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Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



Miller Moths

Small Mountain Owls

Whither Colorado's Wheatear?



Colorado Field Ornithologists
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Photos (on back cover) by Tony Leukering



Gray-crowned
Rosy-Finch
(Hepburn's
race), Wood-
land Park,
Teller County,
13 December
2009. Photo
by Bryan
Patrick

Spring

Bill Kaempfer

As I write this from Boulder on 2 March, the sun is shining brightly, days are getting longer, and temperatures are warming; but still the sun glistens off the snowy peaks above timberline. (I can just barely see part of Shoshoni Peak in the Indian Peaks Wilderness from my office window.) I've been cooped up inside for far too long and I'm glad that February is over—it must be the worst month of the year for birding.

January has the rush of excitement associated with starting off our new year lists; and there always seem to be a few good rarities to be found in January. This year, how many of us rushed off to find the Snowy Owl in Peyton, the Red-shouldered Hawk in Windsor, the Pine Warbler in Pueblo, or the Golden-crowned Sparrow at Red Rocks? But by February, additions to our year lists are glacial and we are left dreaming of what's to come.

Admittedly, spring comes slowly at first—some Mountain Bluebird and Mourning Dove reports from north of their normal wintering range; then reports of Sandhill Cranes arriving in the San Luis Valley even though it is still snow-covered. Great Horned Owls are already on the nest, and while I have yet to see a Cinnamon Teal sighting on COBirds, I bet that happens by the end of this week. But those are only the first few signs of the season that gets us excited year after year.

This year I hope you can join us for the peak of spring birding activity—the CFO annual convention in Fort Collins, 21-24 May. Fort Collins is clearly a world-class site for a birding convention; after all, the American Birding Association held its convention there both 10 and 20 years ago. It presents probably the best opportunity we have in Colorado to combine field trips going both into the mountains and onto the plains: west over the Front Range into Jackson County and east onto the prairies at Crow Valley and beyond. Plus, the timing is perfect—along the northern strip of the state, songbird migration peaks in the final third of the month while shorebirds are still plentiful.

Of course, that leads into the really difficult choices relating to the convention—and I don't mean which of the tempting banquet entrees to order, but which field trips to take. For me, a CFO trip to North Park is always worth it just for the breathtaking beauty of Jackson County, notwithstanding the chance for Veery along Michigan Creek or Greater Sage-Grouse in Arapahoe National Wildlife Ref-

uge. But how about that day-long trek out to Tamarack and Jumbo Reservoir? I remember a visit to Jumbo on exactly the same date in May just three springs ago that produced a flock of 250 Red-necked Phalaropes and 90 Sanderlings in breeding plumage! And then there is that new trip concept for this year, the chaser trip—hightailing it all over Larimer and Weld Counties to try for all those rarities seen on the first two days of the convention.

Spring, and this year's CFO convention in Ft. Collins, can't come fast enough.

Bill Kaempfer, William.Kaempfer@colorado.edu

Renewal Notice Error

Some copies of the October 2009 and January 2010 issues of Colorado Birds were mailed with incorrect membership expiration dates printed on the mailers. The expiration dates on the current issue have been corrected. We apologize for the inconvenience.

CFO BOARD MINUTES

30 January 2010
Fort Collins Hilton
Fort Collins, Colorado

Larry Modesitt, CFO Secretary

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 11:10 A.M. by President Jim Beatty. Officers present were President Jim Beatty, Vice President Bill Kaempfer, Secretary Larry Modesitt, Treasurer Maggie Boswell, and directors Ted Floyd, Mark Peterson, Nathan Pieplow, Bob Righter, Joe Roller, Bill Schmoker, Debra Sparn, and Brad Steger. Board member Larry Semo sent his regrets.

President's Report

The meeting was called to order

by President Jim Beatty, who thanked the Board for accepting the many du-

ties required to make the convention planning a success. In other matters, Jim requested that the board develop a list of metrics to be reported throughout the year for indications of progress.

Secretary's Report

Minutes from Larry Modesitt, Secretary, were approved for the 14 November 2009 Board Meeting at St. Anthony's Hospital.

Treasurer's Report

The board reviewed the year-end financial statements for 2009 compiled by Treasurer Maggie Boswell. The board hailed the profitable result in what has been a difficult year for many organizations. Net income for the year was a positive \$1,949, compared to a budget of \$500 and to a 2008 result of \$113. Several favorable events contributed to this. The major improvement was switching COBirds to Google Groups, which reduced expenses from \$1,985 to \$288. The Board appreciates the effort from Mark Peterson to accomplish this virtually invisible (to most) and consequently thankless task. While convention net income was \$448 less than budgeted, membership expenses were \$588 less. Donations were \$571 higher than budgeted. Project grants and scholarships were \$1,165 less than budgeted, although we did donate an additional unbudgeted amount of \$500 to the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II. This caused us to discuss some ways to advertise more widely for grant applications. We also had no expense for the 2009 keynote speaker Ted Floyd.

Maggie will be presenting a budget for 2010 prior to our next board meeting for discussion by e-mail. Cash reserves of \$28,858 as of December 31 are invested in one of the Vanguard funds. Interest income was only \$153 in 2009 compared to \$325 in 2008. The Board discussed alternatives for achieving more than this minimal interest, but we decided that asset safety is worth losing a small amount of potential interest.

Convention Tasks

A. Introduction—Jim noted again that it was critical that all inclusions for the 2010 convention brochure be completed by February 15, so that the information could be given to Rachel Hopper for brochure preparation and publication. The board appreciates the able job done by Rachel on this behind-the-scenes action for so many years.

B. Pricing—Jim and Maggie discussed that the price for the convention needed to be increased by \$10 to account for increased food expenses, taxes, and service costs. A plated dinner this year will accelerate the dinner process, allowing the keynote speaker to end at an earlier time, a change that early risers, and especially keynote speaker Benkman, are expected to appreciate. We decided to allow a special reduced rate for students, funded from the youth scholarship fund. Maggie also requested to change a membership category from the confusing "general" to the more descriptive "individual/household."

C. Field trips—Mark has nearly finished preparation of field trips,

with thanks to Nick Komar for assisting with many field trip descriptions. To avoid the surprise of a large group suddenly arriving at Hereford Ranch, people at the ranch will be notified in advance. We are planning a crossbill trip, led by crossbill expert Craig Benkman and crossbill voice recorder Nathan Pieplow, for a nominal charge. There also will be a charge for access to Meadow Springs, a large area operated as a private ranch in Larimer County that hosts breeding grassland birds normally difficult to locate. We will also charge for a photographers' trip. Trip charges cover extra costs as well as make up for losses on T-shirts. Participants generally believe that the normal charges of \$10 are worth the value. We likely will have a trip to Wyoming and also a long trip across Cameron Pass to Jackson County. A new addition will be a "chase trip" for which there will be no itinerary known in advance. It will be decided at the last minute, based upon exciting birds just discovered somewhere not on a published trip. Mark also named the other trips planned. We discussed the possibility of a Friday nocturnal trip, which will be decided later.

D. Sack lunches and pricing—Bill Schmoker. We discussed many alternatives and decided to buy from King Soopers, where we could pick up fresh sandwiches in the morning at prices that are reasonable (compared to the alternatives). We also discussed the difficulties of lunch distribution, deciding a leader must be available for handing out lunches. Maggie will provide documentation

for our not-for-profit state and county sales tax exemption.

E. Book sales—Joe Roller. We want to encourage authors to take a vendor table to sell bird-related books and be on hand for book signings. Information will be listed in COBirds, so that attendees can bring books for signing if they have them.

F. "Stump the Chumps" panel—Bill Schmoker and Nathan Pieplow discussed their plans to add an audio component to the popular contest. Bill will recruit a panel, beginning with members of the Colorado Bird Records Committee. Unfortunately, Chairman Larry Semo will be unable to attend the convention this year.

G. Vendors—Larry Modesitt requested that the price for a vendor table be reduced from \$35 to \$20 in an effort to encourage more vendor participation, and the board agreed. The price for a not-for-profit organization table continues at \$10. Larry requested names of potential vendors, and several were suggested. Larry will contact them to suggest participation.

H. Convention Papers—Jim Beatty opened the discussion of papers to be presented. Ted Floyd best represented the point that papers should not be presented if adequate time and attendance are not possible, as paper presentation quality then suffers as a consequence. Mark Peterson recommended avoiding presenting papers on Friday, as late arrival from work, registration, and greeting old friends all combine to drive down attendance. We then agreed to have all papers presented Saturday afternoon af-

ter the many half-day trips. Very few Saturday trips will be full day trips. The board voted with acclaim and alacrity to have a full Happy Hour. In this vein, presenters are urged to provide half-hour presentations instead of the usual forty-five minutes. We discussed Lynn Wickersham's plans to provide status of the last year of the Colorado Breeding Birds Atlas II. Lynn still needs coverage of several blocks, particularly in the east. Larry Modesitt described how Jason Beason will present RMBO's monitoring of Black Swifts, which now includes geolocators on 5 Black Swifts in an attempt to reconstruct their migratory flight path. Larry also described an RMBO paper by Arvind Panjabi dealing with conversion of a sludge dump to a well-managed private range attractive to several bird species of concern, such as Mountain Plovers, Ferruginous Hawks, Burrowing Owls, and Chestnut-collared Longspurs.

I. T-shirts—Bob Righter. Difficulties in choosing sizes in the past caused us to decide to purchase only men's sizes from small to xxx-large. Since past purchases occasionally resulted in large inventories after the convention, Maggie recommended, and we agreed, to purchase very few shirts in addition to the advance orders. Bill Schmoker showed the design, and we discussed T-shirt color, addition of a pocket, and location for the design on front or back. Bob will investigate costs for these alternatives. The final decision will be based upon the feedback we receive.

J. Awards—Joe Roller. We nomi-

nated deserving people, and we chose recipients. We will announce winners at the convention. Joe will get the physical awards prepared, after receiving wording from Brad Steger. In addition, we discussed at length the question of whether to award a plaque to the community hosting the Snowy Owl. While we have presented many plaques to homeowners in the past, the Snowy Owl has been seen not at one address, but throughout a particular neighborhood in Peyton. We agreed that this is not a "landowner" award with which a landowner's continued stewardship is to be rewarded. This type of award, in contrast, is to be a public appreciation for people whose lives were disrupted by birders and photographers invading and scouring their neighborhood with binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses. We agreed to reward the neighborhood association for welcoming people to see the Snowy Owl, and we hope it will build continued goodwill among communities.

K. Project Fund/Scholarships—Bill Kaempfer moved to fully fund certain requests for grants. Joe Roller seconded the motion, which carried. Bill will write to last year's winners and ask for a report on their results. Nathan Pieplow would like to publish results in *Colorado Birds*.

L. Convention publicity—Ted Floyd will create documents for the CFO website and provide regular promotion on COBirds, where he also will encourage subscriptions. He will provide updates near convention time, so people attending should check last minute changes.

Committee Reports

A. Field Trips—Brad Steger presented a preliminary report after studying what other state organizations provide. The offering of field trips, number of conventions, and number and type of publications all vary greatly among leading birding organizations.

B. Nomination—Joe Roller discussed potential individuals for board positions, and board members also offered insights.

C. CFO website—Mark Peterson had no report regarding mapping. Brad Steger, after his study of other states' products, announced that CFO's website is near the top tier. He believes our website needs refreshing, particularly regarding navigation. He believes Minnesota has the best website.

D. Colorado Bird Records Committee—There was no report.

E. Colorado Birds—Nathan Pieplow described articles in the next issue as well as future issues. Some surprises will occur in future issues, with some new subjects to be treated as a series. Nathan also emphasized that each CFO award will be described in the journal. Individuals agreed to write up awards. Joe Roller will prepare the article for the Snowy Owl award, which will be published in the July 2010 issue.

F. Membership—Debra Sparn described anomalies in our database that she is correcting.

G. BOC Online—There was no report.

H. COBirds—Mark Peterson. No changes have been made recently to the website. It is running smoothly and is staying on focus. The board

believes that policing of comments is being done well by Mark and by Rachel Hopper, as comments are in line with COBirds' guidelines.

Old Business

Editing County Birding Website. Requests for changes are to be sent to Rachel Hopper, and no longer to the authors of the website, Nathan Pieplow and Andrew Spencer. Rachel then will provide updates.

New Business

A. Allowing bird feeding discussions on COBirds. A request was made to post to COBirds a reference to another website dedicated to bird feeding. The COBirds rules prohibit discussion of bird feeding. The board would see no problem about a posting referring to another website, but it must be a public website where you need not be a member to see the posts. Since the request was for a reference to a private website with no public archive, the request was denied.

B. CFO's role in moderating discussions and guiding birding ethics on COBirds—We discussed the postings related to the Snowy Owl, which included discussion of many ethics issues. We believe that discussions to date have been well done. While some photographers apparently went too close, the various postings regarding birders' etiquette were professional in tone. Responders also referred to American Birding Association website listings on ethics.

C. Initial thoughts for the 2011 convention—Jim Beatty reminded the board that in the President's let-

ter, he suggested the possibility of once again having a fall convention. Two conventions in the '90's were held only in the fall, and Bill Kaemper and Mark Peterson both strongly supported providing a fall meeting. Brad Steger reviewed activities of many other states. He will complete his study and send a spreadsheet to the board before our next meeting.

Some do conventions in two seasons, and some in three. Some do none. Jim Beatty, Joe Roller, Mark Peterson, and Ted Floyd formed a committee to study this possibility. Brad's data is proving quite useful.

Our next meeting will be on 17 April 2010. President Beatty adjourned the meeting at 3:28 P.M.

ACROSS THE BOARD

Larry Modesitt, CFO Secretary

Jim Beatty

Larry Modesitt joined the board of CFO in 2008 in charge of nominations, nabbing Ted Floyd, Joe Roller, and Bob Righter to become directors. He was elected secretary in 2009.

Larry's first birding was to learn birds for the Boy Scout Nature merit badge. While it was enjoyable, he had little knowledge of or concern for the wider picture. In college he met his wife Abby, a kindred spirit who loved nature. The two of them filled their weekends with canoeing, camping, skiing, soccer, and climbing. While Abby taught math, Larry finished up at Harvard Business School. Beginning a job with Chrysler, he and Abby moved to Michigan. Larry's mother Betty Ambler told him that they should go to a nearby birding hotspot, Canada's Point Pelee. They went in July (as migration wasn't a clear concept to them yet). Abby, Larry, and two-year-old Kent saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak high in a tree. Trying to identify it, Larry began in the guidebook with grebes and searched all the pages until they nearly ran out. "It was the only known time anybody has seen me be patient," he proudly claims.

His interest in birds flew skyward when, as he prepared for a trip to the Everglades with his young family, his mother gave him a life-changing suggestion: "List the birds you see." The budding birder racked up a grand total of 18 birds, and his life list had begun. He noted birds on trips to the mountains, Yellowstone, and California, and after 17 years had a life list of 113 birds.

One day in 1985, after moving to Colorado, Larry was out running at Cherry Creek Reservoir when he ran past Patty Echelmeyer with her Denver Field Ornithologists (DFO) trip. Patty offered a look through the scope, and there was a Blue Grosbeak. Larry remained hard to convince, as there were sports in all seasons—but then Larry ran into Joe Roller at Cherry Creek, and Dr. Joe wrote him a prescription that included *joining* DFO. Larry's first DFO trip was to Apex, where a Yellow-breasted Chat and a Dusky Grouse were the highlights.

Another lucky encounter occurred three years later when Larry and his son Kent were attempting to climb the Mount of the Holy Cross. The car broke down, stranding them. Shortly, however, a fellow climber came along and saved the day. They climbed together, and that is how Larry and Gregg Goodrich became fast friends.

In the process of climbing 27 more fourteeners with him, Larry hooked Gregg on birding. In 2008, Gregg and Larry joined Thompson Marsh, Peter Gent, Duane Nelson, and Hugh Kingery as the fifth and sixth members of the Fourteener-400 club, people who have climbed all of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks *and* seen 400 birds in Colorado.

Eventually Gregg started talking about a friend of his from work who had been joining him on lunchtime forays. Gregg said, "This guy is really excited. I think we can get him to be a birder. We should go on a trip together." They made plans to meet in Big Bend National Park. Gregg and his buddy Glenn Walbek drove in three hours later than the appointed time. "You told us not to stop at roadside rest stops," Glenn admitted, "but those junk birds were all *lifers*!" Subsequent years found Glenn, Gregg, Larry, and Abby making annual trips to Texas.

