Apr (BKP †, MPE; 2006-42; 7-0). Finally, another adult female was well north at Chatfield State Park, *Douglas*, on 28 Apr (JK †; 2006-43; 7-0).

**Wood Thrush** – *Hylocichla mustelina* (28/16). An exceptional showing of Wood Thrushes was also had in 2006, with three additional records obtained. One was at Chico Basin Ranch, *Pueblo*, on 31 May (BM †; 2006-94; 7-0), the first for that well-birded county in 25 years. On 3 Jun, one was photographed at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, surprisingly a first county record (RH †, CWi †, DAL;

2006-97; 7-0). The bird was apparently first discovered on 2 Jun, but the Committee received no details of the observation on that date. Another was banded at Barr Lake, *Adams*, on 7 Oct (SN †; 2006-142; 7-0); this represents the third Wood Thrush banded at that location.

**Varied Thrush** – *Ixoreus naevius* (29/18). The CBRC accepted an additional five Varied Thrush records from 2005-



Wood Thrush, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo County, 31 May 2006. First record for the county. Photo by Bill Maynard

2006, three of which represent first county records. An adult male, a first for Kit Carson, was at Flagler SWA on 22 Dec 2005 (SS †; 2005-144; 7-0). Another first county record was acquired when an adult male was found at Lamar Community College in Lamar on 22 Jan 2006 (BKP; 2006-14; 7-0). A male was reported from that location in late October of that year (DR), although the Committee received no details on that report; it is unknown whether the December bird was the same individual. A female at Last Chance, Washington, on the late date of 12 May 2006 was the first for that county (GW †, GG, LM; 2006-50; 7-0). This date is the latest spring date for Colorado, the previous late date being 14 Mar. The Washington bird was reportedly first discovered a day or two prior to 12 May, though no documentation thereof was provided. A first-basic male was at Crow Valley CG on 18 Dec 2006, which, interestingly, was the second for Weld and the second for that very location (NK †, CWi †, DAL; 2006-173; 7-0). That bird was ostensibly first discovered on 17 Dec, though no details were submitted. Lastly, an adult male was in Fort Collins, Larimer, on 21 Dec 2006 (RB †; 2006-174; 7-0).

**Sprague's Pipit** – *Anthus spragueii*



*Varied Thrush, first-basic male, Crow Valley Campground, Weld County, 18 Dec 2006. Second record for the county. Photo by Cole Wild*

(9/5). One, the first for Lincoln, was near Hugo on 14 Sep 2006 (BG; 2006-126; 6-1).

**Baltimore × Bullock's Oriole** (*Icterus galbula* × *bullockii*) – Quite unusual was a Baltimore × Bullock's Oriole at a residential feeder near Lamar on the strange date of 20 Feb 2006 (DR †, BN; 2006-17; 6-1). The bird was reportedly first discovered by a neighbor on 19 Feb.

## 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 in-

dicates 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 and may be reconsidered by the Committee if new information is provided (e.g., photos, documentation from other observers). We summarize below why the following reports were not accepted.

**Mississippi Kite** – *Ictinia mississippiensis*. The report of a subadult at South Table Mountain in Golden, *Jefferson*, on the rather late date of 2 Oct 2006 met with mixed feelings from the Committee (2006-140; 3-4). The observer reported that the bird had a “distinctive gray back and white front...and mostly clean white ventral side,” which is inconsistent with Mississippi Kite, as no age/sex combination has white underparts. The note that the cere was yellow is also inconsistent with Mississippi Kite.

**Eastern Wood-Pewee** – *Contopus virens*. A silent *Contopus* photographed at Soapstone Ranch, *Larimer*, on 1 Jun 2006 received little Committee support (2006-95; 2-5). Eastern Wood-Pewee often displays a greener hue to its plumage, averages lighter in color overall, and is slightly longer-tailed and shorter-winged than Western Wood-Pewee (*C. sordidulus*), but there is considerable overlap in these characters, and the two species cannot be

safely separated in the field except by vocalizations. Although the bird was described as being green, many Committee members commented that the photographs suggested the bird was actually grayer than described. The bird was reported as having an orange maxilla with very little black at the tip, an all-dark mandible, broad white wingbars, and gray undertail coverts. Eastern Wood-Pewee is not totally identifiable based on those traits.

**Philadelphia Vireo** – *Vireo philadelphicus*. A vireo at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, on 22 May 2006 met with Committee skepticism (2006-81; 3-4). Although the description suggested a Philadelphia Vireo, most members thought that Warbling Vireo was not completely ruled out. The report that the bird was bright yellow on the chest, belly, and undertail coverts conflicts with the plumage of a Philadelphia Vireo in May, as the bright yellow underparts are not obtained until the prebasic molt, which typically begins in July. That prebasic molt is complete, and by the following spring, underparts feathers on Philadelphia Vireos have worn to a dull grayish-yellow rather than bright yellow coloration.

**Sprague's Pipit** – The report of a heard-only bird near Briggsdale, *Weld*, on 16 Oct 2006 (2006-147; 2-5) was probably that of a Sprague's Pipit based on call notes, but few Committee members were comfortable accepting a record in which the sole description of the bird was that it called a doubled “squeet, squeet.”

**Varied Bunting** – *Passerina versicolor*. The review of a potential first

state record Varied Bunting seen in Arvada, Jefferson, on 14 May 2006 garnered no Committee support (2006-56; 0-7). The bird was briefly described as being a sparrow-sized, bluish bird with a reddish-brown oval on the back of the neck, with black encompassing the beak, and with wings not as blue as the rump. That

description alone does not necessarily indicate a male Varied Bunting. Some CBRC members were concerned by the fact that the identification of the bird was not made until the following day. Some reviewers also commented that a hybrid Lazuli × Indigo Bunting (*P. amoena* × *cyanea*) or even Painted Bunting (*P. ciris*) was not ruled out.

## REPORTERS AND CITED OBSERVERS

The CBRC graciously thanks the following individuals for submitting records of or discovering rare species in Colorado that prompted this circulation: JBj: Jim Beatty; RB: Robert Blinderman; CC: Curt Campbell; JD: John Drummond; MF: Mike Foster; BGi: Brian Gibbons; GG: Gregg Goodrich; RH: Rachel Hopper; MI: Marshall Iliff; PJ: Pete Janzen; JK: Joey Kellner; NK: Nick Komar; DAL: David A. Leatherman; TL: Tony Leukering; RL: Roger Linfield; BM: Bill Maynard; RM: Rich Miller; LM: Larry Modesitt; DN: Duane Nelson; SN: Starr Nicely; BN: Bill Nichols; RO: Ric Olson; SO: Stan Oswald; BKP: Brandon K. Percival; MPe: Mark Peterson; PP: Peter Plage; JR: Joe Roller; DR: Dorothy Russell; LS: Larry Semo; SS: Scott Shaum; AS: Andrew Spencer; CV: Curt VanBoening; GW: Glenn Walbek; CWi: Cole Wild.

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## Sedgwick County

*Henry Armknecht*

Birders often make the trek to Sedgwick County in hopes of finding an eastern species or rare vagrant to add to their Colorado list. In addition, the combination of the Platte River, Jumbo Reservoir, flat farmlands, and native grasslands makes it a good county in which to run up a county bird list at or near 200 species.

Most of the population is in the eastern end of Sedgwick County, while most of the birding is in the western end. Fortunately, for the hungry birder, the best-known eatery in the county is nearest the birding. Lucy's is just off I-76 at the Sedgwick exit. It is the best bet in the county for a birder who wants real home-style food and small-town hospitality at a good price. Lucy is open for three meals a day, seven days a week. The pie is famous; try the buffalo if so inclined. Daily specials are good, but tend to sell out early. The Sunday buffet is a real hit, but don't expect to find a seat if you get there late. If you see Lucy Price, tell her hello for me. She is a sweetheart and the ladies who work there do a good job of making everyone feel right at home.