Meanwhile, Larry's consulting took him all over the country during the work week. For 20 years, Larry was a turnaround manager, using experiences gained as a Group Vice President responsible for fixing up, and then managing, troubled companies. He began Modesitt Associates in Michigan, as there was much work there. He and his nine associates most often accepted interim roles to implement the actions they recommended. His most famous and fun role was as the



Larry Modesitt

interim VP of Operations of Lionel Trains, where he helped transform massive losses into prosperity. The group worked on a variety of companies, from chicken distributors to auto plants. Being away from Denver was far from desirable, but he saw his first Connecticut Warbler while getting out of his car at his Michigan apartment. In total, working throughout the US led to 176 life birds.

For a few years, Larry just *enjoyed* birds. But after seeing deteriorating habitat firsthand, he realized that conservation actions were necessary. He joined conservation groups, including Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO). Several years later, Larry made plans to move his office to his home to Denver. About that time, he was asked to join the board of RMBO. Working on a different kind of prevention coincided nicely with the end of his weekly returns to the economically suffering Midwest.

In his current role as Chairman of the Board of RMBO, Larry's adopted mission is conserving native birds and their habitats. With RMBO working in 12 states and Mexico, there are many important projects, including converting the Old Stone House into an environmental learning center. Stressing the importance of stewardship by everybody is a full-time mission of its own. Larry sees the important and differing roles played by CFO, RMBO, and DFO and looks to see how they can work together. All are birding organizations interested not only in seeing birds, but also in conserving them for our grandchildren to see.

Larry: many thanks for the work you do for CFO, RBMO, and the birds themselves!

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

BOOK REVIEW

Small Mountain Owls by Scott Rashid

Hugh Kingery

Written by one of Colorado's most passionate small-owl enthusiasts, this readable memoir describes Scott Rashid's romance with these little

predators. It blends a diverse mix of personal experiences, authoritative references, copious photographs, and Rashid's sketches to produce informa-

tive written and pictorial essays on his four subjects: Northern Pygmy-Owl, Flammulated Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Boreal Owl.

I turned first to Saw-whets, because where we live, we hear and occasionally see them. He evokes the Saw-whet's head perfectly: the "facial disk is brown with white spoke-like feathers extending outward to the edges of the disk. . . . The forehead is brown with small vertical white feathers which look like little streaks of paint." Photographs vividly illustrate these. "When trying to conceal themselves, Northern Saw-whet Owls often raise the upper corners of their facial disk [so that] the top of the head is in the shape of a shallow 'M'." A Rashid sketch shows the M.

For each of the four owls, he illustrates wing feathers and ear openings. In each account two close-up photos compare the difference between the subject owl's primary feathers and another bird's. For the Saw-whet, the photos show how the fringed edge, which allows silent flight, differs from a magpie's primaries. He compares the Pygmy-Owl's primary with that of a Great Horned Owl: as a diurnal predator, Pygmy-Owls don't have silent flight like Great Horned, Saw-whet, or Boreal Owls. Similarly, Saw-whets and Boreals have asymmetrical ear openings; Pygmy-Owls and Flammulated do not—photographs illustrate this. He shows that a Northern Pygmy-Owl, unlike the others, has short, rounded wings and a long tail like a Sharp-shinned Hawk; photographs illustrate that similarity.

Rashid's sketches add a unique di-



Small Mountain Owls

Scott Rashid

Schiffer Books, 2009

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mension. A series on fledgling Flammulated Owls shows their progression from a few days after fledging to one week later to three weeks later; a sketch of an adult feeding a fledgling defies stereotype. He comments that the adult "often closes its eyes [nictating membrane] and uses the rictal bristles around its mouth to feel where the baby's mouth is." Two sketches show a Northern Pygmy-Owl right after it has caught a mouse, then its reaction when "a small flock of crows flew over."

Habitat photos, all taken in Rocky Mountain National Park, show where he has found nesting owls. (Like his research, this book centers on the Park.) To me the nest sites looked similar, and the text explains why: the subject is one single aspen tree. In 1988 and 1989 a Northern Pygmy-Owl occupied a cavity in the tree; in 2004 a Flammulated Owl used that cavity. The next year a Pygmy-Owl

lived in the tree (in a different cavity), and the next year, a Northern Saw-whet nested there (in yet another cavity). And for 10 years, Rashid heard calling Saw-whets and Boreals “in close proximity.” Saw-whets and Pygmy-Owls have even nested in the same tree at the same time.

With a mix of formal and informal writing—and formal and informal subject matter—Scott Rashid makes these owls accessible to general bird-watchers. Most people who read this book will learn much about owls and appreciate the dedication of this accomplished owl-enthusiast.

Hugh Kingery, P.O. Box 584, Franktown, CO 80116, ouzels8@aol.com

ORNITHOLOGICAL HISTORY

Whither Colorado's Wheatear?

Walter Szeliga

On 14 May 1880, Henry Minot wandered up Skunk Canyon, downstream of the Royal Arch in Boulder, Colorado, and happened upon a bird familiar to him from his time in the United Kingdom: the “English Stonechat,” *Saxicola oenanthe*, as it was then called. As was typical of the time period, he leveled his rifle and collected a specimen, confident that this individual would prove to be common in the area.

However, in the intervening 130 years, no other sighting of this species, now called Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), has occurred in Colorado. The location of his specimen has also been a mystery. Here, I examine the evidence for the occurrence of Northern Wheatear in Colorado and the results of my search for the specimen Henry Minot collected that Friday in 1880.

Henry Minot

Born in 1859 near Forest Hills, Massachusetts, Henry Minot was one of William and Katherine Minot's four children. He described himself as timid and preferred to spend his free time hiking, reading, and writing. Since childhood, he had been interested in ornithology, and by the age of 17 had published his first ornithological treatise, “The Land and Game-Birds of New England” (Minot 1876). The same year, Minot entered Harvard University, where he befriended fellow freshman and future President Theodore Roosevelt. Minot's

love of ornithology spurred him to assist Roosevelt in completing his survey of the birds of the Adirondacks during the summer of 1877. This survey resulted in the publication of one of the first authoritative lists of the avifauna of the region (Roosevelt and Minot 1877).

By 1878, Minot began to dislike university life, and during his sophomore year he decided to leave Harvard, citing personal reasons. Minot began traveling, visiting England

and Scotland in 1879 and Colorado in 1880. His travels began to revolve around railroad investing, and in the mid-1880's he made trips to Mexico and Minnesota to report on the state and operation of their railroad systems. By the late 1880's Minot had become the president of the Eastern Railroad in Minnesota. He had just begun investing commercially in Wisconsin when he was killed in a train collision in Pennsylvania on 14 November 1890 at the age of 31.



Northern Wheatear, Lewis County, NY, 15 October 2008. Photo by Chris Wood

A Wheatear in Colorado?

In early 1880, Henry Minot decided to visit Colorado. While it is unclear what motivated his visit, he filled the journals he wrote during the trip with diverse subjects, from information on the quality of the railroads to catalogs of the wildlife. He began his journey to Colorado from New England in late April of 1880. His travels by rail took him southward along the Atlantic Seaboard to Washington D.C. and then westward to St. Louis and on to Denver.

When Minot arrived in Denver in early May, he had few kind words to describe the city. After only a few days in Denver, he de-

cided to continue traveling northwest to Boulder, and on 12 May he arrived and rented a house there for \$9 a week. He began exploring the foothills and plains immediately in the form of nature walks both alone and in the company of Professor Paul Hanus from the University of Boulder. It was on 14 May, his second day exploring Skunk Creek Canyon alone and on foot, when he happened across a bird he felt would be quite common, a Northern Wheatear. He wrote in his journal,

“*Saxicola oenanthe* (?) One specimen, Skunk Gulch Creek, Boulder, Col. Identical with or very close to the English Stonechat, — a pretty bird. It will prove, I think, that this species inhabits our boreal interior ... Of course, I shall look for more. ([20ft.?] Sent full description to Coues)” (MHS Papers Box 9 Volume 13 Folder 7).

He failed to locate more individuals of this species during his stay in Colorado, and by 30 May 1880, he noted so in his journal. In a letter home to his father written on 16 May 1880, he mentions the wheatear:

“I have found many flowers, and about two dozen birds new to me, besides one bird of which only two specimens (stragglers on the coast) are recorded in this country—the Stone Chat, which I now believe must inhabit it. Do you remember these birds on Exmoor? You thought them very pretty, and so they are” (MHS Papers Box 1 Folder 10).

Few other references to this specimen remain aside from drafts of his article “Notes on Colorado Birds,” published in the Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club in the Fall of 1880 (Minot 1880, MHS Papers Box 4 Folder 5), and a letter from Elliott Coues on letterhead from the Smithsonian Institute dated 14 June 1880 stating, “Both of your interesting letters are to hand. The much desired specimen of the *Saxicola* will I suppose reach me in due time” (MHS Papers Box 4 Folder 2).

After this letter and the publication of the observation in the Bulletin, there is no other authoritative mention of the specimen.

Reports of the Colorado wheatear were included in many publications, including “The Birds of Colorado” (Cooke 1897), “Preliminary List of Birds of Boulder County, Colorado” (Henderson 1903), “An Annotated List of the Birds of Boulder County, Colorado” (Henderson 1909), “Birds of Boulder County, Colorado” (Betts 1913), “Birds of Colorado” (Bailey and Niedrach 1965), and the “Check-list of North American Birds” editions 5 and 6 (AOU 1975, AOU 1983). The 7th edition of the checklist mentions that the record from Colorado is erroneous, but gives no reason for its statement (AOU 1998).

Although minutes of the meetings that produced the 7th edition of the checklist are not extant, it is believed that the late Burt Munroe decided to strike the Colorado wheatear record from the checklist following an extensive search for the specimen in the National Collection (Dr. Richard Banks, pers. comm.). In addition, during October 2008, Dr. Claudia Angle and assistants at the Smithsonian Institute conducted a search of all wheatear specimens in the U.S. National Museum and failed to locate the Boulder specimen (Dr. Richard Banks, pers. comm.).

If the specimen had indeed been received by the Smithsonian Institute, its receipt would have been noted in a publication titled the "Smithsonian Report." In fact, the section of the "Smithsonian Report" titled "Additions to the Collection of the National Museum in 1880" contains the note "Coues, Dr. Elliott U.S.A. Specimens of mammals, birds and bird's nest and eggs." However, there is no mention of Henry Minot (Smithsonian Institute 1881). Subsequent editions of the "Smithsonian Report" up to at least 1900 (and prior to 1879) also do not mention acquisitions from either Coues or Minot.

During Henry Minot's trip to Colorado, he spent time in Manitou Springs, and during the summer of 1880, he began corresponding with J. A. Allen of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. Before leaving Manitou Springs, Mr. Minot sent a parcel containing nests and eggs of breeding species from the Pikes Peak area back to Harvard via the Adams Express Company. To ensure that Minot's wheatear specimen did not arrive at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, a thorough search of the collection was conducted during February 2010 that failed to locate the specimen (Dr. Jeremy Trimble, pers. comm.).

The Wheatear in Central North America

The number of occurrences of Northern Wheatears in central North America is small. Including a sighting during the winter of 2009-2010 in Bee County, Texas, there have been five records of Northern Wheatear on the Great Plains, all since the late 1980's: Alberta (1989), Kansas (1997), Texas (1994, 2009), and North Dakota (1994). The Kansas and North Dakota records occurred during spring migration, while the Texas and Alberta records are from late fall and early winter. Winter records of Northern Wheatear in North America are rare, with only six since 1988. One hypothesis is that winter records represent individuals attempting to over-winter in the western hemisphere. If this hypothesis is correct, spring records from the Great Plains could represent northward migration of individuals that have over-wintered in this hemisphere. None of the



Henry Davis Minot, from the frontispiece of *Minot* (1876)

Northern Wheatears from the Great Plains have been identified to subspecies. If these individuals are of the subspecies *leucorhoa*, then they likely represent members of the ephemeral breeding population of western Hudson Bay (Lein and Maher 1970).

Mistaken Identity

In the absence of a specimen, one needs to consider other interpretations of Minot's observations. What other possible species could Minot have collected that day in Boulder that could be misidentified as Northern Wheatear? Although most identification references indicate that Northern Wheatear is unmistakable and most likely only confusable with other wheatears

(Cramp 1988, Kren and Zoerb 1997), misidentifications can occur.

One possibility is Mountain Bluebird. Species in the genus *Oenanthe* are closely allied with bluebirds (*Sialia*), and these two genera were once considered equivalent (Coues 1872). While there is a rough similarity between female Mountain Bluebirds and female or first-winter Northern Wheatears, the distinctive tail pattern of Northern Wheatear would be evident on a specimen.

Aside from Mountain Bluebird, longspurs occasionally occur along the Front Range during spring migration and share a superficially similar tail pattern with Northern Wheatear. Both McCown's Longspur and Chestnut-collared Longspur show a black "T" on the upper rectrices. Data from the mid-to-late 20th century suggest that McCown's Longspur is more likely along the foothills in migration during mid-May than Chestnut-collared Longspur (Andrews and Righter 1992), but there is an indication that this pattern was dramatically different during the late 19th century (Cooke 1897). While these two longspur species have wheatear-like tail patterns, males should have been in full breeding plumage by mid-May and would be difficult to confuse with Northern Wheatear. In the absence of a

more in-depth description of the specimen or the specimen itself, we can only speculate about precisely what bird Henry Minot saw that day in 1880.

State Record?

Given the scarcity of Northern Wheatear records in the Great Plains, what criteria need to be considered for the inclusion of Northern Wheatear on the Colorado state bird checklist? McKelvey et al. (2008) develop a continuum of evidence on which to judge acceptance of the occurrence of rare species. Based on their criteria, Minot's report should be rejected as evidence for the occurrence of Northern Wheatear in Colorado in the absence of the actual specimen. While this may seem harsh, one should note that, for useful scientific conclusions to be drawn, rare and unusual records should be unequivocal to researchers, even 100 years later. Minot's report isn't without merit, however, and the approach of other bird records committees is insightful. The Florida Bird Records Committee has adopted a distinction between a "report" and a "record" (Smith and Woolfenden 1995 and references therein). Using this nomenclature, Minot's description should hold the weight of a "report," a possibly factual account of a species to be considered when or if another sighting occurs.

Next Steps

During the course of my research, I've had the opportunity to search through various archives and collections. For those interested in pursuing Henry Minot's specimen, the following trails could provide the most promising leads for either locating the specimen or information concerning its identification.

A letter from Henry Minot to Elliott Coues in which Minot describes the Northern Wheatear specimen would provide information regarding the correctness of identification. This letter may also indicate the final resting place of the specimen. The existence of this letter is mentioned by Minot in his journal (MHS Papers Box 9 Volume 13 Folder 7 page 13) and appears to have been the impetus for Coues' letter to Minot, but the location of Minot's letter is unknown.

Minot utilized the Adams Express Company to ship nest and egg specimens from Manitou Springs, Colorado to J. A. Allen at the Museum of Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy in Boston, MA (MHS Papers Box 4 Folder 2). It is possible that he used this same company to ship his wheatear specimen to Washington, D.C., and documents regarding this shipment could exist, since Adams Express Company is still in operation.

Although Elliott Coues was associated with the Smithsonian Institute at the time Minot would have shipped his specimens, Coues was never permanently employed by the U.S. National Museum. It is possible that Minot's specimens were kept in Coues' private collection and not immediately transferred to the Smithsonian. Pieces of Elliott Coues' ornithological collection reside at the Natural History Society of Maryland and likely in other locations. I have been unable to access specimen lists from the Natural History Society of Maryland.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Randy Yuen for obtaining copies of the journals and personal letters of Henry Minot and Jeremy Dibbel from the Massachusetts Historical Society for originally finding the letter from Elliott Coues to Henry Minot. Drs. Claudia Angle and Richard Banks along with their assistants at the National Museum in Washington D.C. were instrumental in mounting a search of the US National Museum for mislabeled specimens that could have been Minot's wheatear. Additionally, Dr. Jeremy Trimble and his assistants at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University devoted time to search their collections for the specimen.

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CBRC REPORT

The 54th Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee

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Introduction

This 54th report presents the results of deliberations of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) on partial results of circulations held during autumn 2009. This article provides results of the circulation of 50 reports submitted by 28 observers documenting 28 occurrences of 34 species from the period 2005 through 2009. Fifteen occurrences involving 13 species were not accepted because of insufficient documentation or because descriptions were inconsistent with known identification criteria. Per CBRC bylaws, all accepted records received final 7-0 or 6-1 votes to accept. Each report that was not accepted received fewer than four votes to accept in the final vote. Those records with four or five “ac-

cept" votes have transcended to a second round of deliberations, and results of those deliberations will be published at a later date.

Highlights of this report include the first, second, and third state records for "Mexican" Duck (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) and the third state record of Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*).