In Ovid, El Alegre has a long-standing reputation for its Mexican fare. However, its hours of operation have tended to vary in recent months. They are usually open in the evenings Wednesday through Sunday as well as sometimes for lunch. Kodi's Cafe, also in Ovid, is the typical small town bar and grill. Some meals are quite good. You can also buy "Mountain Oyster Capital" T-shirts as well as a mountain oyster meal, basket, or sandwich there. I have eaten the mountain oysters and can recommend them. Both restaurants are located directly north of the Ovid exit from I-76 and just south of Highway 138. Both are closed on Mondays.

For the most part, other eateries in Sedgwick County may come and go, but I am not familiar with them. When it comes to faster food, Julesburg hosts a Subway just off I-76. The restaurant at the Flying J Truck Stop also has quite good food. The decor is not fancy but food and service make up for it.

Good but not fancy — that's Sedgwick County.

*Henry Armknecht, Osborne, KS, [armknecht@ruraltel.net](mailto:armknecht@ruraltel.net)*

## News From the Field, Spring 2008 (March–May)

Andrew Spencer

### The Spring of the Blackpoll

Each spring in this state seems to have a theme. There are years when Black-and-white Warblers seem to be everywhere, each woodlot on the plains harboring an individual or two. Or there are years when shorebirds are more abundant than normal, and people pick up that long-awaited Hudsonian Godwit. There was the spring of 2007, when Gray-cheeked Thrush went from being an ultra-rarity to being just another ho-hum *Catharus*.

Then there was this spring—the spring of the Blackpoll Warbler. Usually, if you spend enough time on the plains during migration you have a decent chance of encountering one or two of these chickadee-like easterners. This year, if you spent time on the eastern plains in migration, you had little chance of missing one, or two, or thirty Blackpolls.

In general, the spring of 2008 was the best year for eastern warblers in the state this decade. Observers found an astounding 40 species of warblers, and even the normally warbler-starved West Slope had some eastern visitors. Vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers also shared in the bonanza, though to a lesser extent. Barring a couple of celebrity appearances, shorebirds, unfortunately, did not. Birding in the mountains seemed slower than normal, especially in May, when many of the birds that should have been setting up territories and starting to nest were absent. How much of this was due to the heavier-than-normal snowpack and colder-than-normal temperatures and how much was due to true population declines remains unknown.

Weatherwise, the spring of 2008 will be remembered as a cold one (WRCC 2008). Trees seemed to leaf out a couple of weeks later than expected, and snow in many parts of the mountains lingered in greater depths than Coloradoans have become accustomed to in the last few drought-plagued years. Along the Front Range, temperatures averaged below normal for all three months of the season; in Boulder the average monthly temperature was below normal in March by 0.12° F, in April by 1.40° F, and in May by 1.01° F. In the mountain valleys the difference was even more pronounced: Gunnison's temperature was below normal by an astonishing 9.88° in March, 5.46° in April, and 2.43° in May.

Alas, precipitation was also well below normal this spring. While the impressive snowpacks in the mountains were heartening, depressingly little actual new moisture fell during the season. In Steamboat Springs, where precipitation was above average all winter, the spring monthly totals were 63%, 64%, and 76% of the average totals for March, April, and May, respectively. In Lamar, those same totals were truly grim: 22%, 57%, and 15% of the average for the same months. The very heavy spring runoff obscured this fact, though, and many reservoirs were fuller than they had been in years.

Finally, for that insatiable lister buried deeply (or not so deeply) in many of Colorado's birders, this spring had rarities for you, too. The Boulder-Longmont area was red hot, providing (pending acceptance by the CBRC) a fourth state record Ruff, fifth state record Louisiana Waterthrush, and an uncharacteristically long-staying Hudsonian Godwit. Other highlights from the state this spring include a fifth state report of Cerulean Warbler, eighth state report of Swainson's Warbler, ninth state report of Reddish Egret, and a larger-than-normal helping of slightly more mundane rarities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Gent, who after eight years of serving as one of the News From the Field editors for this journal, has decided to move on to other projects. His long service in this capacity and in the many other aspects of CFO in which he is involved are greatly appreciated by everyone.

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

**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:** CBR: Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso/Pueblo*; CVCG: Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*; FCRP: Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso*; LCCW: Lamar Community College Woods, *Prowers*; doc: documentation submitted to the CBRC; m.ob.: multiple observers; no doc: no documentation submitted to the CBRC; Res: Reservoir; SP: State Park.

### **Greater White-fronted Goose:**

As usual, the West Slope provided a few records of this typically eastern Colorado goose, this year from Mesa, Delta, and Rio Blanco. The high count of the spring was 200+ from Elliot SWA, Morgan, on 18 Mar (JRo).

**Trumpeter Swan:** The three records this spring were close to the average for recent years. One was near Prewitt Res, Washington, from 8-12 Mar (BSt, JRo, no doc.); a second-year bird was at Schafer Res, Lincoln, on 15 Mar (JRo, no doc.); and one was at Blue Lake, Eagle, and surrounding areas from 21 Mar through the end of the season (DFi, m.ob., no doc.).

**Tundra Swan:** As with the previous species, there were three records for the more diminutive swan this spring. Two were at Walker Pit in Franktown, Douglas, from 22 Feb through 9 Mar (TH, m.ob., no doc.); one was near Prewitt Res from 8-12 Mar (BSt, JRo, no doc.); and 3 adults were in Craig, Moffat, from 11-12 Apr (FL, no doc.).

**Eurasian Wigeon:** There were three reports of this rare duck this spring, slightly more than usual. A drake visited a few sites near Rifle, Garfield, from 8-13 Mar (VZ, m.ob., no doc.); another was at Blue Mesa Res, Gunnison, on 16 May (JBr, no doc.); and one was at Monte Vista NWR, Rio Grande, on 19 May (VS, no doc.).

### **Ring-necked Duck × Scaup sp.:**

A male of this rarely-seen hybrid combination was seen at Lagerman Res, Boulder, on 3 May (WS).

**Greater Scaup:** Ten reports pertained to 21 individuals this spring,

slightly less than normal. Sightings came from Prowers, Pueblo, El Paso, Fremont, Washington, Weld, Montezuma, Delta, and Garfield.

**Surf Scoter:** Far from the surf was an immature on 7 Mar at Pueblo Res, Pueblo (BKP); this species is far rarer in the spring in Colorado than the fall.

**White-winged Scoter:** Even one report of this species during the spring season is unusual. This spring there were two: a young male at Prospect Ponds, Larimer, from 31 Mar through 2 Apr (Tom and MFr, m.ob.), and one from North Poudre Res #3, Larimer, on 14 Apr (RH).

**Black Scoter:** Completing the scoter hat trick for the spring were a male and female of this species at Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe, from 8-11 Apr (DBI, m.ob.).

**Long-tailed Duck:** There were three reports of this species this spring: a male was at Pueblo Res from 1-7 Mar (BKP); one was at Marston Res, Denver, on 2 Apr (Chris Wood); and a female was at Jumbo Res, Sedgwick/Logan on 6 Apr (SL).

**Bufflehead:** One at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, Jefferson, on 27 May (DF) was extremely late in the season, and the last of its kind reported away from the breeding areas in North Park.

**Common Goldeneye:** A report of 200-300 from Rifle Gap Res, Garfield, on 19 Mar (CD) was the spring high count, and represented a number not usually seen in the state outside of the South Park reservoirs during fall migration.

**Barrow's Goldeneye:** Fifteen re-

ports represent an excellent spring total, especially given that most of these were not from the classic wintering locations. Counties represented include *Pueblo*, *Chaffee*, *Douglas*, *Jefferson*, *Arapahoe*, *Denver*, *Gilpin*, *Larimer*, *Archuleta*, *La Plata*, *Eagle*, and *Garfield*. Easily the most significant report of the spring, though, was of an astounding 135 at Spring Creek Res, *Eagle*, on 25 Apr (DFi), which probably comprises the highest count of this species ever for Colorado.

**Pacific Loon:** A bird in basic plumage on the late date of 16 May at Blue Mesa Res (JBr, VZ) provided the only report for the spring.

**Common Loon:** At least 33 reports of 66 birds made the spring of 2008 sheer loonacy, and one of the best springs for this species in many years, if not ever. The high count was of ten birds at Harvey Gap Res, *Garfield*, on 19 Apr (TM); the last report of the spring was of a bird at Perch Pond, *Moffat*, from 22-23 May (LA, FL). In all, the species was reported from 19 counties.

**Red-necked Grebe:** The only report this spring was of one in Greeley, *Weld*, on 10 May (JBg).

**Least Bittern:** One heard at Bent's Old Fort, *Otero*, on 29 May (JD, m.ob., no doc.) provided the only spring report.

**Great Egret:** One on 25 Mar in *Delta* (AR) was the first of the spring.

**Little Blue Heron:** The only report of the spring came from the very unlikely location of the Stulp Farm, *Prowers*, on 24 May (JSt). The variety of birds that show up in this little oasis on the plains continues to astound;

if this species could appear there, who knows what's possible?

**Reddish Egret:** Providing a potential ninth state record was a dark-morph juvenile that danced its way across the mudflats at NeeNoshe Res, *Kiowa* on 21 May (AS, DN). Unfortunately, it could not be relocated after the initial observation.

**Cattle Egret:** Eleven reports pertaining to thirteen birds was a reasonable total for the spring, given that this species seems to be harder to find in recent years than previously. One at DeWeese Res, *Custer*, on 28 Apr (RM) was higher than normal. Other reports came from *Fremont*, *Chaffee*, *Boulder*, *Weld*, *La Plata*, *Mesa*, *Moffat*, and *Routt*.

**Green Heron:** There were nine reports of this species this spring, about average. The only West-Slope sighting came from Connected Lakes SP, *Mesa* on 8 May (LA); other reports came from *Baca*, *Las Animas*, *Pueblo*, *El Paso*, *Fremont*, *Jefferson*, *Arapahoe*, and *Larimer*.

**Glossy Ibis:** Every spring the reports of this species seem to increase in number, and this spring was no exception, with 18 reported. It seems to be getting to the point where one can expect to find a Glossy in any sufficiently large flock of White-faced Ibis on the plains in the spring! Reports from the mountains and West Slope, where the bird is far less common, include one at Home Lake, *Rio Grande*, on 17 Apr (MP, LE, BKP, no doc.), which was also the first of the spring; two at Pastorius SWA, *La Plata*, on 19 Apr (JBy, JBre, doc.); one between *Salida* and *Poncha Springs*, *Chaffee*,

on 14 May (NP, doc.); and one at DeWeese Res on 18 May (JP, no doc.). Other counties with reports include *Baca*, *Bent*, *Boulder*, *Crowley*, *Douglas*, *El Paso*, *Fremont*, *Prowers*, *Pueblo*, and *Weld*.

**Osprey:** A total of 17 at Lathrop SP, *Huerfano*, on 17 Apr (MP, LE, BKP) was a very high total for a species normally seen in pairs at the most in Colorado.

**Mississippi Kite:** One was at Fountain Creek Regional Park on 15 May (BKP); this species is rare in *El Paso*, though a pair in Security, *El Paso*, on 18 May (JMr) could be heralding the colonization of the county by this expanding species. One at CVCG on 24 May (MC, m.ob.) was well out of range.

**Bald Eagle:** A total of 47 at Bonny Res, *Yuma* on 1 Mar (TL<sub>e</sub>, LS, TS) provided the spring high count.

**Northern Harrier:** This species is normally seen singly or in pairs, so the 50 at Prewitt Res on 9 Mar (JRo) must have been quite a sight!

**Broad-winged Hawk:** The spring total of 30 reports, representing 33 birds, was a truly excellent spring showing. The first of the spring was on 3 Apr from Lee Martinez Park in Fort Collins, *Larimer* (RSp). Reports from the West Slope, where this species is a mega, include a report of one at the Yampa River Preserve, *Routt*,



*Glossy Ibis*, *Fremont County*, 16 May 2008. Photo by Rachel Hopper

on 30 Apr (TL<sub>i</sub>, m.ob.), and of one on the spring count in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 10 May, but with no details. The much rarer dark morph was seen three times: on 26 Apr at the LCCW (DL); on 2 May at Burchfield SWA, *Baca* (AS); and from 4-10 May in Rist Canyon, *Larimer* (RSu, RH, m.ob.).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** The final straggler of this wintertime species was noted on 13 Apr at Crawford, *Delta* (TM).

**Merlin:** One at the Gibbs property, *Larimer*, on 4 May (KP) provided the last report of the spring.

**Black Rail:** One “ki-ki-dooing” at the Fort Lyon marshes, *Bent*, on 27 Apr (DN) was right on time for the first arrival of the spring. Another calling at CBR, *Pueblo*, from 9-19 May (BG, m.ob.) provided the second ranch record, after the first last spring. Finally, one heard at Lake

Henry, *Crowley*, on 18 May (AS) was a first for that county.

**Black-bellied Plover:** The first report of the spring came on 26 Apr from Union Res, *Weld* (TD); the last of the spring was of three at Cheney Res, *Mesa*, from 20-21 May (JBn, LA). Finally, the spring high count was an even dozen from Lower Latham Res, *Weld*, on 14 May (WF).

**Snowy Plover:** One found on 1 Apr (presumably attempting not to look foolish) and seen through 18 May at Highline Lake SP, *Mesa* (HS, m.ob.), was not only early, it provided a rare West Slope record. Another on 24 May at Ball Res, *Elbert* (MP), was a county first.

**Semipalmated Plover:** Nine at Bonny Res on 21 Apr (DFi) were the season's first.

**Mountain Plover:** The first report of the spring came from near Cornish, *Weld*, on 19 Mar (GL).

**Black-necked Stilt:** One reported from Totten Res, *Montezuma*, on 11 Apr (SMY) was the first for the season and a rare bird for southwest Colorado. Other reports away from the southeastern stronghold of this species in the state came from *Arapahoe*, *Douglas*, *Mesa*, *Moffat*, and *Rio Blanco*.

**Solitary Sandpiper:** One on 19 Apr in Grand Junction reported by an unspecified observer was the first of the season, and beat the record early date on the West Slope by two days.

**Willet:** A report from Lake Catamount, *Routt*, on 25 Apr (FL) provided the season's first. The high count was of 20 at Union Res on 26 Apr (BPr).

**Upland Sandpiper:** Sightings away from far northeastern Colorado, where this species breeds, include one at CR 96, *Weld*, on 3 May (RH), another there on 17 May (JBa), and one in the Bijou atlas block, *Elbert*, on 26 May (DK).

**Whimbrel:** A total of fifteen reports for the spring was decent for this scarce shorebird. The first report of the season, as well as the high count, was of 39 at Black Hollow Res, *Weld*, on 29 Apr (CS). The last report came on 25 May, when two were seen in Galetton, *Weld* (PO). Finally, one at Fruitgrowers Res on 20 May (observer unknown) provided a rare West Slope record.

**Long-billed Curlew:** An unspecified number reported on 30 Mar from Grand Junction (DSh) provided the first spring sighting. A flock of 25 at Pastorius Res on 10 Apr (AD) not only provided a rare *La Plata* record, but a surprisingly high total for the West Slope.

**Hudsonian Godwit:** Normally when this gaudy shorebird shows up in the state it is a one-day wonder. Sometimes they don't even have the manners to stay around for a whole day. Quite willing to buck the trend was an alternate-plumaged male discovered on 16 Apr at Union Res (BPr, m.ob., doc.), which stayed through 18 Apr and was viewed by many from throughout the state. Incidentally, this sighting ties the previous early record for Colorado.

**Marbled Godwit:** One from Navajo SP, *Archuleta*, on 7 Apr (JBy) was the first of the season. The high count of 80 on 26 Apr (DH) was a

normal high count, but the location—Browns Park NWR, *Moffat*—was a very unexpected location for such a large number.