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

Committee Functions

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

Committee News

Rachel Hopper's first term on the CBRC ended on 31 December 2009. Although Rachel was eligible for a second term, she chose to not continue on as a CBRC member at this time due to other responsibilities. The Committee sincerely thanks Rachel for her hard work and dedication to the CBRC. Peter Gent's first term also terminated at the end of 2009 and Peter has opted to fulfill a second term on the Committee. Glenn Walbek was selected as the newest member of the CBRC. Glenn's vast experience and expertise will be of great benefit in deliberations on identifications. The current CBRC membership includes Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Joey Kellner, Bill Maynard, Larry Semo, David Silverman, and Glenn Walbek.

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' con-

tinuance on or removal from the statewide Main Review List (Semo et al. 2002).

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

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

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

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

RECORDS ACCEPTED

“Mexican” Duck – *Anas platyrhynchos diazi* (3/3). Establishing the first accepted record of this “subspecies” in Colorado, a male was photographed at Walden Res., Jackson, on 20 Apr 2006 (BG †; 2006-36; 6-1). Providing the second record, a female was observed at Stollsteimer Marsh near Arboles, Archuleta, on 16 May 2006 (JBy; 2006-66; 6-1). The third, another male, was photographed at Lower Latham Res., Weld, on 15 Apr 2009 (DLA †; 2009-17; 6-1).

Taxonomic treatment of the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and related species in North America has had a difficult history. The Mexican Duck is currently recognized as a non-migratory subspecies of Mallard that is resident from southern Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona south through northern and central Mexico (AOU 1998). Historically, the breeding dis-

tribution of Mexican Ducks extended northward to north-central New Mexico in Rio Arriba, but the duck had largely disappeared as a breeding species in the U.S. by 1970 (Aldrich and Baer 1970). The Mexican Duck was listed as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1967, but was subsequently removed from that list in 1978, as populations in the U.S. had grown and were also deemed to be a hybrid swarm with Mallards (USFWS 1978).

Mallards and Mexican Ducks were formerly recognized as distinct species (*A. platyrhynchos* and *A. diazi*). Robert Ridgway (1886) described *Anas diazi* from Puebla, Mexico, noting that it differed from the Mallard by the lack of sexual dimorphism and from the Mottled Duck by its more Mallard-like characteristics, namely a distinct white band on the secondary coverts and an overall less

fulvous coloration (Johnsgard 1961). Thirty-six years later, Huber (1920) published a description of another species of dark Mallard-like duck from New Mexico that he named the New Mexican Duck (*Anas novimexicana*). Huber was unaware of the similarities between the “New Mexican” Duck and the Mexican



Alder Flycatcher, Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso County, 14 May 2006. Photo by Brian Gibbons

Duck, but contemporary ornithologists accepted and published occurrences of Huber's duck, as there was a paucity of specimens and field observations of the ducks collected from the two separate locations. As such, Conover (1922) maintained that extralimital specimens of ducks from Nebraska pertained to *A. novimexicana*, and Phillips (1924) treated the "New Mexican Duck" in his monograph. It was not until 1946 when Lindsey summarized the dilemma: "The known nesting range of the New Mexican Duck is confined to a small area of the south-western United States, but the presumptive range extends southwards into Chihuahua, Mexico, where its relation to the northern breeding limits of the Mexican Duck is undetermined" (1946). In 1957, the AOU treated *A. novimexicana* as a subspecies of *diazi*, although Hellmayr and Conover (1948), Delecour (1956), and Johnsgard (1961) considered the subspecific distinction unwarranted.

To complicate matters, Lindsey (1946) indicated that Mexican Ducks in the U.S. had shared characteristics with Mallards and noted that hybrids usually outnumbered pure Mexican Ducks wintering in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Aldrich and Baer (1970), however, maintained (via personal communication with William Huey) that the Albuquerque birds were an anomaly because the ponds the birds inhabited were associated with the Albuquerque Zoo, which had domestic Mallard-type birds. But Aldrich and Baer themselves found that specimens from

New Mexico and Chihuahua showed traces of Mallard characteristics, including varying amounts of green on the head and vermiculation on the dorsal plumage, indicating that hybridization was occurring.

At the time, the Biological Species Concept was the fundamental ethos in defining speciation. The Biological Species Concept classifies organisms as being of the same species if they are potentially capable of interbreeding and producing fertile offspring. Since then, flaws with the Biological Species Concept have been identified, namely that some widely recognized "species" actually are capable of interbreeding and producing fertile offspring—e.g., coyotes (*Canis latrans*) and wolves (*C. lupus* and *C. rufus*); various gulls; and Blue-winged (*Vermivora pinus*) and Golden-winged Warblers (*V. chrysoptera*). Many taxonomists have now turned to the use of the Phylogenetic Species Concept, which defines species as the smallest diagnosable cluster of individual organisms within which there is a parental pattern of ancestry and descent, which can be demonstrated by comparing alleles between populations.

Interestingly, despite acknowledging that hybridization was occurring, Aldrich and Baer (1970) did not totally agree with the Biological Species Concept, as they agreed with the hypothesis of Johnson (1961) that the Mexican Duck, like the American Black Duck (*A. rubripes*), had differentiated from the wide-ranging, sexually dimorphic Mallard in the past as a result of ecological or dis-

tance barriers to gene flow and different sets of selection factors. They concluded their study by claiming that the Mexican Duck has a certain amount of reproductive isolation from the Mallard in areas of sympatry and should, therefore, taxonomically be considered a distinct species.

Hubbard (1977) disagreed with Alridge and Baer (1970) when he published findings showing a wide array of phenotypic intermediates between northern Mallards and Mexican Ducks in the general region of the U.S.-Mexico border, with fewer *platyrhynchos* characteristics to the south and more to the north. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service used Hubbard's research in support of the delisting of Mexican Duck in 1978. Later, Scott and Reynolds (1984) conducted a similar study and concurred with Hubbard that Mexican Duck specimens from throughout the range showed a relatively smooth clinal change from north to south, with northern populations influenced by Mallard phenotypes. They stated that they did not know whether hybridization was increasing or decreasing, but hypothesized that introgression of the Mallard genome into *diazi* populations may have been historical, as there was a documented decline in *platyrhynchos* populations in Mexico.

The American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) had treated the Mexican Duck as a species through five editions of the AOU Checklist, but opted to reduce it to subspecies rank in the sixth edition (AOU 1983). The explanation was that "Extensive hybridization in southeastern

Arizona, southern New Mexico, and west-central Texas compels merger of the two groups, formerly recognized as distinct species" (AOU 1998). The AOU continues this treatment through the latest supplement to the seventh edition of the Checklist, based on Hubbard's (1977) analysis of hybridization

More recently, however, McCracken et al. (2001) challenged the subspecies status of the Mexican Duck using mitochondrial DNA control region sequencing that takes hybridization into account. They found that the Mexican Duck is the southwestern sister "species" of the Mottled Duck (*A. fulvigula*) and the American Black Duck (*A. rubripes*), all members of a set of original and monomorphic "mallards" that speciated in North America before dimorphic "green-head" Mallards expanded their range from Europe to North America. They are all closely related members of a recent allopatric radiation with no postzygotic barriers to gene exchange between them. However, they mate assortatively, and do not interbreed freely. McCracken et al (2001) therefore recommended that "Mexican ducks be designated as [a] species so that the nomenclature is consistent with phylogeny." Recently, the International Ornithological Congress has elevated Mexican Duck back to true species rank (Gill and Donsker 2010), although the AOU has not yet acted on the recommendation.

The troubled taxonomic past of the Mexican Duck, coupled with the difficulty of separating it from various "dark" Mallard-like hybrids, has

clouded the history of its occurrence in Colorado. Bailey and Niedrach (1965) listed three specimens from the state. The first, a female (DMNS specimen no. 20557), was collected by the authors on 29 Oct 1939 along the South Platte River near Henderson in Adams. The second, a male, was collected on 19 Nov 1944 by Bailey at the Mile High Duck Club near Barr Lake (DMNS specimen no. 24392). The third, another female, was collected at Jumbo Reservoir in Sedgwick on 4 Mar 1947 by G.I. Crawford (DMNS specimen no. 25374). These three specimens were later examined by John R. Hubbard of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, a noted expert on Mexican Ducks, who determined that the specimens were not Mexican Ducks (Andrews 1979). Other observations of possible Mexican Ducks in Colorado include a pair seen on Spring Creek in Rio Grande by Robert Ryder on 16 May 1950 and a male seen by Bailey at the Mile High Duck Club on 20 Jun 1957 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). Neither Andrews and Righter (1992) nor Righter et al. (2004) reference any Mexican Duck observations.

Red-throated Loon – *Gavia stellata* (37/14). An adult at Sweitzer Lake on 26 Oct 2008 (JBn †, AR; 2008-117; 7-0) was the first for Delta and only the fourth for the West Slope.

Brown Pelican – *Pelecanus occidentalis* (19/7). An adult at Totten Res. on 25 Apr 2009 (JB †; 2009-21; 7-0) was the first for Montezuma. This



Brown Pelican, Montezuma County, 25 April 2009. Photo by Jim Beatty

is also only the second documented record for the West Slope, the first being of one collected at Woods Lake in Eagle by P.J. Engelbrecht in July 1908. If this “pattern” of one Brown Pelican every 100 years on the West Slope continues, it does not offer much hope for today’s birders to see another in that region.

Least Bittern – *Ixobrychus exilis* (21/6). One, the first for Prowers, was heard calling from the cattails (*Typha* spp.) at Thurston Res. on 28 Jul 2008 (BKP; 2008-92; 5-2, 7-0).

Little Blue Heron – *Egretta caerulea*. A second-cycle bird in “calico” plumage was seen in a flooded field near Merino, Washington, on 29 Aug 2009 (TD; 2009-59; 5-2, 6-1). This represents the first county record.

Reddish Egret – *Egretta rufescens* (10/6). A second-cycle bird was at DeWeese SWA near Westcliffe between 17 and 18 Jul 2009 (LE †, BM †, BKP †, RM; 2009-70; 7-0), providing the first record for Custer and the westernmost ever in Colorado.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – *Nyctanassa violacea* (20/6). An adult, the fifth for Logan, was at Jumbo Res. on 30 Aug 2009 (BK, MP, BSt; 2009-60; 7-0).

Glossy Ibis – *Plegadis falcinellus* (53/36). An adult, La Plata's third, was at Pastorius Res. on 25 Apr 2006 (JBy, SA; 2006-37; 5-2, 5-2, 7-0). Another adult was along US Highway 50 between Salida and Poncha Springs, Chaffee, on 14 May 2008 (NP; 2008-59; 5-2, 6-1).

White-rumped Sandpiper – *Calidris fuscicollis*. Providing only the second West Slope accepted record, and a very early record for Colorado, one was at a pond near Paradox on 7 May

2008 (AS; 2008-54; 5-2, 7-0). This is a first county record for Montrose.

Red-headed Woodpecker – *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*. Providing a rare westerly record for modern times, an adult was photographed at Soapstone Ranch in Larimer on 25 May 2006 (CWⁱ †, RS; 2006-88; 7-0).

The range of this species has contracted eastward in Colorado. Cooke (1897) indicated that Red-headed Woodpeckers were common and that the species “Breeds on the plains and up to 10,000 feet. Rather more common on the plains than in the mountains.” Edward Warren (1910) recounted his mammalian collecting trip with Harold Durand from Colorado Springs to the San Luis Valley in 1909, remarking that Red-headed Woodpeckers were “Abundant near our camp at Glendale [eastern Fremont], June 5-6.” He went on to say that “Not another one was seen until we got to Pueblo, where Durand saw one in the City, and after we got about 15 miles north of that place they were very common, seen often among the trees along Fountain Creek.” In *El Paso*, Aiken and Warren (1914) also noted the species to be common. They maintained that “This species breeds over the lower portions of the County especially in the cottonwoods along the streams; not going into the mountains in the nesting season, but after that time may wander quite extensively...”

By 1939, the species was considered to have increased in



Reddish Egret, Custer County, 17 July 2009.
Photo by Bill Maynard

numbers in the Denver area, as Niedrach and Rockwell (1939) detailed that "This species is one of several eastern birds which gradually are extending their range westward, and it is much more common in the Denver area than it was thirty years ago." Bailey and Niedrach (1965) also noted that the distribution of the species "extends from the plains of Eastern Colorado into the foothills to possibly 8000 feet, and more rarely west of the Continental Divide." They did not provide information as to the abundance pattern of the species at the foothill edge at the time, however.

It is unclear when the species' range retracted eastward in Colorado. Andrews and Righter (1992) stated that the species was an "Uncommon to fairly common spring and fall migrant and summer resident on extreme eastern plains from Morgan and Otero counties eastward; rare west to foothills." It appears, based on published literature, that between the period of 1965 and 1992, the western edge of the plains and the foothills were excluded from the normal distribution of the Red-headed Woodpecker. In 2002, the CBRC placed Red-headed Woodpeckers on the Conditional Review List that requests details on observations of the species west of the 6,000-foot elevation contour in the state (Semo et al. 2002). Perhaps declines in the westernmost population in Colorado had already commenced prior to 1965, as Bailey and Niedrach (1965) did not comment on the abundance of the species in that area.

It is well known that European

Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) aggressively compete with Red-headed Woodpeckers for nesting cavities, and declines in woodpecker populations have been attributed to that competition (Ingold 1978, Jackson 1970). It is interesting to note that European Starlings entered Colorado during the 1930s. The first flocks were seen in Logan in 1937 and the first specimen was secured at Barr Lake in 1938 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). Urbanization and conversion of farmlands along the Front Range most likely also caused a decline in the amount of breeding habitat for the woodpecker. The CBRC encourages observers to provide details of Red-headed Woodpeckers in the foothills and areas west so that the distribution of the species can continue to be tracked.

Alder Flycatcher – *Empidonax alnorum* (28/18). One was at Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso, on 14 May 2006 (BG †; 2006-55; 5-2, 5-2, 6-1).

Vermilion Flycatcher – *Pyrocephalus rubinus* (38/23). Vermilion Flycatchers made an unparalleled push into Colorado during 2009. Setting the stage was the alternate-plumaged male discovered at the Barr Lake State Park Nature Center on 24 Mar (BSc †, DF, LS †, CWi †; 2009-12; 7-0), which was, surprisingly, the first for well-birded Adams. A female was at Crow Valley CG, Weld, on 15 Apr (RH †, CK; 2009-18; 7-0). Another female was at Sawhill Ponds in Boulder between 18 and 19 Apr (NP, WS †, BK, LS †; 2009-20; 7-0). Lastly, another male was in Florence, Fremont, on 19 Apr as well (BKP †, MP, CWi; 2009-34; 7-0).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – *Tyrannus forficatus* (34/22). Establishing the first record for *Grand*, and only the sixth west of the Front Range, an alternate-plumaged male was photographed near Granby on 6 Aug 2006 (ODB †; 2006-183; 7-0). Another male was photographed near Grover, *Weld*, on 14 May 2009 (ES †; 2009-39; 7-0) and is the fourth for the county.

Yellow-throated Vireo – *Vireo flavifrons*. Although the species is no longer on the state review list, the Committee received documentation of a summer bird that briefly held territory in Pueblo West, *Pueblo*, on 16 Jun 2009 (BKP †; 2009-51; 7-0).

Purple Martin – *Progne subis*. Providing another rare record of the species on the Eastern Plains, a female-plumaged bird was at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 21 May 2009 (BG †; 2009-42; 7-0).

Le Conte's Sparrow – *Ammodramus leconteii* (11/3). Multiple birds, perhaps as many as 10, were found in a weedy field at Fox Ranch near Idalia, *Yuma*, on 3 Oct 2009 (BM †, BPa †, TF; 2009-67; 7-0), establishing the second record for the county. This is also the first accepted record of the species in Colorado since 2002.

White-throated Sparrow – *Zonotrichia albicollis*. Furnishing a rare record for southwestern Colorado and a first for *Dolores*, one was near Cahone on 4 Mar 2006 (GD; 2006-22; 7-0).

Smith's Longspur – *Calcarius pictus* (3/3). One was found near Bonny Res., *Yuma*, on 30 Sep 2006 (AS, ABo; 2006-137; 4-3, 7-0) and is a first for the county.



Vermilion Flycatcher, Barr Lake SP, *Adams County*, 24 March 2009. Photo by Bill Schmoker

Scarlet Tanager – *Piranga olivacea* (34/15). Returning for its third consecutive year, the adult male that has established a summer territory in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, since 2007 was present again in 2009, and documented on 6 and 7 Jun (NP; 2009-49; 7-0).

Scott's Oriole – *Icterus parisorum*. Providing a rare record for the San Luis Valley and a first for *Conejos*, an immature male was near Manassa on 23 May 2009 (NP, DAL; 2009-46; 7-0).