**Red Knot:** The only report was of one from Ball Res on 24 May (MP, no doc.); this represents a county first, pending acceptance.

**Sanderling:** A sighting of 20 from Rio Blanco Res, *Rio Blanco*, on 2 May (DH) was both the season's first and the high count. The final report of the season was of one at Union Res on 18 May (TFL).

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** One in Paradox, *Montrose*, on 7 May (AS, CW, doc.) was not only exceptionally early, it provided a first county record. Other West Slope reports include two at Fruitgrowers Res on 20 May (AR) and one in Craig from 28-29 May (FL, m.ob.). A flock of nine at Chatfield SP, *Douglas*, on 31 May (JK, GW, SSt) was farther west than normal.

**Baird's Sandpiper:** A report from Mack, *Mesa*, on 24 Mar (LA) was quite early and provided the first sighting of the season.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** There were a measly three reports this season, though doubtless some sightings went unreported. One was at Browns Park NWR on 20 Apr

(DH); another was at Fruitgrowers Res on 22 Apr (EH); and one was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 28 Apr (JD).

**Dunlin:** One along South River Road, *Alamosa*, on 11 May (JRa) provided both the only report of the season and a good San Luis Valley record.

**Stilt Sandpiper:** One at Totten Res on 7 May (AS, CW) was the season's first; the high count was of 300 on 17 May at Bonny Res (RR).

**Ruff:** When the second state record of this species appeared a few years ago, not too many people got to see it. When the third state record showed up a couple of years later, even fewer people were lucky enough to come to grips with it. So this spring, when one showed up at Boulder Res, *Boulder* on 1 May (TFL, m.ob., doc.) there was a mad dash by many to chase it. And despite being a one-day wonder, it did not disappoint. After



*Hudsonian Godwit*, Union Reservoir, Weld County, 16 May 2008. Photo by David Waltman

extensive discussion of the sex of the bird the consensus was that it could well be a "satellite male," a smaller-than-usual male that has a more female-like plumage.

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The spring total of six reports was a bit low by recent standards. The first of the season was found on 30 Apr in Cañon City, *Fremont* (TLe, MP, BSt). The only report of multiple birds was of a flock of 12 at Walden Ponds, *Boulder* on 3 May (TFI). Other counties with sightings include *Baca*, *Broomfield*, and *Prowers*.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** A report on 19 Mar from Grand Junction (CD) was early, and the first of the season.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** A report from Grand Junction on 11 April (LA) was the first of the season, and this early record heralded an amazing spring for this species. Flocks of a few hundred are rare in the state, and usually represent the season high count. This year, though, there were three flocks of over a thousand, with a super-flock of 6650 at San Luis Lakes, *Alamosa*, on 11 May (AS, CW) providing both a season high count and a new state high count.

**Laughing Gull:** A first-year individual from Blue Lake,

*Bent/Kiowa*, on 25 May (DN, AS, no doc.) provided the only report of the season; it was last seen on the following day.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** One at Union Res on 3 March (SRI) was the first of the season; one at Fruitgrowers Res on 3 May (LS) was the last.

**Mew Gull:** There were two reports this spring: a first-cycle bird from Pueblo Res from 1 to 9 Mar (BKP, m.ob., no doc.), and an adult at Horseshoe Lake, *Larimer*, from 20 to 21 Mar (NK, m.ob., doc.).

**Herring Gull:** A report of 308 at Bonny Res on 1 Mar provided the high count of the spring season (LS, TLe); a first-cycle bird at Pastorius Res on 20 March (JBy) provided a rare *La Plata* record.

**Thayer's Gull:** The spring total of only five reports was pathetic by recent standards, though doubtless a number of sightings went unreported. However, not all of the news for this species was bad: one from Confluence Park, *Delta*, from 1-3 Mar (DFi,



*Ruff, Boulder Reservoir, Boulder County, 1 May 2008. Photo by David Waltman*

m.ob.) would, pending CBRC acceptance, provide the first West-Slope record.

**Iceland Gull:** The recent increase in reports of this species in recent years has been amazing, and the two reports this spring add to the trend. An adult at Boyd Lake, *Larimer*, on 1 Mar (NK, AS, m.ob., doc.) was possibly the first record of an adult bird in Colorado; a juvenile at Cherry Creek Res from 7-8 Mar (GW, AS, no doc.) was of the more expected age.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** There were only eight reports of this species this spring, fewer than in most recent years. Counties with reports include *Arapahoe*, *Douglas*, *Larimer*, *Pueblo*, *Washington*, *Weld*, and *Yuma*.

**Glaucous-winged Gull:** One of unreported age from Cherry Creek Res on 2 March (DBI, no doc.) was the only sighting of the season. The percentage of Colorado reports for

this species from Cherry Creek is going from astounding to ridiculous.

**Glaucous Gull:** A total of three reports for this species was very low by recent standards. The fact that two of them came from the far eastern plains was also a bit unusual; a first-cycle bird was at Bonny Res on 12 March (JRo), and another first-cycle bird was at Jumbo Res on 13 Apr (HA). The last report of the spring came from Cherry Creek Res on the exceptionally late date of 28 April (DBI).

**Great Black-backed Gull:** The three reports of this species represented a decent total and a sign of the continued increase of this large easterner in Colorado. An adult wandered around the Loveland area lakes from 3 Mar through early April (AS, NK, m.ob., no doc.); one of unreported plumage was at Prewitt Res on 8 Mar (BSt, no doc.); and a first-cycle bird was at Jumbo Res, *Sedgwick*, from 6-13 Mar (SL, HA, no doc.).

**Least Tern:** The first report of the season was also a good one, from South Platte Park, *Arapahoe*, on the rather early date of 2 April (GP). Another out-of-range bird was reported from Chatfield Res, *Douglas*, on 15 April (JK), and another hung out at Walden Ponds from 28-29 May (KMD, BSc, m.ob.).

**Caspian Tern:** There were three re-



*Iceland Gull, Boyd Lake, Larimer County, 1 March 2008. Photo by Andrew Spencer*

ports of this species this spring: one from Highline Lake SP on 29 April (LA); another from Lake Henry on 30 April (TLe, MP, BSt); and one from Walden Ponds on 2 May (DW).

**Black Tern:** Two at Smith Res, *Costilla*, on 11 May (AS, CW) were the first reported during the season; the high count was provided by a flock of 300 at Jumbo Res on 28 May (SL).

**Common Tern:** Five at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 15 May (BKP, m.ob.) furnished a first ranch record and the first report of the season.

**Band-tailed Pigeon:** A surprising number of reports of this typically higher-elevation species came from the plains this spring: one was at CBR, *El Paso*, on 4 May (BKP, m.ob.), providing a second ranch record; one was at Rock Canyon, *Pueblo*, on 10 May (BKP); and one was at Van's Grove, *Bent*, on 10 May (LS, TS), where it furnished a first county record.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** The places where this dove isn't are growing fewer and fewer every year; this spring *San Juan* gained its first record on 16 April (MP, LE, BKP), when four were seen in Silverton. At this point only *Clear Creek* and *Gilpin* lack reports of this ever-expanding species.

**White-winged Dove:** The fourteen reports this spring would once have been shocking to birders in Colorado; nowadays numbers like these are expected. Counties with reports include *Adams*, *Baca*, *Bent*, *Boulder*, *Broomfield*, *Custer*, *Douglas*, *Larimer*, and *La Plata*.

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** A report

from Walden Ponds on 22 May (TFl) was the first of the spring; this species is typically one of the last to arrive in the state.

**Western Screech-Owl:** A report from Franktown, *Douglas*, on 24 Apr (HK, UK) was farther north than usual, and provided a very rare *Douglas* record. Another singing vociferously at Two Buttes Res from 3-11 May (SL, JK, m.ob.) was a first record for that location, making it one of the very few places in the state with reports of both screech-owl species.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl:** A juvenile photographed at Ball Res, *Elbert*, on 25 May (LE, m.ob.) provided a rather startling breeding record, much farther east and lower than typical for this species in Colorado.