Purple Finch – *Carpodacus purpurea* (38/10). A female was photographed at a feeder in Colorado Springs, *El Paso*, on the late date of 11 May 2008 (ABu †; 2008-56; 6-1). The winter of 2007-2008 saw an unprecedented influx of Purple Finches into Colorado, with at least 38 different birds being accepted (Semo and

Faulkner 2009a, Semo and Faulkner 2009b). It is not surprising, therefore, that at least one lingered post-winter.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

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

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

Red-shouldered Hawk – *Buteo lineatus*. Documentation of an adult in Broomfield, *Broomfield*, on 9 Oct 2008 received enough initial support to garner a second round of voting. After review of first round member comments, the Committee decided that there was not enough definitive information to accept this report as Colorado’s 18th record (2008-118; 4-3, 2-5). The observer noted a flying buteo at relatively close distance, but without optics, showing a rufous body, a short tail with two bands, and a “crested” (we assume he meant



Purple Martin, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo County, 21 May 2009. Photo by Brian Gibbons

“crescent”) in the wings, which were described as rufous only on the upperparts. Some Committee members were concerned about the lack of particular features and details that should have been seen, such as the rufous feathering on the underwings and a more precise description of which upperwing feathers were rufous. Although this call for detail may seem overly picky, several Committee members had difficulty definitively ruling out the more likely Broad-winged Hawk (*B. platycercus*) based on the few details provided in the written description.

Gyr Falcon – *Falco rusticolus*. An adult briefly observed near Antero Reservoir, *Park*, on 10 Nov 2008 received considerable Committee support during the first round of voting, but during the second round several members wavered in their certainty that Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*) or hybrids were sufficiently ruled out (2008-133 †; 5-2, 2-5). Of most concern to a majority of members were the brief 30-second view and the level of detail discernable on a bird flying away from the observer during much of the observation period. Photographs showed what was likely a large falcon but they were inconclusive in the opinion of a majority of Committee members to positively identify it as a Gyr Falcon.

King Rail – *Rallus elegans*. The heard-only bird at the Green Heron Slough near Las Animas, *Bent*, on 28 and 29 Apr 2007 needed two rounds of voting before the Committee reached a decision (2007-27; 5-2, 2-5). Heard-only birds are very

difficult for the Committee to accept, although it does happen. Members must not only be able to reasonably accept the description of the song or call as pertaining to the reported species, but they must also consider how much that description was influenced by field guides (text or audio) after the fact. The favorable initial support for this documentation came from the observer's comments on how the series of single “kek” notes heard from this bird differed from those given by Virginia Rails (*R. limicola*), which are often doubled in succession as “kikik”. The observer, however, ruled out Clapper Rail (*R. longirostris*) by range only, as both it and King Rail sound very similar. While primarily a denizen of coastal saltmarshes, Clapper Rail has occurred inland and many Committee members felt that without a recording or other additional information, Clapper Rail must be considered as a possibility.

Iceland Gull – *Larus glaucoideus*. Documentation of an adult in basic plumage roosting on Lake Loveland, *Larimer*, on 7 Dec 2008 required three rounds of voting and outside expert opinion (2008-138 †; 5-2, 5-2, 1-6). The outside expert considered this bird a “tweener,” which is one that exhibits plumage features muddled between the “classic” examples of Iceland Gull and Thayer's Gull (*L. thayeri*). In this case, the photos showed a bird with a slightly darker mantle than neighboring Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*), intermediate gray wingtips, and brownish-yellow irides. This combination, as noted by the outside expert, was enough to

warrant caution in placing an unconditional species name on this individual. A majority of Committee members demurred to the expert's opinion during the third round of voting.

Black-headed Gull – *Larus ridibundus*. An adult in alternate plumage was described from Blue Mesa Reservoir, Gunnison, on 5 Apr 2009 (2009-15 †; 3-4). Per the CBRC By-laws, the first round of voting is cast without discussion between members, so it is particularly interesting that three of the four dissenting members mentioned the bird's white scapular crescent as one reason for not accepting this as a state record. All four members were also concerned about the large white eye arcs. Neither of the above two plumage features is shown by Black-headed Gull, but both are displayed by Franklin's Gull (*L. pipixcan*). However, in their written comments, the four members also were intrigued by the bird's partial dark hood and red bill, both favorable for Black-headed Gull. The photos were not definitive for Black-headed Gull, but neither were they definitive for Franklin's Gull. The Committee is not required to provide an alternate identification for any bird it does not accept as the reported species, and it chooses not to do so with this intriguing hooded gull.

Laughing Gull – *Larus atricilla*. The description of a young gull reported as a first-winter Laughing Gull at Sterling Reservoir, Logan, on 29 Aug 2009 was too brief for many Committee members (2009-58; 5-2, 1-6). Although it was observed flying with two Franklin's Gulls, the report

did not include pertinent information such as a size comparison of the side-by-side birds. Dissenting members also noted during first round voting that, in August, juveniles of other species like Franklin's, Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*), and California (*L. californicus*) gulls are also brown. No mention of how the latter two species were ruled out was given in the documentation. This fact apparently swayed many members during second round voting.

Winter Wren – *Troglodytes troglodytes*. As noted above in the discussion of the King Rail documentation, this heard-only bird had a couple members questioning how to conclude species identification from a written song description. In the case of Winter Wren, whose song is often lengthy, complex, and unlike any other North American species, identification should prove to be a bit simpler. It did not with the documentation of a heard-only individual near Mosca, Alamosa, on 13 Jun 2005 (2005-67; 5-2, 5-2, 0-7). The aurally astute observer provided a thorough and clearly written description of the song that satisfied a majority of Committee members to accept it as a Winter Wren, as indicated by the 5-2 votes in the first two rounds. However, the observer, while remaining convinced of the identification, nonetheless requested that the documentation be pulled from review over concerns that the juvenile subsong of other species had not been sufficiently ruled out, and all of the Committee members obliged during the third round of voting.

Thick-billed Kingbird – *Tyrannus crassirostris*. An out-of-state birder documented a bird thought to be a juvenile Thick-billed Kingbird at a Fort Collins, *Larimer*, nature preserve on 5 Sep 2007 (2007-62; 1-6). The description of a brown back, a white breast, and a bill more diminutive than a shrike's did not match that of the reported species in the opinion of most Committee members. Juvenile Thick-billed Kingbirds have gray upperparts, a pale yellow belly (which should have been noticed given the 5 minutes of observation), and a massive bill characteristic of the species. The bird's flycatching behavior and wing feathers "outlined in a lighter rust or buffy color" were intriguing. It was unclear what species the bird may have been, as the most likely candidate, Eastern Kingbird (*T. tyrannus*), does not show rusty coloration on the wings in any plumage.

Blue-headed Vireo – *Vireo solitarius*. Because of the similarity between dull Blue-headed Vireos and bright Cassin's Vireos (*V. cassinii*), all reports of this species without some form of physical documentation have been held to high standards. Such is the case for one reported in Boulder, *Boulder*, on 28 Sep 2005 (2005-101; 2-5). The written report describes a vireo with dark blue-gray head, contrasting white spectacles and throat, green back contrasting with head, and strongly yellow flanks, clearly placing it in the Solitary Vireo complex; however, several Committee members commented that they would like to have seen more discussion on how this bird differed from Cassin's

Vireo—in particular, the degree of contrast between the auriculars and throat. Even so, such a comparison is subjective and experts occasionally disagree on species identification of photographed Solitary Vireos. As noted for the Iceland Gull report in this section, some individuals may not be conclusively identified.

Sprague's Pipit – *Anthus spragueii*. The August date for a pair of Sprague's Pipits near Ellicott, *El Paso*, was a chief concern for several Committee members, as noted in comments in their dissenting votes (2005-158; 2-5). Several members also wrote that the seasonally and geographically more likely juvenile Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), which can easily be mistaken for Sprague's Pipit, was not sufficiently ruled out in the written description.

Bohemian Waxwing – *Bombycilla garrulus*. The Committee did not support the documentation of a waxwing at Bear Creek Park, *Jefferson*, on 12 Sep 2009, thought to be this species (2009-63, 1-6). Due to the bird's being partially obscured by vegetation, only its head, described as having "some rufous color, with a sleek crest" and a black mask, was seen by the reporting observer. Early September would be exceptionally early for a Bohemian Waxwing in Colorado. According to the e-Bird website (www.ebird.org), the earliest occurrences of Bohemian Waxwing in Colorado are from mid-October. A majority of Committee members noted that to accept such an unseasonably early report they would need a description of the wing pattern and vent color.

Blackburnian Warbler – *Dendroica fusca*. The only description provided in the documentation of a possible Blackburnian Warbler coming to a Fort Collins, Larimer, feeder on 4 May 2005 (2005-159, 1-6) was that the bird had an “iridescent, carrot-orange throat and bib”. Without noting other plumage features, let alone size of the bird in general or in comparison with other birds at the feeder, the throat-bib coloration could be used to describe other possible species like House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) or Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*). The Committee must rely only on what is provided in the documentation, and reporting observers are urged to consider this when writing their bird descriptions. However simplistic or unnecessary it may seem to include information about the “general size and shape” of a bird, these are the building blocks that Committee members use to form a mental picture of the bird being described. Without

them, descriptions of only a few features, however awe-striking, leave too much to the imagination.

Henslow’s Sparrow – *Ammodramus henslowii*. The Committee received documentation from three observers of a Henslow’s Sparrow at Hopper Ponds SWA near Idalia, Yuma, for 3-4 Oct 2008 (2008-112; 5-2, 3-4). Although they were initially supportive of the combined documentation, during second round voting two members decided that the brief observation time (30 seconds total for the two days), the misidentification of a Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) in flight as the reported species by one of the original finders during a second-day chase by several birders, and the level of detail provided in the documentation for this briefly observed bird, provided enough cause for concern to derail what would be Colorado’s third record of the species and the first in 20 years.

REPORTERS AND CITED OBSERVERS

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THE HUNGRY BIRD

The Army Cutworm, or Miller Moth

Dave Leatherman

[Editor's note: *This is the first installment of a regular column in Colorado Birds that will focus on a particular food item of our state's avifauna. Knowing what birds eat can help birders find birds as well as understand and predict their behavior.*

We hope readers will find such information useful to their particular style and purpose for birding, not to mention interesting. Comments and suggestions for future essays are welcome.]

They spot-stain drapes, drive cats crazy, and cause swallows to play chicken with SUVs at intersections. They have a remarkable ability to enter places we do not want them, yet seem incapable of getting out. Once, they so badly infested Fort Carson that the Commanding Officer's wife, convinced that they came from the towering white firs beside her house, lobbied a high-ranking military panel to fell the trees. When I was called in to consult, the panel asked me in



Army Cutworm Moth. Photo by David Leatherman

exasperation, “What good are they!?”

“They” go by the common name of “miller moths.” Entomology textbooks dub them Army Cutworm Moths or *Euxoa auxiliaris*. While the term “miller” can be applied to any number of nondescript brown moths, in Colorado the overwhelming majority of millers observed are adult Army Cutworms.

The Army Cutworm’s life cycle is remarkable. Its seasonal migrations from the plains to the high country, combined with its periodic superabundance, make it conspicuous and important to humans, birds, other animals, and its host plants.

Female Army Cutworm moths lay eggs at low elevation from late summer through fall on a large number of plants, including crops like winter wheat, alfalfa, and turfgrass. The small larvae begin feeding in fall and continue throughout the winter, as temperatures allow. In spring, if their numbers are high, they may cause economically significant crop damage and become the target of spraying. Full-grown larvae burrow in loose soil, pupate, and emerge as millers about a month later. Upon emerging as fresh adult moths, they begin a deliberate migration of several weeks’ duration to higher elevations. The goal of these movements is life-sustaining flower nectar and cooler temperatures.

During spring movements, millers can be a considerable nuisance to humans, particularly in years of abundance. They rest during the day in dark places, including homes, vehicles, mailboxes, shrubs, and tree cavities. Russian-olive and many types of shrub and non-woody plant blooms are important as nectar sources during their spring migrations.

Bird predation occurs during the larval and adult stages of the Army Cutworm. European starlings, meadowlarks, and many blackbird species exert control on cutworms during spring, especially when huge populations achieve “armyworm” status and move across the ground

in masses seeking vegetation to eat. But it is the spring migration of miller moths from the plains to mountain meadows, primarily in May and June, which becomes an



Army Cutworm Moth. Photo by David Leatherman

insectivorous bird phenomenon. This is the answer to the question, "What good are they!?"

The same types and arrangements of vegetation attractive to migrating birds attract millers also. The number of bird species that opportunistically, occasionally feed on millers is large and includes flycatchers, swallows, vireos, wrens, starlings, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, sparrows, blackbirds, and finches. They seek millers by variations on the theme of flycatching, and by gleaning bark crevices of large shade trees, car grills, and the crowns of flowering plants – in short, in every way they can, everywhere the moths are accessible.

Millers are high in fat content and, thus, a good food source. Even grizzly bears, in places like Yellowstone National Park, seek them out and gorge. Compared to spring and early summer, summer and autumn populations are less concentrated, less available, and less important to birds.

For more information about millers, including their management, see



Army Cutworm larva. Photo by Whitney Cranshaw

Colorado State University Extension Insect Fact Sheet 5.597, "Miller Moths," by Whitney Cranshaw.

I would like to hear from birders about bird species they have seen eating millers and details of particularly noteworthy episodes. When appropriate, I plan to share correspondence from readers relevant to each installment of this column at the onset of the next.

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THE HUNGRY BIRDER

Fort Collins

Eric DeFonso

This May, dozens of energized birders will descend into Fort Collins for the 2010 CFO Convention. Living up to its moniker as "Choice City," Fort Collins is certainly blessed with many fine eateries, and birders can find virtually any cuisine in any price range to sate their hunger. Because of this embarrassment of riches, I'll focus on the more locally distinct places I'm familiar with, or that I think will appeal to the visiting birder.

The convention will be held at the Hilton, renovated just a couple years ago and located on Prospect Road just west of College Avenue (also known as US 287). In Fort Collins, College is the main north-south thoroughfare, and north of Prospect it heads alongside the Colorado State University campus for a mile and then up through Old Town, the cultural and traditional center of Fort Collins. Most of the restaurants mentioned here will be in this general part of town, but that's not to say there aren't also plenty of other options south of Prospect. Indeed, the more recent sprawl (i.e. "South Fort Collins") also offers quality chains and local restaurants, some of which are second locations for those mentioned in this article. It also offers the usual fast food options, if you really want to clog your arteries.

With that in mind, I'll offer a few of my suggestions on how to expand your culinary experience in Fort Collins. To make it easier to locate the kinds of dining you're craving, I'll break the scene down by style of cuisine.

Mexican

Some very good Mexican food can be had in town, but the atmosphere can be quite different depending on where you go. I'm personally partial to the reasonably priced



Pueblo Viejo, Fort Collins. Photo by Eric DeFonso

Pueblo Viejo in Old Town (185 N. College). It all starts with the great tortilla chips, and they offer the traditional fare along with some nicely prepared seafood selections like camarongos (large shrimp). The larger and louder place in Old Town is the **Rio Grande** (143 W. Mountain), often just referred to as The Rio. It has great margaritas and dinners, but after a day of straining to hear Grasshopper Sparrows and warbler chip notes, you may find the indoor acoustics and the vocal clientele a bit too jarring, so try to sit outside if you can. A third dining option nearby is **Los Tarrascos** (622 S. College). If you're hankering for a mid-day burrito or something else quick and cheap, you can try the **Taqueria Los Comales** (111 W. Prospect) just east of the Hilton. Other cheap, low-key, nearby Mexican options include chain places like **Chipotle** (649 S. College) or **Qdoba** (1104 W. Elizabeth).

Asian

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Mongolian, and Thai restaurants are all well-represented in town. In Old Town **Lulu's Asian Bistro** (117 S. College) provides a generalized Asian cuisine, with menu offerings in virtually all the aforementioned styles at fair prices. **HuHot** (249 S. College) serves tasty Mongolian-grill style lunches and dinners; you should prepare to be creative since part of the fun of eating there is assembling your own concoction of stir-fried meats and vegetables, which the grill chefs then cook up for you in the round, as if you were dining in a Mongolian yurt.

For Japanese, the hands-down favorite would have to be **Suehiro** (223 Linden). It's a truly excellent dining experience, although you may have to wait for seating, especially on weekends. Just across the



Young's Cafe, Fort Collins. Photo by Eric DeFonso

street from the Hilton is **Suh** (200 W. Prospect), a sit-down restaurant now specializing in sushi but with a more casual atmosphere and relatively low prices. Like Lulu's Bistro it has

a fusion style, but perhaps with a bit more emphasis on the Japanese.

Bann Thai (626 S. College) and **Thai Pepper** (109 E. Laurel) are located close to each other near the aforementioned Los Tarrascos. Both are fine choices for Thai food, with perhaps a slight nod going to **Thai Pepper** for its lively flavors. It tends to be more crowded, though, and sometimes service there can be quite slow, so be warned. A third option, and one I know well since I live close to it, is **Sri Thai** (950 S. Taft Hill) a couple miles west of the Hilton and a half-mile north of Prospect. Good service, a great food and wine selection, and a warm atmosphere make this a viable option if you get that Thai food craving.

I don't eat Chinese very often, but when I do, I go to **Jasmine Garden** (2721 S. College Ste. 4B), a quiet and elegant place about a mile south of the Hilton in the Thunderbird Plaza shopping center. Lately I've been on a Vietnamese "kick," and I get my fix at a place called **Young's Cafe** (3307 S. College) a bit further south, which has great peanut-sauce dishes and clay-pot entrees. A lower-key option for Vietnamese is **PhoDuy** (902 W. Drake), which seems to specialize in noodle and rice bowls.

Indian

The vote for best place in town goes to **Taj Mahal** (148 W. Oak). That's not just my vote either—weekly papers have awarded it many times over the years as well. Although it may look empty when you drop by in the early evening, don't be daunted—the food is excellent (I'm a sucker for the Saag Paneer). The prices are quite reasonable, and I have never left unsatisfied with any of the menu selections.

Italian

Mamma mia—Fort Collins has quite a selection of Italian places. In Old Town the main contenders are **Bisetti's** (120 S. College), **Enzio's** (126 W. Mountain), and **Canino's** (613 S. College), and you frankly can't go wrong with any of them, although they are a touch on the dressier end, with prices to match. If you are craving Italian but don't want to pay much or change out of your grungy birding attire, **Panino's** (310 W. Prospect) should suit you well, and it is conveniently right across the street from the Hilton. Yes, Fort Collins is home to both "Canino's" and "Panino's."

If you find yourself on the south side of Fort Collins near Harmony and Lemay, you can try **Dominic's** (931 E. Harmony), which is also a nice place. I had the open ravioli there recently and was very impressed.

Pub/Grill/Steak

Fort Collins just wouldn't be what it is without this category. Pub food is a staple here, and when I have out-of-town guests, the first place we eat out is usually one of these. It seems especially fitting since Fort Collins is also the headquarters for several great breweries like New Belgium, Odell, and the aptly-named Fort Collins Brewery—and, of course, **CooperSmith's** (5 Old Town Square), a popular pub/grill with very good selections of brews and sandwiches. **Austin American Grill** (100 W. Mountain) on the corner of Mountain and College is a more upscale version of the same. **Stonehouse Grill** (125 S. College) also has a devoted following although I have never been there myself.

Similarly, the main steak places in town are places I don't go, but if you're so inclined you may want to try the **Sonny Lubick Steakhouse** (115 S. College), which is named after the famous CSU football coach, or the **Canyon Chop House**



Taj Mahal, Fort Collins. Photo by Eric DeFonso



Cozzola's Pizza, Fort Collins. Photo by Eric DeFonso

(211 Canyon) near Meldrum and Oak, just west of Old Town.

Speaking of brews, although they don't serve food (unless you count beer as liquid bread), a visit to Fort

Collins isn't complete until you take the quirky **New Belgium Brewery** tour (500 Linden). No beer aficionado should miss it, and it is also of interest to non-beer drinkers who will appreciate the remarkable level of social and environmental consciousness this microbrewery exhibits, all while making a great selection of beers.

Pizza

My preferred pizza places are few but all very good, and very different from each other. They're also all in Old Town. If I'm craving Mediterranean-style thin-crust pizza, I go to **Rustic Oven** (123 N. College). They also serve traditional Italian-type entrees with an American flavor. For a more traditional-style pizza including plenty of make-your-own options, go to **Cozzola's** (241 Linden). If you and your birding friends are super-hungry, then a **BeauJo's** (100 N. College) mountain pie may be in order. BeauJo's isn't unique to Fort Collins, but it is a Colorado fixture, with generally thick crusts and ample toppings.

Breakfast

Granted, breakfast places may not fit well into our morning-intensive convention birding schedules, but if you find yourself wanting a more leisurely morning, or if you finish up early and want to snag a brunch, these places are definitely ones to keep in mind. The most distinctive breakfast place in town is perhaps **Lucile's** (400 S. Meldrum), which also has restaurants in Denver and Boulder. They serve zesty Cajun-style fare in a cozy but eye-catching decor. You might also try **Dempsey's** (160 W. Oak) for a more typical breakfast menu and more generic atmosphere. My personal favorite there are the lus-

cious banana-blueberry pancakes. A quarter-mile west of College is **Cafe Bluebird** (524 W. Laurel), another great breakfast possibility. Old Town also offers the **Silver Grill** (218 Walnut), which opens at 6:30 A.M..

If you are looking for very early starts or want breakfast at night, you'll have to go to the chains. The **IHOP** (1002 S. College) is open 24 hours, as is the Denny's near I-25 and CO 14, or you could try **Perkins** (310 S. College) which opens at 5:30 A.M.. Good luck with the quality, as I have never had occasion to eat at any of these.

Quick Stops

It's more of a restaurant/convenience store, but if you'll be heading out west of Fort Collins to points beyond like Stove Prairie or Cameron Pass, you should know about **Vern's**. Strategically located in west Laporte on County Road 54G, it's right near the turnoff for Rist Canyon Road, on the way up to Western Bluebirds, Ovenbirds, Lazuli Buntings, or Flammulated Owls in the evening. It's also on the way to Poudre Canyon and Cameron Pass. You can expect plenty of snack fare, but you can also sit down for breakfast or lunch if you like. Not far from here is **Ted's Place** at the turnoff for Cameron Pass, where CO 14 splits off from US 287. This is really just a convenience store, but it's good to know it's there. It's open late, but not 24 hours, so keep that in mind.

Sweets

If your sweet tooth is nagging at you, there are a few distinctive local options to consider before dumping your change into the hotel vending machines. Head back to Old Town and drop by **Kilwin's** (114 S. College) for a wide array of delectable chocolate treats. If you're thinking

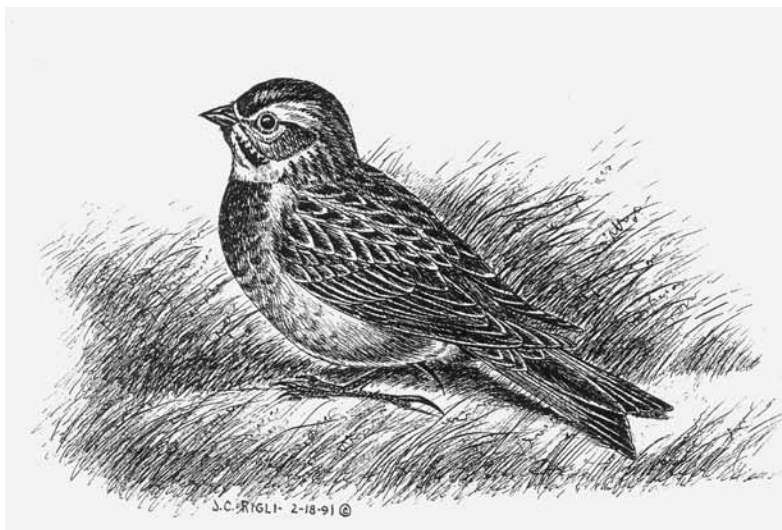


Mary's Mountain Cookies and Rustic Oven, Fort Collins.
Photo by Eric DeFonso

more along the lines of cookies and ice cream, **Mary's Mountain Cookies** (123 N. College) probably has just the thing for you. In recent years the shop used to close ridiculously early in the day, but nowadays they are open much later into the evening, making it a fun place to stop by after dining out elsewhere in Old Town. If it's just plain ice cream treats, either **Walrus Ice Cream** (125 W. Mountain) or **Rocky Mountain Blue Bell** (172 N. College) should do the trick.

There are some things about your visit to Fort Collins for the CFO convention that I can't guarantee, like stumping the chumps with your photo of some headless beastie, or seeing that mythical Swainson's Warbler or last year's Least Bittern. What I can guarantee is that you can find something really good to eat somewhere here in "Choice City."

Eric DeFonso, bay.wren@gmail.com



McCown's Longspur, by Joe Rigli

Fall 2009 (August–November)

Bill Maynard

The fall season can be a birder's dream: a mixture of hot and cold temperatures, an extended and usually relaxed migration compared to the frenetic pace of spring, allowing ample time and multiple opportunities to search for migrants. Need an excuse to keep the leaf rake in the garage? Go birding instead!

Even though the official start of fall migration is the first day of August, for shorebirds it starts as early as late June. Colorado's irrigation-water storage reservoirs are required birding destinations during this season. (If you disagree, look at the repeated use of the abbreviation "Res." in this summary.) This fall, however, mudflats were few and far between and finding flocks of shorebirds was difficult—that is, unless you were a frequent visitor to *Weld's* Timnath Reservoir. Abundant moisture from the summer season kept irrigation reservoirs at maximum water levels, signaling shorebirds to pass overhead on their continuing southbound journey. At least one exception is the possible death of Ramah Reservoir in *El Paso*; most runoff now appears to become captured before it reaches this SWA reservoir.

This season was part of the 2009-2010 El Niño Southern Oscillation. Extrapolated data from 1895-1997 predicted Colorado would have normal temperatures, except in the northeast portions of the state, where it predicted temperatures would be somewhat warmer than the mean for this time period. Precipitation was predicted to be "somewhat wet" in the western third of the state and the southeast, while for the south-central and northeast regions, predictions were for the area to be "wet." Only the north-central region was predicted to have normal rainfall (NWSCPC).

On the whole, though, weather patterns throughout the state were unremarkable and far from noteworthy: no early blizzards, no exceptionally powerful fronts, no gripping cold snaps. It was pleasant, perhaps way too pleasant from a birder's perspective.

In most parts of Colorado, this fall's migration period could be described as lackluster. The mountain parks did not produce the usual species richness or the usual large numbers of waterfowl. Gobs of warblers did not drip from the trees, although Dave Leatherman taught us the value of searching hackberry trees in October and November. Unlike the prior fall, Gulf hurricanes did not swirl any pelagic species into our state in 2009. Rather, occasional cold fronts brought expected species trickling in from the north and east. For some species,

including waterfowl, raptors, and some owls, migration did not begin until the fall season was completed.

Few reports described true rarities. The rarest report was of Western Gull, a species recorded twice from the same reservoir in Fort Collins, a first cycle bird first, followed six days later by an adult. Western Gull is not on the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Checklist of Birds and without documentation neither sighting will become more than a post to COBirds with a casual mention here.

Extremely rare anywhere inland, two Arctic Loons were reported during the period, both documented and currently being carefully scrutinized by the Colorado Records Committee members. The big loon, Yellow-billed, was reported from two locations. Very rare in the state, a Red-shouldered Hawk was reported for a five-day period from the southeast. Inca Dove reports came from a new location and an undocumented report of a Blue-throated Hummingbird from a private residence in Penrose was of interest. A documented and photographed bird fitting the description of a Cave Swallow will again be carefully reviewed, and perhaps this one will at long last be accepted as the latest addition to the state list. Winter Wrens of two different subspecies (soon to be species) were heard, seen, and recorded. Returning for the fourth consecutive year, Cañon City's Golden-crowned Sparrow was right on schedule. A few Purple Finches were detected on Colorado's Eastern Plains, but where were the warblers?

"News from the Field" contains news, reports, and rumors of bird sighting from Colorado. The news is compiled from online discussion groups and rare bird alerts (RBAs), with valuable contributions from a large network of statewide informants. *Rarity reports* may become *records* after vetting and scrutiny by the Colorado Bird Records Committee.

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

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

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

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

Greater White-fronted Goose: The first of the season was one adult on 5 Oct at Navajo Res., *Archuleta* (JiB), where it is uncommon. The annual small wintering flock in the Cañon City area, *Fremont*, was first reported on 10 Oct (MM, RMi).

Trumpeter Swan: The only report of the period was of three birds at Cerise Ranch Pond near Carbondale, *Garfield*, 6-13 Oct (TM). The birds appear to be part of a group of four that escaped three years ago from their owner, Adelle Crawford of El Jebel, and have been roaming around the Roaring Fork Valley ever since (T. McConnell, pers. comm.)

Tundra Swan: Four reports of 12 birds was a low total; the first report on 29 Oct was of five adults at Rio Blanco Res., *Rio Blanco* (FL, DH). Likely part of the same flight were the three birds

on the same date from Perch Pond, *Moffat* (FL).

Wood Duck: On the West Slope, four Woodies were reported on 1 Aug at Loudy-Simpson Park, *Craig*, and young birds were observed there on 15 Aug (FL). In the Carbondale area, *Garfield*, two birds were seen on 28 Nov (TM).

Mottled Duck hybrid: KS and JM photographed a bird thought to be of this hybrid combination on the Arkansas River below Pueblo, *Pueblo*, on 21 Nov. Birders are cautioned to carefully scrutinize all dark female "Mallards."

Blue-winged Teal: Quite late were two birds on 15 Nov at Plaster Res., *Broomfield* (TS).

Greater Scaup: Only four reports were submitted, representing five individuals. This species most likely con-

tinues to be underreported. The first of the season was a single on 20 Nov from Lake DeWeese, *Custer* (SeM).

Surf Scoter: A pitiful number of reports, five, representing only ten birds, suggests a very unspectacular migration for this species, especially through the mountain park reservoirs. The first report of the season was of a single female on 14 Oct from Grand Junction, *Mesa* (BB, m.ob.).

White-winged Scoter: The eight reports of 16 individuals were slightly below the 10-year average for this species. However, seven birds at Timnath Res., *Larimer*, on 31 Oct were a good find (CW).

Black Scoter: This is the least common Colorado scoter species, and this fall saw only three reports of three birds. The first of the season was a single immature from Fossil Creek Res., *Larimer*, on 13 Oct (CW).

Long-tailed Duck: Five reports, all of singles, came from scattered locations including *Boulder*, *Larimer*, *Morgan*, and *Weld*. The first was an immature/female on 16 Nov at Lagerman Res. *Boulder* (BSc).

Barrow's Goldeneye: Of the fifteen reports representing 140 individuals, Craig Station Inlet Pond, *Moffat*, produced the high number with 45 birds detected on 30 Nov. Another respectable total of 29 birds was recorded on 14 Nov, the earliest report date, from Stagecoach Res., *Routt* (CDo, TD). Also on the 14th, a single male was at Franktown's Walker Pit, *Douglas* (GW); the site first attracted attention by producing Colorado's first Arctic Loon in Nov 2002.

Red-breasted Merganser: The spe-

cies is rare in the northeastern part of the state, but LS found a single at Jumbo Reservoir on 10 Oct.

Red-throated Loon: The five reports of five birds were about average. The earliest report was of a bird at Marston Res., *Denver*, on 7 Sep, a bird still present from the summer period (TS, no doc.). At Union Reservoir, *Weld*, a juvenile was spotted 30 Oct through 1 Nov (NP, BGu, m.ob., doc.). Lake DeWeese near Westcliffe hosted one bird on 1 Nov (LE, no doc.); if documented, it might become the first county record for *Custer*. Another single was seen at Pueblo Res., 7-14 Nov (VT, BKP, m.ob., doc.). Finally, birders watching the impressive show of the long-staying Parasitic Jaeger at Chatfield Res., *Douglas/Jefferson*, found an immature Red-throated Loon that was seen 14-18 Nov (JD, m.ob., no doc.).

Arctic Loon: This species is extremely rare at all Lower 48 inland locations; nonetheless, not one, but two individuals were reported with documentation. Hopefully, both reports include information that separate Arctic Loon from Common Loon, which can also show the white crescent flank patch. An adult in basic plumage was reported from Union Res., *Weld*, on 25 Oct (WS, doc.). Another bird was described from Marston Res., *Denver*, from 31 Oct through 19 Nov (DK, TJ, m.ob., doc.). On some days, observers there reported only Common Loons present.

Pacific Loon: Nine reports, all of single birds, came from scattered locations in *Arapahoe*, *Denver*, *Jefferson*, *Pueblo*, *Larimer*, *Douglas*, *Sedgwick*,

Logan, and *Washington*. The first was a bird seen 11 Oct through 18 Nov at Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe* (BB).

Yellow-billed Loon: Two juveniles were reported, one 7-8 Nov at Standley Lake, *Jefferson*, (CW, NK, no doc.). The other was seen on one day only at Jumbo Reservoir, *Sedgwick/Logan*, on 20 Nov (CW, LS, m.ob., doc.).

Red-necked Grebe: A bleak total of only two birds was reported this season, one an adult from Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, 18 Oct through 6 Nov (CLW). The other was a cooperative bird at Union Reservoir, *Weld*, 25 Oct through 2 Nov (TD, m.ob.).