**Lesser Nighthawk:** Four records of the rarer nighthawk made for a good spring. A male was at Two Buttes on 20 May (AS, no doc.); at least three (two females and a male) were at the Nucla Sewage Ponds, *Montrose*, from 24 May through the end of the season (CD, BW, m.ob., no doc.); a female was at CBR, *Pueblo*, from 25-28 May (BG, m.ob., doc.); and a male was at Burchfield SWA on 27 May (AS, no doc.).

**Common Nighthawk:** Dexter reported over 1000 birds in the Nucla area, an amazing concentration that doubtless had something to do with the rather large numbers of Lesser Nighthawks at the same location.

**Common Poorwill:** One on 21 Apr at Bonny Res (DFi) was the first of the season.

**Black Swift:** The first report of the season came from the expected

location of Box Canyon, *Ouray*, on 28 May (SH). A flock of 60 on 29 May in Confluence Park (AR) must have been a nice sight!

***Chaetura swift*:** One on 10 Apr from Lafayette, *Boulder* (TFl), was reported to show several features of Vaux's Swift, a species still not on the state list but expected to occur.

***Calliope Hummingbird*:** This bird is far rarer in Colorado during the spring than the fall, and the three records this spring represent perhaps the best spring ever for this species in the state. One was in Hotchkiss, *Delta*, from 2-3 May (AR); a female was in La Veta, *Huerfano*, on 3 May (BJ); and a male was in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, on 6 May (JCo, BCo). This last report was especially interesting as the bird was reportedly engaging in a flight display; this species has never been confirmed breeding in Colorado but breeds fairly near the border in adjacent states.

***Broad-tailed Hummingbird*:** A male at Two Buttes on 2 May (AS, m.ob.) and one on the Rocking 7K Ranch in *Prowers* on 10 May (JD, m.ob.) were much farther east than normal, especially for spring migration.

***Red-headed Woodpecker*:** One at Moraine Park, *Larimer*, from 26-28 May (KW, JW, m.ob.) was both farther west and higher than normal.

***Williamson's Sapsucker*:** A report of a male at the Last Chance Rest Stop, *Washington*, on 2 May (LK) and a female from CVCG on 10 May (JH) were farther east than normal and provided rare plains records.

***Red-naped Sapsucker*:** The first report of the spring came on 7 Mar

from Cañon City (RM); this bird probably wintered in the area.

***Olive-sided Flycatcher*:** As usual, the first spring report came in mid-May, this year on 17 May from CVCG (JBg).

***Western Wood-Pewee*:** One in Grand Junction on 2 May (LA) was the first of the season, and furnished a record early date for the West Slope.

***Eastern Wood-Pewee*:** There were five reports of this species this spring: a singing bird was at the LCCW on 1 May (AS, doc.); one was at FCRP on 8 May (BKP, no doc.); a singing bird was at Lake Beckwith, *Pueblo*, on 26 May (DS, no doc.); a singing male was at Burchfield SWA on 27 May (AS, no doc.); and one was in Akron, *Washington*, on 27 May (SL, no doc.).

***Yellow-bellied Flycatcher*:** A calling bird was at Two Buttes on 20 May (AS, doc.); audio recordings were submitted to the CBRC. This species is still not on the state list.

***Alder Flycatcher*:** The spring total of ten reports was nothing short of astounding. One was at CBR, *Pueblo*, from 19-20 May (JD, m.ob., no doc.); one was calling at Two Buttes on 20 May (AS, no doc.); two were at Ball Res on 24 May (MP, no doc.); one was singing in Akron from 25-27 May (CN, AS, m.ob., no doc.); one was calling at CBR, *El Paso*, from 27-28 May (BM, m.ob., no doc.); one was in Lafayette on 27 May (TFl, no doc.); one was singing at Two Buttes on 28 May (AS, no doc.); one was at CVCG on 28 May (DL, RH, doc.); and one was at the Las Animas Fish Hatchery, *Bent*, on 29 May (JD, doc.).

**Least Flycatcher:** A bird from Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 21 Apr (DS) was early, and the first of the season.

**Gray Flycatcher:** A total of 19 reports came from the eastern plains, far more than normal but in line with the trend of pinyon-juniper breeders on the plains this spring.

**Black Phoebe:** A report from Chatfield SP, *Douglas/Jefferson*, on 5 May (GW, m.ob., doc.) should provide a first record for both counties and a first record for this heavily-birded park.

**Vermilion Flycatcher:** The spring total of three reports was about average. A male was at Highline Lake SP from 29 Mar to 6 Apr (JT, m.ob., doc.); another was at the Cañon City Riverwalk on 13 Apr (RM, BKP, m.ob., doc.); and a singing male was in *Prowers* from 26-27 Apr (JO, BKP, doc.).

**Cassin's Kingbird:** The first report of the spring came from Sweitzer Lake SP, *Delta*, on 24 Apr (AR), which also represents a record early arrival date for the West Slope.

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher:** One was at Barr Lake on 3 May (NKt, doc.); a female was in *Cheyenne* on 4 May (RO, NE, m.ob., doc.); and a male was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 11 May (BM, JMa, DMA, doc.).

**Northern Shrike:** The last report of the season came on 1 Apr from Zink's Pond (TD).

**White-eyed Vireo:** Four reports for the spring was about average. One



*Philadelphia Vireo*, Chico Basin Ranch, *Pueblo* County, 22 May 2008. Photo by Glenn Walbek

was in *Lafayette* on 6 May (CN); a singing male was in *Prowers* on 10 May (DE, JD); a bird was banded at CBR, *El Paso*, on 20 May (BG); and one was at Lykins Gulch, *Boulder*, on 23 May (*vide* MB).

**Bell's Vireo:** There were two reports from the southeastern plains, where this species is rare. One was at Two Buttes on 8 May (JD, JRo), and one was on the Rocking 7K Ranch in *Prowers* on 11 May (JD). Even more unusual, though, was one at Dixon Res, *Larimer*, on 24 May (RR).

**Yellow-throated Vireo:** A total of seven reports made for an excellent spring. One was at Willow Creek Park, *Prowers*, on 27 Apr (DL); one was in *Alamosa*, *Alamosa*, from 7-18 May (JRa, m.ob.); another was at the



*Gray-cheeked Thrush, Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso County, 16 May 2008. Photo by Bill Maynard*

Mt. Sanitas Trailhead, *Boulder*, on 18 May (TLc); one was in *El Paso* on 24 May (MP, LE); one was in Lafayette on 28 May (TFl); one was south of Durango, *La Plata*, on 31 May (PD), which probably represents a first county record; and one was in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 31 May (RSp).

**Cassin's Vireo:** The spring total of 12 reports was greater than normal. Counties with sightings include *Alamosa*, *Bent*, *Boulder*, *El Paso*, *Freemont*, *La Plata*, *Pueblo*, and *Weld*.

**Blue-headed Vireo:** There were two reports of this species this spring. One was reported from Dixon Res on 12 May (GS, no doc.), and one was photographed at Prewitt Res on 13 May (GW, NE, doc.).

**Philadelphia Vireo:** The spring

total of eight reports was spectacular. One was at CBR, *El Paso*, from 7-8 May (BG, doc.); one was at the LCCW on 14 May (DR, no doc.); one was at CVCG on the same day (KMD, no doc.); one was at FCRP on 17 May (SSh, doc.); another was at CBR, *Pueblo*, from 20-22 May (BM, m.ob., doc.); one was at the LCCW on 20 May (AS, no doc.); and a male was singing at Walden Ponds on 25 May (WS, no doc.).

**Chihuahuan Raven:** Rather far from Chihuahua were a bird in *Alamosa* on 21 April (TFl) and one in Fort Collins on 28 May (THa, doc.).

**Purple Martin:** Lamar seems to be the new mecca for this species on the eastern plains, with reports from there from a number of recent years. This year it was a bird on 6 May (BG, doc.).

**Mountain Chickadee:** The massive invasion by this species onto the eastern plains continued well into the spring, with the last laggard seen on 6 May at CBR, *El Paso* (BG).

**Bewick's Wren:** One at Doudy Draw, *Boulder*, on 26 April (NP) was out of range.

**Sedge Wren:** The only sighting from this spring came on 12 Apr from near Hygiene, *Boulder* (WS, doc.).

**Eastern Bluebird:** A report of two from near Juanita, *Archuleta*, on 31 March (TD) provided a rare southwestern Colorado record.

**Veery:** There were a total of 23 reports on the eastern plains this spring,

an excellent total; the vast majority came from CBR.

**Gray-cheeked Thrush:** There were seven reports this spring, slightly more than normal. One was at Two Buttes on 10 May (DN, no doc.); one was at Last Chance on 13 May (NE, GW, no doc.); one was banded at CBR, *El Paso*, and another was seen in CBR, *Pueblo*, on 14 May (BG, doc.); one was at FCRP from 15-16 May (MP, BKP, doc.); another was banded at CBR, *El Paso*, on 17 May (BG, doc.); and one was at Two Buttes on 20 May (AS, no doc.).

**Wood Thrush:** A bird at Lake Hasty Campground, *Bent*, from 4-9 May (TLe, m.ob., no doc.) acted more like a robin than a Wood Thrush, and offered uncharacteristically spectacular looks to any lucky enough to see it.

**Varied Thrush:** A female that spent from 14 Mar through 12 Apr east of Longmont, *Weld* (BPr, IPr, m.ob., doc.), was very cooperative and many a birder got to add this species to their state list because of it. The only other report of the season was of a bird in Burlington, *Kit Carson*, on 11 Apr (CWy, no doc.).

**Bohemian Waxwing:** The massive invasion from the winter continued well into the spring, with the last report being of a flock of 125 on 17 April in Westminster (LS); the high count was of 1000+ in Louisville, *Boulder* (PHa).

**Blue-winged Warbler:** There were two reports of this species

this spring, one of a bird in Alamosa on 23 May (JRa, JSt, JPo), and one of a singing male at CBR, *El Paso*, on 27 May (BM, m.ob.).

**Golden-winged Warbler:** The only spring report came from CBR, *El Paso*, on 1 May (JD).

**Tennessee Warbler:** Birders in Tennessee must have been wondering where all their warblers were this spring. Colorado had an astounding 32 reports pertaining to 42 birds, surely the best spring ever for this species in the state.

**Nashville Warbler:** A mere six reports was below normal for the spring; counties with records include *Baca*, *Crowley*, *El Paso*, *Jefferson*, *Prowers*, and *Yuma*.

**Virginia's Warbler:** One in Paonia on 18 Apr (JBn) was the first of the



Wood Thrush, Lake Hasty Campground, *Bent* County, 4 May 2008. Photo by Loch Kilpatrick

spring, and represents a record early West Slope arrival.

**Lucy's Warbler:**

This species is becoming old news in Montezuma; this year the first sighting came on 12 Apr from Yellowjacket



*Tennessee Warbler, Fountain Creek Regional Park, El Paso County*  
16 May 2008. Photo by Loch Kilpatrick

Creek (PD, m.ob.). There were also sightings from the Ismay Trading Post and along McElmo Creek, perhaps indicating that it is expanding its range in the area. The real news, though, was that a male was seen in Gateway, Mesa, from 22-28 Apr (CD, BW, m.ob., no doc.), which marks only the second record from the county and one of the very few away from Yellowjacket Creek.

**Northern Parula:** The spring total of 25 reports was excellent, better even than last year's 22. Significant records include those of a male at Frantz Lake, Chaffee, on 23 Apr (RM) and one along Cat Creek, Rio Grande, on 23 May (JRa, JSt, JPo). Other counties with reports include Baca, Bent, Boulder, Douglas, El Paso, Larimer, Prowers, Pueblo, and Washington.

**Chestnut-sided Warbler:** Six sightings from the spring represented a dismal total; counties with reports include Baca, El Paso, Fremont, Larimer, Prowers, and Pueblo.

**Magnolia Warbler:** There were six reports this spring, about average. Two females were at CBR, Pueblo, on 17 May (GW, m.ob.); two were at FCRP on 18 May (MG); a female was at CVCG from 22-24 May (KMD, m.ob.); a male was at Dixon Res on 23 May (RSp); one was at FCRP on 29 May (MG); and a male was at Waneka Lake, Boulder, on 29 May (TFI).

**Cape May Warbler:** Nowhere near Cape May were a female at FCRP on 18 May (SSh, doc.) and a male at CBR, El Paso, on 27 May (BKP, m.ob., doc.).

**Black-throated Gray Warbler:** While most springs a few individuals of this westerly species appear on the eastern plains, this year the number was just ridiculous. At times it seemed like every woodlot had one. The first of the season was on 20 Apr in Lamar (DL).

**Black-throated Green Warbler:** There were only two reports of this species this spring. A male was at



*Pine Warbler, Larimer County, 16 March 2008. Photo by Nick Komar*

Lake Cheraw on 10 May (LS, TS), and a male was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 13 May (BG, BKP).



*Yellow-throated Warbler, Bent County, 4 May 2008. Photo by Loch Kilpatrick*

**Townsend's Warbler:** This species is far more common in the fall than the spring in Colorado, so nine reports constituted a decent total. Counties with reports include *Alamosa*, *El Paso*, *Pueblo*, and *Weld*.

**Yellow-throated Warbler:** Two reports was about normal for the spring; the first was a singing male in *Bent* on 2 May (TLe, JK, m.ob., doc.), and the second was at the *Eldorado Mountain Open*

*Space* on 24 May (PTa, no doc.).

**Grace's Warbler:** Most of Colorado's birders are used to going to southwest Colorado to find this species—or, at best, the Wet Mountains. So one that spent 30 Apr to 1 May at CVCG and another (?) there on 10 May (AS, CW, RH, m.ob., doc.) were surprising. To round out the eastern plains records, there was a male in the town of Olney Springs, *Crowley*, on 1 May (AS, doc.). In both locations the species was a county first.

**Pine Warbler:** The only sighting this spring came on 16 Mar in *Fort Collins* (NK, doc.).

**Prairie Warbler:** There were two reports of this rather misnamed species this spring, about average. A male was at CVCG on 13 May (AS, no doc.), and one was in *Lafayette* on 26 May (TFl, doc.).

**Palm Warbler:** There were four reports this spring, a bit fewer than

average. All were of the western subspecies. One was at CBR, *El Paso*, on 4 May (BKP, m.ob.); another was at CBR, *Pueblo*, from 6-10 May (BH); another was also at CBR, *Pueblo*, at a different location on 10 May (BG); and one was at the Last Chance Rest Stop on 13 May (GW, m.ob.).

**Bay-breasted Warbler:** Perhaps not unexpectedly, a single individual of this species accompanied the amazing Blackpoll Warbler fallout at CBR on 17 May (see below). It was on the *El Paso* side, and only seen by three of the many observers at the ranch that day (SG, BG, LS, doc.).

**Blackpoll Warbler:** The spring total of 47 reports was nothing short of extraordinary. The total of 168 individuals was unbelievable; I had to sum it twice to make sure I hadn't miscounted. The first report came on 4 May from Two Buttes (AS, m.ob.), and the floodgates opened from there,

culminating in the remarkable fallout at CBR on 17 May, when a total of 65 birds was found in both counties (m.ob.). Surprisingly, there were no West Slope records.

**Cerulean Warbler:** It is not without reason that this species has a reputation for being the most difficult eastern warbler species to find in Colorado, so a spring with even one report is a good one. This year it was a singing male in *El Paso* on 25 May (MP, no doc.).

**Black-and-white Warbler:** A total of 16 reports came in this spring, about average. The first report came on 27 Apr when two were seen at Sale Lake, *Boulder* (WS); the last was on 26 May from Lake Holbrook (AS).

**American Redstart:** There were 31 reports this spring; the first came on 6 May when one was banded at CBR, *El Paso* (NG).