Neotropic Cormorant: Three birds comprised a high count for the season. The first showed up at Timnath Res., *Larimer/Weld*, on 14 August (NK, doc.). Another bird, described as having darker orange skin and a paler throat, was at College Lake on the CSU campus, *Larimer*, on 1 Oct (NK, no doc.). A young bird was at Big Johnson Res., *El Paso*, on 22 Oct (JDr, MP, BM, BS, doc.) for what may be a first county record.

Least Bittern: An adult male, a female, and one juvenile, likely the same family group from the summer season, were still at Cottonwood Hollow, Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 2-3 Aug (CW, NK, doc.).

Little Blue Heron: On 29 and 30 Aug a calico-plumaged Little Blue was seen near Prewitt Res., *Washington* (JK, m.ob., doc.).

Cattle Egret: From the April 2009 "News from the Field" we learned that Cattle Egrets in Colorado are declining. The four reports this season support that hypothesis. However, over 100 birds at Red Lion SWA, *Logan*,

furnished a large total, perhaps the highest number at one location in the state (BK). In *Ourray*, the first ever sighting of this species delighted the finders on 7 Oct (BW, CD). On 24 Oct two more were spotted east of Ridgway, *Montrose*, by the same observers. One was at Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, on 24 Oct (MCB, KN), while a single visited Totten Res., *Montezuma* (DBC).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron: Jumbo Res., *Logan*, hosted an adult 23-30 Aug (MP, BK, m.ob., doc.) while the other Aug sighting was of a single south of Alamosa, *Alamosa*, on Aug 7 (NK, no doc.). Three juveniles were reported on 2 Sep from near Crook, *Logan* (ED, doc.), while on 4 Sep, another juvenile was at Timnath Res., *Larimer* (CW, NK, no doc.).

Swallow-tailed Kite: A bird described as this very rare Colorado species was reported at a very late date for this migratory kite, 17 Oct, from Boulder, *Boulder* (CL, doc.).

Common Black-Hawk: Extremely rare on the WS with only four previous records there, this species was reported from the Uncompahgre Plateau, *Montrose*, on 9 Oct (AC, no doc.).

Red-shouldered Hawk: This very rare Colorado raptor, an immature bird, was reported from the LCCW, *Prowers*, from 17-22 Oct (DLe, no doc.).

Broad-winged Hawk: This species put in a good showing this fall, with eight reports representing nine individuals. Of note was the early one on 30 Aug at the South Fork of Carnero Creek, *Saguache*, providing that county its first record (JBe).



Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe County, 29 August 2009. Photo by Kirk Huffstater

Harlan's (Red-tailed) Hawk: The individual featured on the cover of the January issue of this journal returned to Hygiene, *Boulder*, for its third consecutive winter on 8 Nov (CN). This light-morph Harlan's Hawk was photographed by in April in Alaska (Schmoker & Liguori 2010).

Rough-legged Hawk: The first report of the season came from near Antero Reservoir, *Park*, at about the mean arrival date of 23 Oct (LS).

Yellow Rail: Although an out-of-state visitor reported this very rare species near Blue Mesa Res., *Gunnison*, on 29 Sep, most local birders believe this was a juvenile Sora (no name, no doc).

Sandhill Crane: A huge showing of 3,200 birds was reported from the northwest portion of *Elbert* on 8 Oct

(DT) and from near Elizabeth, *Elbert*, the next day (BD).

Black-bellied Plover: The last birds of the season were reported on 24 Oct from Barr Lake, *Adams* (IS), with a flock of 12 individuals, while the high count was of 30 birds at Timnath Res.,

Larimer, on 16 Oct (CW). The annual Chatfield SP "Big Sit" tallied one on 11 Oct, the bird making it into both *Douglas* and *Jefferson* (JK, m.ob.).

American Golden-Plover: Timnath Res., this fall's bird magnet, attracted six on 11 Oct, and at least one remained until the 16th (CW). The only other report of this species during the period came from Lagerman Res., *Boulder*, on 15 Oct (MB, TD).

Snowy Plover: Farther north than expected, the only one reported from the season was at Jumbo Reservoir, *Logan*, on 30 Aug (BK, m.ob.).

Black-necked Stilt: Of note was one that visited Grand Junction, *Mesa*, 20-31 Oct; the species is a casual visitor to the WS in fall.

Upland Sandpiper: Vocalizing nocturnal migrants were detected on

20 Aug in Greenlee Preserve and on 24 Aug in Pratt Park, *Boulder* (TF, TD), while the species was seen in the vicinity of the Stulp Farm, *Prowers*, on 2 Aug (JS).

Long-billed Curlew: Though the species is casual after mid-May in *Ouray*, three juveniles were photographed at Ridgway Res. on 28 Aug (CD, BW).

Hudsonian Godwit: A juvenile spent 9 days at Timnath Res., *Larimer*, 24 Sep through 2 Oct (NK, no doc.).

Red Knot: Keeping Timnath Res., *Larimer*, on the map, a molting adult was seen 4-8 Sep (NK, no doc.).

Sanderling: Very uncommon on the WS was a single at Totten Res., *Montezuma*, on 23 Sep (MDH).

Western Sandpiper: One was at CR 600 Pond, *Archuleta*, on 3 Sep, in a county where this species is uncommon in the fall (JiB).

Pectoral Sandpiper: Uncommon on the WS were three birds that visited Narraguinnep Res., *Montezuma*, on 8 Sep (CDo, BW); one at Navajo Res., *Archuleta*, on 10 Oct, which might be a new county record (HM, JiB); and two juveniles at Stagecoach Res., *Routt* (CD, TLi), 1-3 Nov.

Dunlin: Two first county records for this species included a bird at Rio Blanco Res., *Rio Blanco*, on 29 Oct (DH, photo, FL) and two birds at CMS Pond in Craig, *Moffat*, 31 Oct through 4 Nov (FL). The only other seasonal report came from Timnath Res., *Larimer*, 11-16 Nov (CW), furthering the reputation of Timnath as a migrant trap and Dunlin as a late migrant.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: The three reports are about average for the fall season. One at Cherry Creek SP Wetlands, *Arapahoe*, was seen by many from 29 Aug through 2 Sep, becoming a life bird for at least a few (GLA, m.ob., doc.). One was reported from Jumbo Res., *Logan*, on 7 Sep (CW, JK, m.ob., no doc.) and another bird was there on 20 Sep (BSc, m.ob., doc.).

Short-billed Dowitcher: A dismal four reports for this species were submitted, the earliest on 29 Aug from CR 29 & CR 6 Ponds, *Phillips* (MP). One was at Timnath Res., *Larimer*, on 6 Sep (CW), while three juveniles were present at Jumbo Res., *Logan*, 7-12 Sep (JK, m.ob.). The latest report came again from Timnath Res., where four birds were seen 11-16 Oct (CW).

Long-billed Dowitcher: Although common in fall, the 400 individuals reported from Timnath Res., *Larimer*, on 11 Oct (CW) were noteworthy.

Red Phalarope: Although this is the rarest of the Colorado phalaropes, the fact that only one bird, a one-day wonder, was reported this season illustrated the lackluster shorebird migration through the state. This singleton was at Timnath Res., *Larimer*, on 6 Sep (CW, NK, doc.).

Black-legged Kittiwake: This rare Colorado gull was reported twice in the period. A weakened second-cycle bird was found and photographed on 9 Nov at a small pond near I-25, *El Paso* (BKO). The following day the bird was found dead in the same pond with its head resting at the edge of a cattail marsh (SR, EE, BM, m.ob., doc.). The specimen has become a part of the



Laughing Gull, Prewitt Reservoir, Washington County, 27 September 2009. Photo by Joe Roller

Colorado College museum collection. On 15 Nov, LH (fide RBA, no doc.) reported a bird from Lagerman Res., Boulder.

Sabine's Gull: This was a poor year for this species, with only eleven reports representing 14 birds. The one that spent 5-10 Oct at Navajo Res., *Archuleta*, stands out, as it is a rare migrant there (JiB). Of the birds for which age was reported, three were adults and seven were juveniles.

Bonaparte's Gull: A flock of 83 was at McIntosh Lake, *Boulder*, on 15 Nov (TF), while an early sighting was a recently-fledged bird at Jumbo Res., *Sedgwick/Logan*, on 23 Aug (BK).

Laughing Gull: Four birds from three locations, all within a four-day period, represented an above-average count for the fall season. The first, an adult, appeared at Timnath Res, *Larimer*, on 24 Aug and remained there through 5 Sep (RH, doc.). One was at CR 23, *Weld*, on 26 Aug (TD, no doc.); a first-cycle bird was at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, on

26 Aug (BK, TD, no doc.); and two were reported the next day from the same location (JR, no doc.).

Franklin's Gull: The species is casual on the WS after the third week of Oct; one was at Blue Mesa

Res., *Gunnison*, on 23 Oct (CD, BW).

Mew Gull: Continuing to increase in numbers in our state, this species was reported five times for a total of six individuals. None of the birds were documented, however. The reports came from *Boulder*, *Larimer*, *Arapahoe*, and *Pueblo*, the earliest on 14 Oct at Boulder Res. (TD) and the latest, of an adult, on 28 Nov from a DFO field trip to Pueblo Res.

Western Gull: Perhaps the most interesting reports of the season were those of the two gulls reported as this species from Warren Lake in Fort Collins, *Larimer*. The first was reported as a first-cycle bird on 15 Nov (NK, no doc.) and the second was a dark-mantled adult on 21 Nov (BR, no doc.). Without documentation, this species cannot be added to the state list.

Herring Gull: Uncommon in *La Plata* was a first-cycle bird at Vallecito Res. on 8 Aug (SA, m.ob.).

"Nelson's Gull": This hybrid, a cross between Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) and "American" Herring

Gull (*Larus [argentatus] smithsonianus*) was reported from Warren Lake, *Larimer*, on 15 Nov (NK, no doc.). Nelson's Gull was originally described as a species from the Bering Sea coast of Alaska in 1884. The hybrids apparently can show almost all of the parental plumage combinations and structures, plus they can resemble other gull species or resemble hybrid Glaucous-winged × "American" Herring Gull, hybrid Glaucous Gull × "Vega" Herring Gull, or Glaucous Gull × "European" Herring Gull (Howell and Dunn 2007).

Thayer's Gull: Ten reports of 13 individuals included a first county record: a first-cycle bird 3-26 Nov at Stagecoach Res., *Routt* (TLi, m.ob.), representing only the second or third WS record. Other birds were recorded in *Jefferson*, *Boulder*, *Weld*, *Pueblo*, *Larimer*, and *Boulder*—in other words, at the expected Front Range locations.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Nine reports representing eleven birds is about average in the fall period for this species, which is increasingly common in Colorado. In addition to the regularly reported adult birds, a bird in its second cycle was reported from Horsetooth Res., *Larimer*, 9-31 Oct (NK), and third-cycle birds were at both Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, 21-27 Nov (GW, LK) and at Pueblo Res., *Pueblo*, on 26 Nov (AVAS field trip).

Glaucous-winged Gull: A one-day wonder was a single of unspecified age reported from Highline Res., *Mesa*, on 6 Oct (RL, no doc.).

Least Tern: Away from their traditional southeastern haunts, one was

reported from Boyd Lake SP, *Larimer*, on 10 Sep (WR), and a juvenile was at Sixmile Res., *Boulder*, 23-24 Sep (BSc, TD).

Arctic Tern: Three reports were received, one of a bird photographed at Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, on 14 Oct (KS, CL, JM, doc.). An adult was reported from Lower Latham on 12 Sep (CW, no doc.) and the following day a non-adult was reported from the same location (EDe, NK, SR, no doc.).

Caspian Tern: Only two birds were reported, one on the WS at Blue Mesa Res., *Gunnison*, on 5 Sep (VZ) and an adult at Bonny Res. SP, *Yuma*, on 22 Aug (LS, m.ob.).

Parasitic Jaeger: A light-morph juvenile was well-studied and photographed at Chatfield SP, *Jefferson/Douglas*, 5-13 Nov (JK, m.ob., doc.). A bird identical in plumage to the Chatfield bird was seen 14-15 Nov at Pueblo Res., *Pueblo*, where the AVAS field trip was treated to prolonged, but distant, views of Colorado's rarest jaeger species (BKP, AVAS, m.ob., doc.).

Long-tailed Jaeger: A juvenile was at Whitewater, *Mesa*, for the first two days of Sep (DLe, m.ob., no doc.).

White-winged Dove: There were five reports from the period representing ten or more birds of this increasingly common species. Reports came from *Prowers*, *Fremont*, *Boulder*, *Pueblo*, and *El Paso*.

Inca Dove: One was at Lamar, *Prowers*, from 12 Aug to 15 Oct (JS), and a single was reported from Las Animas, *Bent*, on 10 Nov (DN, no doc.).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: This spe-



Parasitic Jaeger, Chatfield SP, Douglas/Jefferson Counties, 10 November 2009. Photo by Glenn Walbek

cies is rarely reported from the fall season. One was at the Stulp Farm, *Prowers*, on 31 Aug (JS) and another was at Bonny Res., *Yuma*, on 22 Aug (LS, m.ob.). At least three birds were seen at the TNC's Fox Ranch, *Yuma*, 21-22 Aug (BP, BM, TF, m.ob.) and a single was at Flagler Res. SWA, *Kit Carson*, on 22 Aug (BM, BP).

Greater Roadrunner: This species is hopefully recovering from the long-lasting killer snow cover in the southeastern part of the state a few winters ago. Two birds were reported this fall: one was at the Stulp Farm, *Prowers*, on 23 Aug (JS), while the other was at Lathrop SP, *Huerfano*, on 9 Oct (RMi).

Eastern Screech-Owl: Rare at the location was one heard on 24 Oct in Cottonwood Canyon, *Las Animas* (MP).

Northern Pygmy-Owl: This species is rare, or rarely detected, in the Wet Mountains, but one was heard on 12 Sep from Davenport Campground, *Custer* (MP, BS, BKP), and another

which is noteworthy as this species is usually not recorded during this period away from towns.

Blue-throated Hummingbird: A male was reported from a private residence in Penrose, *Fremont*. The landowners did not allow birders on their property, so details remain minimal (fide LB, no doc.).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: An adult male was at the Paulsen farm north of Lamar, *Prowers* (LP, no doc.), and a female visited Willow Valley, a Lamar subdivision, on 1 Aug (JTh, no doc.). The species is almost annual during this season and in this area.

Black-chinned Hummingbird: Late was an immature female on 8 Oct in Green Mountain, *Jefferson*, where ice and snow were reported to have frozen the contents of the feeder (MCh), forecasting a bleak outcome for this individual.

Calliope Hummingbird: East of normal migratory routes, one visited the feeders at the Stulp farm in *Prowers* on 1 Aug (JS) and a male was in

was photographed in the same county north of Lake Isabel on 10 Sep (ASM, JSm).

Chimney Swift: A small group of six birds was seen over Barr Lake, *Adams*, on 12 Sep (LS),

Lamar's Willow Valley subdivision on 18 Aug (JTh).

Broad-tailed Hummingbird: A number of late birds were reported from *Douglas*, *Boulder*, and *Jefferson* on 2, 8, 12, 16, and 19 Oct. An out-of-range migrant was in *Prowers* at the Stulp farm 29-31 August (JS).

Rufous Hummingbird: One was late in Franktown, *Douglas*, 1-2 Oct (KM), and east of normal were a male 11-14 Aug in Lamar (JTh) and a bird at the Stulp farm in the same county on 31 Aug (JS).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Historically, this species has been restricted to the northeastern counties south as far as Bonny Res. SP. During this fall period, birds were reported from two locations in Lamar, both on 17 Oct (DLe, RMi), and one report came from Two Buttes Res., *Baca*, on 24 Oct (MP).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Only two reports were received of this eastern species this season: one bird, a juvenile, was at Lamar's Fairmount Cemetery, *Prowers*, on 20 Oct (DLe), while an adult male was recorded on 29 Oct from a historic wintering spot for the species, Cañon City's Centennial Park, *Fremont* (SeM).

Alder Flycatcher: Rare,

or rarely identified in the fall season when they are often silent, the species appeared on 28 Aug at Thompson Ranch, *Lincoln* (GW, JK, JR, no doc.), and was seen with a Willow Flycatcher for comparison; another was reported from Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 13 Sep (DSi, doc.).

Gray Flycatcher: Only one report came this fall from the Eastern Plains, of a bird on 15 Aug at the Stulp farm, *Prowers* (JS).