**Prothonotary Warbler:** Two reports is about normal. One was at John Martin Res on 6 May (DN), the other at the Cañon City Riverwalk on 28 May (RM).

**Swainson's Warbler:** Among the most exciting reports of the spring was the one of this species at Sale Lake on 14 May (WS, DW, doc.); only a lucky few got to see it.

**Ovenbird:** The first report came on 6 May from *Pueblo*, *Pueblo* (VT).



*Blackpoll Warbler, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo County, 16 May 2008. Photo by Bill Schmoker*



*Louisiana Waterthrush, Larimer County, 26 April 2008.*  
Photo by Bill Schmoker

**Northern Waterthrush:** Even though this species is usually one of the more common eastern warbler species, the spring total of 55 reports was more than expected.

**Louisiana Waterthrush:** Many Colorado birders have been predicting that this species should occur more often in the state, perhaps near the Kansas border in early April. This year it finally happened, but the bird appeared in Longmont, *Boulder*, from 25-26 May (MM, MMa, m.ob., doc.). The number of birders who got to see it was heartening.

**Kentucky Warbler:** Three reports were slightly more than normal for the

spring. A male was in *Prowers* on the rather early date of 16 Apr (NS, m.ob.); another was at Two Buttes from 1-3 May (AS, m.ob., doc.); and a male was at Neegronda Res on 3 May (KMD, no doc.).

**Mourning Warbler:** The total of five reports was a bit better than normal. A male was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 14 May (JD, SSt, DC, no doc.); one was at the Mt. Sanitas Trailhead on 16 May (THE, no doc.); a male was at the Cañon City Riverwalk on 19 May (DL); a male was at Two Buttes on 20 May (AS, no doc.); and a first-spring female



*Mourning Warbler, Fremont County, 19 May 2008.*  
Photo by David Leatherman



*Hooded Warbler, El Dorado Mountain Open Space, Boulder County, 23 May 2008. Photo by David Waltman*

was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 23 May (GW, LM, doc.).

**Hooded Warbler:** A total of eleven reports was a bit above average. Most significant of the bunch was a male at the Eldorado Ranch Open Space found on 20 May (CN, m.ob.) that was seen through the end of the season and well into the summer. Other counties with reports include *Baca*, *Bent*, *Crowley*, *El Paso*, *Fremont*, *Larimer*, *Prowers*, and *Pueblo*.

**Canada Warbler:** One decided to stop off on its way to Canada and brighten the lives of those lucky enough to be at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 28 May (BM, GW, doc.). Unfortunately, it left the rest of us in the dark.

**Hepatic Tanager:** A female at Two Buttes on 4 May (AS, LK, doc.) was farther east than normal, though this species breeds as close as eastern *Las Animas*.

**Summer Tanager:** Twenty reports

was a bit above average. Significant records include those of a female in *Alamosa* from 7-11 May (JSt, m.ob.) and a bird returning to *Yellow-jacket Creek* on 29 May (JBn).

**Scarlet Tanager:**

The only report of the season was of a female in the unlikely location of *Alamosa* on 23 May (JRa, JSt, no doc.).

**American Tree Sparrow:** The final spring sighting came

on 13 Apr from *Jumbo Res* (HA).

**Field Sparrow:** One at the *Mesa Trail, Boulder*, on 18 May (CN) was significantly farther west than normal for this rather peripheral species in Colorado.

**Black-throated Sparrow:** One at *Lac Amora Park, Broomfield*, on 16 April (BPa) provided a rare northern Front Range record, as did one at *Doudy Draw* on 26 May (LB, SB).

**Sage Sparrow:** Seven reports from east of the divide were a few more than normal; counties with reports include *Douglas*, *El Paso*, *Fremont*, *Las Animas*, and *Larimer*.

**Savannah Sparrow:** One near *Zink's Pond* on 8 Mar (JBy) was very early, and the first for the season.

**Baird's Sparrow:** Most birders would agree that this species migrates through eastern Colorado every spring, maybe in numbers. That agreement hasn't done much for actu-

ally finding those regular migrants. So it was heartening to hear of a report of three birds from near Two Buttes on 28 Apr (JCa, doc.).

**Fox Sparrow:** A member of the eastern “Red” subspecies was reported from Tamarack SWA, Logan, on 6 Apr (SL), and a member of the “Slate-colored” subspecies was reported from Stearns Lake, Boulder, on 13 Apr (TFI).

**Swamp Sparrow:** There were five reports of this species this spring, fewer than normal. Counties with reports were Bent, Boulder, Otero, Pueblo, and Weld.

**White-throated Sparrow:** Fifteen reports was about average. Most significant of the bunch was from Cedaredge, Delta, on 31 May (RW). Other counties with reports include Bent, Boulder, El Paso, Fremont, Kiowa, Larimer, Lincoln, Prowers, Pueblo, and Yuma.

**Harris’s Sparrow:** Nineteen reports was slightly above average. Counties with reports include Baca, Cheyenne, Douglas, El Paso, Fremont, Jefferson, Kiowa, Lincoln, Otero, and Pueblo.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow:** An adult first found during the winter season remained at Tunnel Drive, Fremont, till 27 Mar (BKP, doc.); one was in Colorado Springs from 1-30 Mar (MW, no doc.); another was in Grand Junction on 27 Apr (JT, no doc.); and an adult was at CBR, El Paso, on 15 May (BG, TR, doc.).

**Northern Cardinal:** The on-again, off-again bird from Chatfield SP was seen this spring from 13-14 Mar (JSc, GW).

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** The 34 reports from the spring made for a very good season. Significant records include those of one bird in Alamosa on 23 May (JRa, JSt, JPo), one in Hotchkiss from 3-12 May (AR), and one in Mancos, Montezuma, from 16-17 May (WD). Other counties with reports include Adams, Baca, Boulder, El Paso, Fremont, Huerfano, Larimer, Prowers, Pueblo, Sedgwick, Washington, and Weld.

**Rose-breasted × Black-headed Grosbeak:** One individual of this regular but rarely-reported hybrid combination was reported from Bellvue, Larimer, on 28 May (ET-M).

**Painted Bunting:** A green-plumaged bird from south of Lamar on 5 May (JSt, doc.) furnished the only report of the season.

**Bobolink:** One in Paonia on 11 May (JBn) was the first of the season, early, and in an unusual location. The other four reports of the spring came from El Paso, Prowers, and Pueblo.

**Eastern Meadowlark:** The only report this spring was of one bird of the “Lillian’s” race in Baca on 27 Apr (CW, no doc.).

**Rusty Blackbird:** This spring there were three reports: of a flock of 10 at Chatfield SP, Douglas, from 30 Mar to 1 Apr (JK, m.ob.); of two in Niwot, Boulder on 31 Mar (AHk); and of two in Fort Collins from 31 Mar to 7 Apr (TLe, m.ob.).

**Great-tailed Grackle:** A sighting of a female from CR 193, Custer, on 28 Apr (RM) was reported to be the second county record.

**Baltimore Oriole:** This species is rare in southeastern Colorado; there

were four reports there this spring, from *Baca*, *Bent*, and *Prowers*. There were also reports from CVCG on 5 and 31 May (CC, BK).

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch:** A singleton amid a gigantic flock of Brown-capped Rosy-Finches on 9 May in Silverton (AS, CW) provided the last report of the spring and a very late date for the state.

**Black Rosy-Finch:** Two individuals in the same flock mentioned above on 9 May (NP, AS, CW) were also the last of the season and very late; this species does breed in nearby Utah.

**Pine Grosbeak:** A female at CVCG on 11 May (RR) was exceptionally far east for this species in Colorado, particularly given the late date.

**Purple Finch:** Colorado saw an unprecedented invasion of this species this past winter, and a few lin-

gered into the spring. Up to eleven were seen around Bonny Res through 20 May (TLe, LS, m.ob., doc.), and a female was seen in Colorado Springs from 11 to 15 May (AB, doc.).

**Cassin's Finch:** A flock of six south of Lamar from 16 to 22 Apr (JSt) and a female-plumaged bird from Lake Hasty on 18 Apr (JK, m.ob.) were much farther east than normal. Other plains records came from *El Paso* and *Weld*.

**Red Crossbill:** There were a few plains records this spring: 12+ were in Greeley on 3 Mar (DM); five were south of Lamar on 10 Mar (JSt); and a flock of four was at Two Buttes on 28 May (AS). The latter record included recordings of the birds, which proved to be Type 2.

**Evening Grosbeak:** Four at Two Buttes on 28 May (AS) were much farther east than normal, especially for so late in the season.

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*Red-naped Sapsucker by Joe Rigli*

# Swainson's Hawk vs. Rough-legged Hawk: An Overlooked Identification Pitfall

*Tony Leukering*

Though many birders might consider it unlikely that Swainson's Hawk could be confused with Rough-legged Hawk and vice versa, I believe that this very problem causes a number of incorrect reports of the two out of season. This is quite important, as the two species are virtual temporal replacements of each other in Colorado, with Rough-legged Hawk being quite rare or completely absent from mid-April through September, and Swainson's Hawk nearly non-existent in the state from October through March. I doubt that this temporal pattern is accidental. Both species are mouse specialists with low wing loading (i.e., large wing area relative to weight) that utilize hovering and kiting extensively in foraging over open country. Were they to occur together, they would certainly be direct competitors. Interestingly, the two species are also among the longest-migrating buteos of the Americas, that aspect being yet another feature of the two species' ecologies that encourages similarity of shape, particularly wing shape.

What many might consider to be typical plumages of the two—Rough-legged's overall pale plumage, distinct blackish belly, and wrist patches; Swainson's dark upperparts, dark bib, and pale belly—are certainly quite distinctive. However, certain plumages of the two species can fairly readily be misconstrued as belonging to the other. Oddly, these plumages belong to quite different age classes in the two species. In this essay, utilizing the pictures on the back cover of this journal, I treat the problems of separating juvenile and immature Swainson's Hawks from adult male Rough-legged Hawks. As these two species' typical plumages are well covered in the relevant field and specialty guides (particularly Liguori 2005 and Wheeler 2003), I mainly treat the potentially confusing plumages. Also, as plumage features are not as evident and thus less useful in dark morphs of the two species, I primarily discuss the light-morph plumages.

## **Swainson's Hawk**

The first individuals of this species typically arrive in Colorado right around April Fool's Day, though in some years a few individuals are found in the last few days of March. In fall, the eastern plains often hold large concentrations of grasshopper-chasing Swainson's

Hawks of various ages, with numbers often peaking in mid-September. Nevertheless, virtually all have departed the state by 1 October, with just the occasional bird, almost always a youngster of some sort, still present into the first week of October or, very rarely, later. There are no acceptable records of the species in Colorado between mid-October and late March.

Like most raptors and all North American buteos, Swainson's Hawk retains its juvenal plumage (the plumage in which it leaves the nest) until it is nearly one year old. Unlike most North American buteos, the species has a distinct and juvenal-like formative plumage, which it molts into when about a year old. The juvenal and formative plumages are quite distinct from those of adults and are typified by an indistinct and streaky bib; variable extent and abundance of mottling/streaking on the breast, belly and wing linings; and more-or-less distinct black wrist commas. These two plumages can usually be told from each other, as the older birds are usually molting at least some flight feathers during their stay in Colorado. After their pre-formative molt is complete, they usually retain roughly the three outermost juvenal primaries, which can be distinguished from the newer feathers by their paler color and more worn appearance.

### **Rough-legged Hawk**

This species typically arrives in Colorado after the first week of October, with the primary period of passage being mid-October to late November. After that period, most Rough-legs found in the state are wintering birds, though some movement into and through the state—often due to hard weather elsewhere—probably takes place well into winter. In spring, the return to the breeding grounds probably begins in mid- to late February and peaks in early to mid-March, with virtually all individuals having departed the state by 1 April. In most years, a few individuals, almost always juveniles, linger into the first week or two of April and as late as about the 20<sup>th</sup>. There are no acceptable Colorado records of the species between then and early October.

**The species:** Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*) and Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*).

**The context:** Almost anywhere in Colorado, at almost any season

**The problem:** Even though the two species rarely occur in the same season, there is surprising potential for confusion between young Swainson's and adult male Rough-legged Hawks.

*(See photos on back cover.)*

Unlike most raptors, adults of this species sport distinct male and female plumages, though a minority of birds exhibit something of an intermediate appearance. Although it is not well known or documented, my experience suggests that Rough-legged Hawks molt into a formative plumage that is variably distinct from definitive basic (full adult) plumage. The best clue that such birds are not adults is their retention of approximately the three outermost juvenal primaries, as mentioned above for Swainson's Hawks. This phenomenon, then, might account for the apparently intermediate plumages noted above. Such visibly formative-plumaged birds may very well all be immature males—because, since juvenal plumage in this species is quite similar to that of adult females, a distinct formative plumage in females would be much more difficult to detect.

As all juveniles and virtually all adult female Rough-legged Hawks exhibit the stereotypical large black wrist and belly patches, they run little risk of being mistaken for Swainson's Hawks. Adult males, however, tend to have little or no distinct belly patch and often have smaller wrist patches, which are occasionally reduced from square patches to thin commas and are often brown rather than black. The most lightly-marked such birds also tend to have little or no dark mottling in the wing linings and on the belly, the belly then contrasting fairly strongly with a dark-streaked bib of sorts.

## **Solutions**

In identifying birds, it always pays to look beyond the one or two “obvious” features to assess as many characters as possible. Additionally, simply knowing what species is more likely at a given time of year helps to eliminate possibilities, and I hope that the explanation of the seasonal occurrence patterns of the two species being discussed can help in that matter. However, individual birds can and do occur outside normal temporal patterns, so a finer knowledge of identification features may assist in correctly identifying a puzzling bird. All features below are useful in separating Swainson's and Rough-legged Hawks of all colors.

One of the best features to help separate these two species is shape, as is typical in raptor identification. Though the two are more similar in shape than almost any other pair of ABA-area butes, they are still different. Swainson's Hawks are well known to exhibit a strong dihedral when soaring, with the wings typically rounded smoothly upward above the horizontal from wing base to tip. Rough-legged Hawk, however, sports a modified dihedral, with the “arms” lifted above the horizontal, but the “hands” leveled parallel to the ground.

Tail patterns of the two are also quite different. Rough-legged

Hawk has a mostly white tail with a variable number of black bands, the largest being just subterminal, but with the basal half (or so) of the tail being white in most individuals. Swainson's Hawk has a darker tail, as the ground color is not quite white and the tail is narrowly banded throughout its length, though the subterminal band may be wider than the rest. Beware that Swainson's typically has a white or whitish rump that can be misconstrued as the base of the tail.

Though their coloring is much more subdued than that of adults, juvenile Swainson's Hawks still have flight feathers that are darker than are the wing linings (except in the very darkest of dark morphs), while Rough-legged Hawks have paler flight feathers with a trailing subterminal black band in adults (juveniles have a vague dusky terminal band). Finally, given good looks at a perched bird, one should be able to note that the Rough-legged's legs are feathered all the way to the toes, unlike the unfeathered yellow legs of Swainson's Hawks.

### Corrigendum

In the previous installment of this column (Neotropic Cormorant), the references in the text to the two back-cover pictures of Neotropic Cormorant were reversed; the swimming bird is the one referred to second and does show the long tail well, as well as a fair bit of supraloral orange—a trait thought by many to be diagnostic of Double-crested. I apologize for any inconvenience.

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I would like to thank Larry Semo and Jerry Liguori (in my opinion, probably the most highly-skilled North American hawkwatcher) for their review of a previous draft of this manuscript. I also thank Jerry for the use of his picture of the Rough-legged Hawk.

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Swainson's Hawk, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo County, 5 May 2007. *Photo by Tony Leukering*



Rough-legged Hawk, Salt Lake Valley, UT December 2002. *Photo by Jerry Liguori*

*In the Scope:*

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