"Western Flycatcher": Rather late for a Colorado Cordilleran Flycatcher was one at Pueblo's Valco Ponds, *Pueblo*, on 18 October (MY). Fall birds captured and banded on California's Farallon Islands, even after being carefully measured, are all called "Western Flycatcher" (Peter Pyle, pers. comm. to CBRC).

Black Phoebe: Away from traditional haunts, one was in Colorado City, *Pueblo*, 14-22 Sep (DSi). Two birds were at Sands Lake, *Salida*, *Chaffee*, 27 Aug through 15 Sep (RMi). A third bird was reported on



Long-tailed Jaeger, Whitewater, Mesa County, 9 September 2009. Photo by David Leatherman

17 Sep from the Durango Fish Hatchery, *La Plata* (RoM).

Eastern Phoebe: Unusual this far north, one bird was at Grandview Cemetery, *Larimer*, on 29 Oct (DLe).

Great Crested Flycatcher: A post-breeding juvenile was found in south-eastern Fort Collins, *Larimer*, 2-5 Sep (LG), while a very cooperative bird was at CBR, *Pueblo*, 11-15 Sep (JDr). Another was in *Prowers* from 13-14 Sep (LP), and two birds were photographed at Fox Ranch, *Yuma*, on 22 Aug (BSc, BP, NP, m.ob.).

Eastern Kingbird: Rare in *Hinsdale*, possibly furnishing a new county record, one was at Brown Lakes SWA on 15 Sep (JiB).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: The season's only report was of an adult from the South Boulder Creek Trail near Eldorado Springs, *Boulder*, 21-22 August (CN, m.ob., doc.).

Blue-headed Vireo: The first bird of the season was an early individual at Thompson Ranch, *Lincoln*, on 7 Sep (GW, MP, no doc.). On 11 Sep, a bird was identified at CBR, *Pueblo*, where it was separated from the Cassin's Vireos there (JDr, no doc.). At CVCG, a single was found on 14 Sep (DLe, no doc.). A nicely photographed bird discovered at Pueblo's Valco Ponds, *Pueblo*, on 25 Sep (BKP, doc.) fit more into the time period when conventional wisdom predicts this species should appear in Colorado in migration. One was at the Stulp Farm in *Prowers* on 12 Oct (JS, no doc.), and one was in the John

Martin Res. area of *Bent* on 11 Nov (DN, no doc.).

Warbling Vireo: Getting quite late, one bird appeared at a private yard in Greeley, *Weld*, on 4 Nov (NE).

Red-eyed Vireo: Uncommon on the WS was one that visited the CR J bridge in McElmo Canyon, *Montezuma*, on 24 Aug (DLe).

Chihuahuan Raven: Two birds identified as this species were photographed on 20 Aug near Blanca, *Costilla* (JiB, doc.), where this species is rare.

Tree Swallow: Late was a single at Plaster Res., *Broomfield*, on 14 Nov (TS).

Cave Swallow: A swallow with a buff throat and an orange "headlight" was described and photographed on 25 Sep downstream from Pueblo Res., *Pueblo* (BKP, doc.). This species still has not been accepted onto the Colorado Field Ornithologists Checklist of the Birds of Colorado, although a number of single-person sightings have been submitted for review.



Red-eyed Vireo, Last Chance, Washington County, 17 September 2009. Photo by Loch Kilpatrick

Barn Swallow: In a great migration-defining event, thousands of this species were observed dropping into the cattails of Greenlee Preserve, *Boulder*, 4-6 Sep (TE, m.ob.).

Mountain Chickadee: A very early migrant to the Eastern Plains was one at Mineral Palace Park, *Pueblo*, on 4 Aug (VT).

Bushtit: North and east of its expected range was one at Union Res., *Weld*, on 1 Nov (CN).

White-breasted Nuthatch: Not to be outdone by a Bushtit, one bird was at a very high elevation for this species, at the summit of 12,575' Spearhead Mountain, *Boulder*, on 23 Aug (WS).

Canyon Wren: At a high elevation for this species, one was sighted at 11,500' in *San Juan* on 22 Aug (JBr).

Carolina Wren: LCCW, *Prowers*, hosted one bird 24-26 Oct (MP), and another was found on 12 Sep near Orlando Res., *Huerfano* (MP, BS), for the season's only reports of this species.

Winter Wren: In 2009, the AOU Check-list Committee received a formal proposal to elevate *Troglodytes troglodytes pacificus* to species status (AOU 2009). This taxon is currently referred to as Pacific Wren. Although the split will not be made official until the July *Supplement to the AOU Check-list* is published in the *Auk*, rumor has it that this species has been accepted as a good species by the Committee.

Birds from both the eastern group and the western *pacificus* group can occur in Colorado in fall and winter (e.g., Bailey and Niedrach 1965). The easiest way to separate the two groups is by their call notes; the eastern

group's call notes sound similar to a Song Sparrow call, while *pacificus* call notes are described as sounding very similar to a Wilson's Warbler chip note. Songs of the two wren types are also distinguishable (David Towes, pers. comm.), but more difficult to separate.

During this report period, not all observers separated Winter Wrens into eastern- or western-type birds. On 24 Oct, a bird of an unknown subspecies was at the Stulp Farm, *Prowers* (JS). One was at the Cañon City Riverwalk, *Fremont*, on 7 Nov (RMi). A recording of a bird thought to be in the *pacificus* group was made in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, on 10 Nov (WS, NP, doc.). Along the St. Vrain River shoreline at 63rd Ave, *Boulder*, two birds, one thought to be from the eastern group and a second bird believed to be a member of the *pacificus* group, were heard calling on 26-27 Nov (TE, BGu, CL, m.ob.).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: Very late, likely trying to winter, one was below the John Martin Res. Dam on 25 Nov (DN).

Veery: Quite late, a western subspecies singleton was in the area of the Kingfisher Bridge in Chatfield SP, *Jefferson*, on 28 Nov (JK).

Varied Thrush: The first report of the season was of a female 3-4 Oct at CVCG (JR, m.ob., no doc.), and the only other report was of a first ranch record at CBR, *Pueblo*, on 15 Oct (BM, BKP, doc.).

Brown Thrasher: At an unusual location was a single between the alluvial fan and Endovalley in RMNP, *Larimer*, on 28 Sep (MJS).

Bohemian Waxwing: The only report of this irruptive species was of a single bird in Castlewood Canyon SP, *Douglas*, on 28 Nov (LR).

Golden-winged Warbler: An adult was photographed along the Poudre River in Fort Collins on 30 Sep (DLe).

Tennessee Warbler: Only three reports of this species were submitted. The earliest was of a single



Golden-winged Warbler, Fort Collins, Larimer County, 30 September 2009. Photo by David Leatherman



Northern Parula, Lake Estes, Larimer County, 23 October 2009. Photo by Nick Komar

at Pueblo's Valco Ponds, *Pueblo*, on 27 Aug (CL, DC). One was at Franktown, *Douglas*, on 4 Sep (KM), and a single was in the McMurry Natural Area, *Larimer*, on 16 Sep (RS).

Nashville Warbler: Six sightings representing eight individuals comprised the season's total. Some observers separated the longer tailed, tail-twitching, brighter-rumped western or "Calaveras" Warbler from the less-yellow eastern birds, which give a dull *chink* call note. The earliest report came from Brusk Creek above Collbran, *Mesa*, on 30 Aug (NK). The second was at CVCG, *Weld*, on 7 Sep (JK, m.ob.). As many as three birds were at Loudy-Simpson Park in Craig, *Moffat*, 8-12 Sep (FL). The migrant trap at Last Chance, *Washington*, produced one on 12



Black-throated Blue Warbler, Prowers County, 18 October 2009. Photo by Jane Stulp

Sep (MF). A first fall female, suspected to be an eastern bird, was along the Poudre River, *Larimer*, on 4 Oct (DLe) and the same observer found a western bird at Lamar's Fairmount Cemetery, *Prowers*, on 20 Oct (DLe).

Northern Parula: The season's only report of this parulid came from Lake Estes, *Larimer* (DW, m.ob.), where it was seen 23-26 Oct.

Chestnut-sided Warbler: On 4 Sep, RMi found this fall's only individual along the Cañon City Riverwalk, *Fremont*. This is a very low number for what is usually a relatively common eastern species in the fall in Colorado.

Magnolia Warbler: Of the three reports this season, the earliest came from the Cañon City Riverwalk on 4 Sep (RMi). A first fall female was at Dixon Res., *Larimer*, on 9 Oct (CK, EDe) and the latest report was of an immature at Lake Estes, *Larimer*, on 26 Oct (SW).

Cape May Warbler: There were two reports of this very rare Color-

ado warbler. The first was an adult male at Jumbo Res., *Sedgwick*, on 1 Sep (CW, no doc.). The other was an immature female seen at Cañon City's Veterans Park, *Fremont* (BKP, MP, no doc.), on 25 Oct. It was most likely feeding on hackberry nipplegall psyllids and hackberry blistergall psyllids (DLe, pers. comm.). Both psyllid species were there in abundance and both concurrently occur on the outside of the galls in fall. Veterans and Rouse Parks are two Cañon City locations where mature hackberry trees can be found.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: Five males were reported from scattered locations. The earliest sighting came from Upper Beaver Meadows in RMNP, *Larimer*, on 19 Sep (TS, m.ob.). Another was in Ovid, *Sedgwick*, on 26 Sep (BK, TD). The Stulp Farm south of Lamar had one on 18 Oct (JS), while in *Fremont*, both the Cañon City Riverwalk and Veterans Park produced singles on 19 Oct and 23-25 Oct, respectively (RMi).

Townsend's Warbler: Usually very common in fall and usually not included in this summary, this attractive warbler produced only two reports this season, comprising a total of five individuals. Three birds were along CR 250, *Chaffee*, on 11 Aug (RMi) and

two more were in Pueblo City Park, *Pueblo*, on 7 Oct (RMi).

Blackburnian Warbler: A nice showing of this beautiful warbler included six reports of singletons. The earliest report was from Betasso Preserve, *Boulder* (WS, no doc.). A first-fall male put in an appearance at CVCG on 12 Sep (MCh, no doc.). Two birds were reported in *Larimer* on 4 Oct, one in west Fort Collins (NK, no doc.) and a first-fall male along the Poudre River (DLe, no doc.). CVCG hosted another on 8 Oct (JR, no doc.) and the latest report was from Cañon City's Veterans Park, this year's warbler hot spot, on 25 Oct (RMi, no doc.).

Yellow-throated Warbler: Not recorded every fall in Colorado, this species appeared at an unusual spot: Lake Estes, *Larimer*, 20-25 Oct (SJR, m.ob., no doc.).

Pine Warbler: The only fall sighting reported was of a male at the Stulp Farm, *Prowers*, on 19 Oct, where it was photographed (JS, no doc.).

Palm Warbler: Five reports were submitted, including two of the distinctive yellow eastern subspecies. On 29 Aug the first report of the season described an eastern bird from Prewitt Res., *Washington* (GM), and later on 12 Sep a brown western bird was located at this migrant trap (CW). On a weekend outing to TNC's Fox Ranch, *Yuma*, one briefly appeared, representing the first record for this property (BM, BP). In *Aurora*, *Arapahoe*, one was spotted on 1 Nov (CRu), while the last of the season was an eastern bird along the Boulder Creek Path near Foothills Parkway, *Boulder*, on the late date of 24 Nov (SS).

Blackpoll Warbler: This species had a poor showing with only two reports. The first was of a male in alternate plumage from *Rye*, *Pueblo*, on 10 Sep (DS). The other bird appeared on 12 Sep at CVCG, *Weld* (MCh).

Black-and-white Warbler: This year was noteworthy for the paucity of reports. One bird, a hatch-year male, was at a backyard residence in *Douglas* on 20 Aug (GW).

American Redstart: Only 11 reports representing 17 birds came in of this usually-common migrant, from a variety of locations in *Douglas*, *Yuma*, *Prowers*, *Moffat*, *Fremont*, *Chaffee*, and *Larimer*, from 20 Aug through 22 Oct (m.ob.).

Prothonotary Warbler: Three birds graced the Colorado landscape this fall: a male in Skunk Canyon, *Boulder*, on 7 Sep (GG, AR); a female at the Cañon City Riverwalk, *Fremont*, on 14 Sep (RMi); and a third bird at Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso*, 19-20 Sep (KP).

Kentucky Warbler: Still present from the summer season, a male remained in Boulder's Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, where it was reported on 16 Aug (RCS, doc.). Another male was at LCCW, *Prowers*, on 24 Oct (MP, BKP, doc.).

Hooded Warbler: A male was singing along the Mesa Trail near Chautauqua Park, *Boulder*, on 5 Sep (TS); the only other report of this species was of a female from the Larimer Federal Complex on 4 Sep (TH).

Wilson's Warbler: New information about a bird captured at CBR, *El Paso*, during the spring season has come to light. On 16 May a banded

male Wilson's Warbler was captured. The Bird Banding Lab report shows this CBR bird was banded by Oliver Komar, Nick Komar's brother, as a hatch-year male on 24 Sep 2008 at Finca Nuevos Horizontes, 6.2 km ESE of Juayua, Sonsonate, El Salvador (fide BG).

Glass-colored Sparrow: Unusual were single birds in *Lake, Rio Blanco, Archuleta, Mineral, and La Plata*. The individual along SR 149, *Mineral*, on 5 Oct (JiB) may represent a new county record.

Field Sparrow: Farther west than expected was one at Doudy Draw, *Boulder*, on 19 Sep (WS). A long-staying bird was near Florence, *Fremont*, 25 Sep through 5 Oct (PG), and two birds were at CBR on 29 Sep (JDr).

Savannah Sparrow: Quite late were five birds in the John Martin Res. area, *Bent*, on 28 Nov (DN).

Grasshopper Sparrow: Very rare here, perhaps furnishing a first county record, were two birds in Nucla, *Montrose*, on 19 Sep (CD). Only four previous records of this species have been recorded on the WS (Richter et al. 2004).

Le Conte's Sparrow: Near the edge of the Arickaree River floodplain, along the north-facing slope of a hill on the TNC's Fox Ranch, *Yuma*, in a spot where Sprague's Pipits had been recorded in past years, at least six Le Conte's Sparrows were counted in a loose flock on 2-3 Oct. Due to unusually heavy precipitation in 2009, the area was festooned with horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*) and other tall forbs (TE, BM, BSc, BP, doc.).

"Red" Fox Sparrow: Some orni-

thologists believe the subspecies that form the "Red" Fox Sparrow group comprise a unique species. Red Fox Sparrows sing a unique song and are the most brightly-marked of the 3-4 Fox Sparrow groups. The subspecies do intergrade along the edges of their ranges, and Red Fox Sparrows intergrade with the interior Slate-colored in areas north of Colorado where their populations overlap; some birds are not easily put into any group (Sibley). Two identifiable birds were reported this fall: one in Greeley, *Weld*, on 12 Oct (NE, no doc.) and one on 28 Oct in the John Martin area, *Bent* (DN, no doc.).

Swamp Sparrow: Eleven reports representing 16 birds was a good seasonal showing. They were reported from *Pueblo, Weld, Kit Carson, Boulder, Prowers, Chaffee, Adams, Fremont, and Bent*. At least one of the CBR (*Pueblo*) birds stayed from 29 Sep to 16 Oct (JDr).

White-throated Sparrow: This *Zonotrichia* had a phenomenal showing, with 17 reports, some of multiple birds; a high count of five birds came from the John Martin area, *Bent*, 11-28 Nov (DN). The first report came from CVCG, *Weld*, 2-4 Oct (DLe). If you have a subscription to Cornell's Birds of North America Online (BNA), you may want to read some fascinating facts about the differences in tan vs. white-striped color morphs, including noticeable behavioral differences between the two color morph males and females (Falls and Kopachena 1994).

Harris's Sparrow: The big *Zonotrichia* was recorded in significant numbers, with thirteen singles report-



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Denver County, 7 October 2009. Photo by Bill Eden

ed from *Boulder, Yuma, Washington, Bent, Boulder, Prowers, Broomfield, Jefferson, Larimer, and Custer*. The first sighting was at a high elevation, 8500', in *Peaceful Valley, Boulder*, on 28 Aug (SBo).

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Returning for its fourth consecutive year, an adult was first seen at Tunnel Drive just west of Cañon City, *Fremont*, on 20 October and remained there through the end of the period (RMi, m.ob., no doc.). It was heard singing a soft song in Nov (BM, RMi). All *Zonotrichias* can sing during the winter.

Lapland Longspur: Rare on the WS was a male at the Meeker farmlands, *Rio Blanco*, on 29 Oct (FL).

Summer Tanager: Rare at this season was one at Pueblo on 3 Oct (TI, RC). A male was in Livermore, *Larimer*, on 11 Nov (DBe, doc.).

Western Tanager: Quite late was one at Lathrop SP, *Huerfano*, on 10 Nov (RMi).

Northern Cardinal: Away from its expected locations in the state, a male was in the Stonemoor Hills subdivision in Pueblo on 16 Sep and remained there past the end of the period (DCh).

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Uncommon on the WS was one at Lake City, *Hinsdale*, on 6 Aug (VS). A first-winter male was in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 17 Nov (NKO, doc.).

Painted Bunting: A first-year bird was mist-netted, photographed, and banded at the RMBO/CBR Banding Station, *El Paso*, on 27 Sep (SB, doc.).

Eastern Meadowlark: One was reported from Barr Lake, *Adams*, on 24 Oct (DC, no doc.).

Rusty Blackbird: A female of this declining species in transitional plumage was in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 30 October (DLe), while a female was reported from the migrant trap at Last Chance, *Washington*, on 5 Nov (TJ).

Great-tailed Grackle: Rare in the county, a male was in Meeker, *Rio Blanco*, from 13 Nov to at least the end of the month (DH).

Purple Finch: Three birds of this rare (in Colorado) finch were reported, none of them adult males. It usually takes two years for males to

show at least some red coloration; therefore, hatch-year and second-year birds are not reliably sexed from August to April (Pyle 1997). The first of the season was at LCCW, *Prowers*, on 22 Oct (DLe, photo). Another (the same bird?) was in the Willow Valley area of Lamar, *Prowers* (JTh, no doc.) 29-30 Oct. The third was at Horse-shoe Lake, *Larimer*, on 31 Oct (CW, no doc.).

White-winged Crossbill: Nine birds were reported from four locations, all from *Larimer*, *Grand*, or *Routt*. The male/female pair in Grandview Cemetery, *Larimer*, first reported on 22 Nov, put on a good show for many and continued there past the end of the reporting period (DLe).

Evening Grosbeak: By 18 Oct, a single had reached the Eastern Plains at Riverside Cemetery, Lamar (DLe). Another was found at Two Buttes Res., *Baca*, on 24 Oct (MP, BKP). According to the observer, the Lamar bird was probably of "Type 4" (Sewall



Purple Finch, Prowers County, 22 October 2009. Photo by David Leatherman

et al. 2004), the common type in the mountains of Colorado.

REGIONAL COMPILERS

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

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IN THE SCOPE

Molt and Plumage: A Primer

Tony Leukering

Just over 50 years ago, Humphrey and Parkes (1959) published a paper in the *Auk*, the journal of the American Ornithologists' Union, with far-reaching implications and effect. The paper's title, "An approach to the study of molts and plumages," may seem rather benign, but it described a systematic way to treat the subject that had heretofore been lacking. While the Humphrey-Parkes system (widely known as the "H-P system") has not been universally accepted, it remains the sole system of naming molts and plumages that is internally consistent and requires no alterations, no matter what species of bird on the planet one considers.

This essay is the first of a multi-part effort to explain the respective strategies that various bird groups use to replace their plumage. (The other installments in the series will not follow in metronomic fashion.) This article is intended as a broad introduction to the topic, and subsequent essays will examine certain subjects in more detail.

If you do not understand parts of what follows, do not despair! The topic is quite complex, and anyone thinking that he or she understands everything the first time through is probably deceiving him- or herself. I know that I'm still learning aspects of the topic, and I've been working on it for, literally, decades. But with a little effort, anyone can gain a basic understanding of molt—and understanding molt can vastly improve a birder's skills, as we shall see.

What

Molt is the act of replacing feathers in a systematic way. It can seem complex and confusing to us humans because birds have “co-opted” molt to fulfill many purposes in addition to the simple replacement of worn feathers. Molt has diverged into a plethora of strategies to fit the lifestyles and needs of the world’s birds, with individual species “designing” (through survival of the fittest, of course) their own molt strategy if and when the need arises.

The simplest definition of a molt is the replacement of a discrete set of feathers, either all of the feathers or some subset. Thus, a molt can be viewed as the transition between the previous set of feathers and the subsequent one. These sets of feathers created by molts are called plumages. Plumages can be made up either of entirely new feathers or a mix of old and new feathers.

Why

While bird feathers, gram for gram, are very strong, they need to be very light; thus, they wear out. Birds developed a way to deal with the problem so long ago that their dinosaurian forebears may actually have been the ones to develop it.

See Figure 1 on the back cover. The very ugly Herring Gull depicted there is as good an example as I’ve ever seen of the need for birds to replace their plumage. This individual, for whatever reason—probably poor health—has delayed one, or even two, of its molts. The picture was taken in June and, judging by the state of its primaries, which are worn and bleached, the bird probably did not replace them in its prebasic molt the previous fall. The wing coverts, which are also extremely worn, had two chances to be replaced: once in the previous fall’s prebasic molt and again in the spring’s prealternate molt.

When

In most bird species, molt is conducted on an annual basis in order to maintain the plumage and fitness of individuals. The simplest strategy is to replace feathers once per year, and probably more species use this strategy than any other. However, even the annual strategy has seen schism—most such species molt all their feathers once per year, but others replace only a subset of feathers each year (meaning that some feathers are more than one year old). These species are primarily large ones for which the time and energy required to replace all feathers, particularly the large flight feathers of the wings, are prohibitive. This “large-bird” strategy will be discussed in its own essay in the future.

Through time, as birds have used molt for adaptive reasons other than strict feather-coat maintenance, molt strategies have multiplied. Now, many species conduct two molts annually, with some adding a third. As molting is an energy-expensive process, birds generally constrain molts to periods when they are not performing other energy-expensive processes like breeding or migration. Though many bird species conduct multiple molts in a year, virtually all species conduct a molt after breeding, whether or not it is their only molt of an annual cycle.

Where

Most individuals of most bird species conduct a molt on or near the breeding grounds immediately or shortly after the breeding season. This is because for most species, the time immediately after breeding is one of few, if any, parental responsibilities and of relatively high resource availability.

As with most aspects of biology, there are many exceptions to this “rule.” If the above can be thought of as molting-location strategy #1, then the other such strategies are:

2. molt on the wintering grounds;
3. initiate molt on the breeding grounds, suspend it, and then complete it on the wintering grounds;
4. molt in some third area, which is sometimes (but not always) in between the breeding and wintering grounds.

There are varieties of each of the above strategies that might best be termed tactics, but most species utilize one of these four general approaches. Other strategies may exist, but most of the world’s bird species have been very little studied when it comes to molt.

Modified Humphrey and Parkes (H-P) terminology

Humphrey and Parkes (1959) proposed a solution to the problem of identifying plumages, and the molts that produce them, without the confounding aspects of calendar or location. Though the terms remain well-used, “winter plumage” and “breeding plumage” are difficult to define because there are so many exceptions. Good examples of the problems inherent in this “system” are legion, but I present a couple as example of the need for more rigorous nomenclature:

1. Many bird species that breed at high northern latitudes and which spend the non-breeding season south of the equator are in “winter plumage” in the Southern Hemisphere’s summer and mix with other species, resident and migrant, that are in their “summer plumage” in the Northern Hemisphere’s winter.
2. Many duck species conduct courtship and pairing behaviors in

winter, thus such species are in “breeding plumage” in winter. In fact, the only time that males are not in “breeding plumage” is in summer and early fall, and females breed in “non-breeding” plumage!

See Figure 2 on the back cover. This pair of Gadwall was photographed in mid-March, but the male has been in this “breeding plumage” since, at least, the previous October, and he will retain it until May or June, at which point he will molt into what has been termed “eclipse plumage.” The female has initiated her molt into “eclipse plumage” and will retain that plumage until fall. The very different molt tactics of ducks will be more thoroughly treated in a subsequent essay.

The Humphrey and Parkes (hereafter, the “H-P system”) terminology separates aspects of molt and plumage from other considerations and identifies molts based on their homology (that is, shared ancestral history) across species. Howell et al. (2003, 2004) modified one of the basic tenets of H-P in order to allow the system to account for discrepancies first articulated well in studies of gull molt (Howell et al. 1999). I summarize the modified system below.

The basis of the modified system is that the “first coat of pennaaceous feathers” (Pyle 2008), which is often called “juvenile plumage,” has now been defined as “**first basic plumage**” (Howell et al. 2003). From this point, all subsequent plumages are derived via discrete molts with consistent nomenclature: **prealternate molts** (abbreviated PA) produce **alternate plumages** (A), while **prebasic molts** (PB) produce **basic plumages** (B).

One molt per year

Plumage cycles are defined on the basis of prebasic molts: a plumage cycle is the time between the initiation of one PB molt and the initiation of the next one. In species in which only one molt is conducted per year, there is only one plumage—basic—no matter how the bird’s appearance (or “aspect”) may change through the year. European Starling is one such species; its appearance changes from winter to summer due to feather wear, not replacement of feathers.

In slow-developing species, individual PB molts may differ in their extent or timing and/or provide for varying appearances (aspect), as in eagles. In such species, molts and plumages can be numbered until adult or definitive aspect is reached. Thus, one can differentiate juvenile Bald Eagles (in juvenile or first basic plumage, or B1) from one-year-olds (B2), from two-year-olds (B3), and from three-year-olds (B4). Once plumage aspect has stabilized in the adult or **definitive** appearance, one can no longer discern the precise age of the bird, so this plumage is termed **definitive basic (DB) plumage**. In

Bald Eagles, definitive basic plumage is characterized by a clean white head and tail, among other features.

See Figures 3 and 4 on the back cover. The Northern Mockingbird in Figure 3 is in juvenal or first basic plumage (B1). The species is a good example of one with a simple molt strategy, conducting only one molt per year (but see below). The Bald Eagle depicted in Figure 4 is in second basic (B2) plumage, having conducted one molt—the second prebasic (PB2)—since leaving the nest, and is probably a bit under two years old.

Multiple molts per year

Species with more than one molt per year are considered to have inserted an extra molt (or two) into the cycle **between pre-basic molts**. Extra molts have been inserted in many species that inhabit harsh environments or are exposed to more sun annually, meaning they need to replace worn feathers more often than once per year. Extra molts can also occur in colorful species, long-distance migrants, and species with strong sexual selection of male appearance, but there are species exhibiting all three of these traits that conduct only one molt per year (e.g., longspurs and Red-winged Blackbird).

The most common inserted molt is the prealternate (PA) molt. Again, in slow-developing species that have them, such as gulls, PA molts can be numbered until the individual achieves adult plumage: the first prealternate molt (PA1) produces first alternate plumage (A1), the second prealternate molt (PA2) produces second alternate plumage (PA2), et cetera.

In many species, prealternate molts serve to increase “attractiveness” for the purposes of holding territories and/or mating (although there are many species, including flycatchers and wrens, that do not change appearance markedly in the prealternate molt). In species that do change appearance, the prealternate molt is often limited to the head and the chest and/or particular badge features (e.g., the head patterns of *Zonotrichia* sparrows). In slow-developing species, such as gulls, the earlier prealternate molts seem to be a way to advance plumage maturation, but the reasons are unknown, as most such birds do not breed in these plumages (e.g., A3 California Gulls).

Whereas prealternate molts occur in most or all cycles, another inserted molt occurs *only* in the first plumage cycle: the **preformative molt**, which produces **formative plumage**. Thus, formative plumage is unlike alternate plumage, which is inserted into every year of a bird's adult life. This difference explains my contention that alternate plumages are more common even though formative plumages are more widespread. Yes, more species exhibit formative plumages

than exhibit alternate plumages—and some species sport both—but a particularly long-lived Herring Gull, for example, will exhibit only one formative plumage in its life, whereas it will exhibit alternate plumages in each of its 35 years of life.

The aforementioned Northern Mockingbird (Fig. 3, back cover) provides a good example of the ephemeral nature of first basic (or “juvenile”) plumage in many passerines. This juvenile probably began replacing parts of its first basic plumage with formative plumage only a couple weeks after leaving the nest, at less than a month old. Those who do not bird in mid-summer will only rarely encounter birds in first basic plumage, though many larger species have less ephemeral first basic plumage. Because it disappears so quickly in many species, this plumage provides one of the easiest and surest methods to “confirm” a species as breeding locally (but beware the species that do migrate in this plumage!).

The final inserted molt is a **presupplemental molt**, which produces, of course, a **supplemental plumage**. Presupplemental molts are generally inserted only into definitive plumage cycles (that is, they occur only in “adult” birds), but there are some exceptions. Although a few common species exhibit this molt (e.g., terns and some *Passerina* buntings), it is poorly studied and little understood. These molts are variable in timing by species and, in some species, by age and/or sex! In some species, they may precede the prealternate molt, in others succeed it (Pyle 2007). As an example of how extreme some species may be, some Least Terns have been shown to replace some inner primaries as many as three times (that is, go through four generations of those feathers) in their first plumage cycle (Pyle 2008, figure caption on p. 17).

For now, it is enough to know that presupplemental molts exist. Should these molt essays continue to the point at which I am discussing presupplemental molts in detail, it will mean both that I have written a lot of these essays and that I will have learned an awful lot more about presupplemental molts than I currently know!

Molt strategies

As the final aspect of molts and plumages presented here, Howell et al. (2003) introduced the concept of molting strategies (not to be confused with the molting-location strategies noted above!), defining four such strategies as follows:

Simple Basic Strategy (SBS): No inserted molts in the first or definitive cycles (Fig. 5A).

Complex Basic Strategy (CBS): One inserted molt in the first cycle and no inserted molts in definitive cycles (Fig. 5B).

Simple Alternate Strategy (SAS): One inserted molt in the first cycle and one inserted (prealternate) molt in definitive cycles (Fig. 5C–E).

Complex Alternate Strategy (CAS): Two (rarely three) inserted molts in the first cycle and one (occasionally two) inserted molt in definitive cycles (Fig. 5F–H).

Figure 5 is a reproduction of Pyle’s (2008) Figure 10. I strongly recommend obtaining your own copy of Pyle’s book. On the back cover, I have provided species examples of SBS (Bald Eagle), CBS (Northern Mockingbird), and SAS (Gadwall and Herring Gull).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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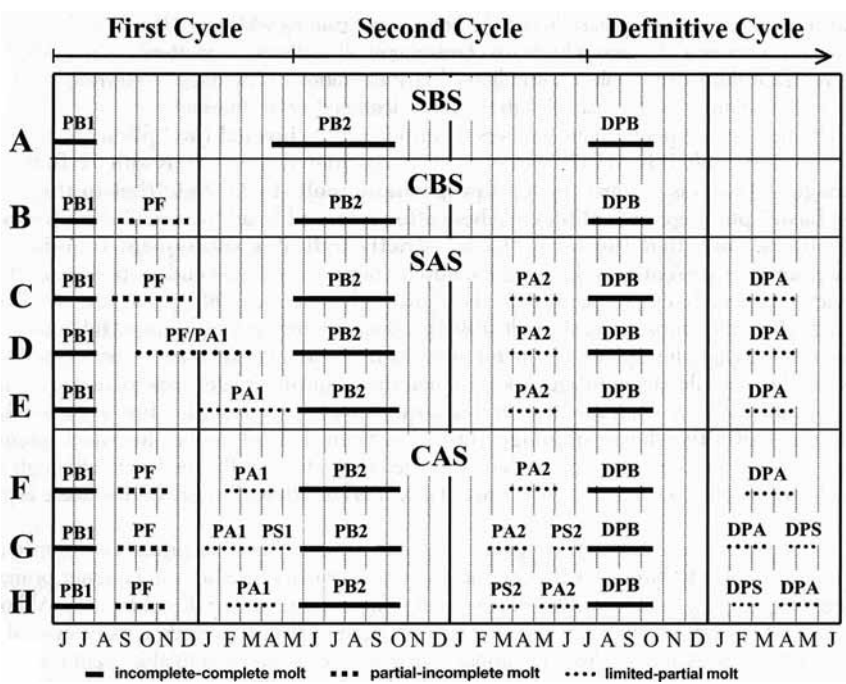


Figure 5 (from Pyle 2008, used with permission). Examples of timing and extent of molts in North American birds. **A: Simple Basic Strategy (SBS).** **B: Complex Basic Strategy (CBS).** **C, D, E: Simple Alternate Strategy (SAS),** three examples differentiated by the timing and extent of the second molt. **F, G, H: Complex Alternate Strategy (CAS),** three examples differentiated by the order and number of inserted molts. See text for molt abbreviations.

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Fig. 1. Herring Gull,
Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge,
Sussex County, DE,
11 June 2008.



Fig. 2. Male and
female Gadwall,
Sands Lake, Chaffee
County, CO, 14
March 2007.

Fig. 3. Northern
Mockingbird, Villas,
Cape May County,
NJ, 13 July 2009.



Fig. 4. Bald Eagle,
Cherry Creek State
Park, Arapahoe
County, CO, 12
February 2005.
*All photos by Tony
Leukering*