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Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



Hybrid Phoebes
History of the CBRC
Shrikes vs. Mockingbirds



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Male American
Three-toed
Woodpecker
at nest cavity,
Rist Canyon
(7360 ft), Lar-
imer County,
17 June 2011.
Photo by Dave
Leatherman

2012 Convention: Trinidad and Las Animas County, 18–20 May

Jim Beatty

Mark your calendars and join us in Trinidad! We'll head south in 2012 for the 48th CFO Convention and Annual Meeting. The CFO Convention has been to Trinidad before, but not since 1994, eighteen years ago. Trinidad is located at the northern end of Raton Pass, on the old Santa Fe Trail that connected St. Joseph, Missouri with Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Calling Las Animas County “underbirded” is an understatement! The Las Animas County checklist currently stands at just 302 species, and it's quite possible that our convention field trips will increase that total. Some of the birds that we'll search for include Hepatic Tanager, Grace's Warbler, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Scott's Oriole. We'll puzzle over separating Common from Chihuahuan Ravens. And you never know what rarities might show up. Excellent birds on the Las Animas County checklist include Crested Caracara (Colorado's first record was an individual injured by a Trinidad school bus, rehabilitated, and released), Eastern Whip-poor-will, Lesser Nighthawk, Louisiana Waterthrush, and nine species of owls.

At over 4,775 square miles, Las Animas is Colorado's largest county, nearly as big as Connecticut. However, with just 15,000 residents, the population density is only three people per square mile. The terrain varies widely from the low point, where the Purgatoire River flows northeast into Otero County, to the 13,000-foot mountains of the picturesque Spanish Peaks and Culebra Range west of Trinidad. In between there are many life zones, from the dry grasslands where roadrunners roam to the montane and subalpine habitats where Gray Jays and rosy-finches are possible. While migration may be slowing in late May, there are sure to be some exciting surprises, and the breeding species should be well established. If we're very lucky perhaps we'll find an Acorn Woodpecker, a Gray Vireo, or even a Magnificent Hummingbird.

Field trips will radiate out from Trinidad and will offer many possibilities. Some will include rugged hiking, while others will be more leisurely and less strenuous. We are working to include some private ranches with enticing birding potential and, of course, our traditional photography, audio-recording, owling, and “what birds eat” trips. There will be trips to neighboring counties like Huerfano and Otero, as well as a trip or two into northern New Mexico and the Raton Pass

area, where interesting driving loops are possible back into Colorado on scenic back roads.

Our headquarters will be the Holiday Inn in Trinidad (719-845-8400), where you can reserve a room now at the special CFO Convention rate of \$99.99 per night. Our program will be very similar to recent years, although since the hotel has limited meeting space, we'll be using several different venues for our events. The Tourism Board of Trinidad has graciously offered to host a welcoming barbeque at the Trinidad State Park pavilion close to downtown. Our very popular Team ID Challenge on Friday evening and the Saturday afternoon paper session will be at the nearby Mount Carmel Center. Our Saturday banquet will be at the A. R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art in downtown Trinidad.

Dr. Brian Linkhart has agreed to be our keynote speaker. Dr. Linkhart is an Associate Professor of Biology at Colorado College and has done considerable research on Flammulated Owls.

We look forward to seeing you in Trinidad!

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

CFO MEETING MINUTES

15 October 2011

University of Colorado Center for Innovation and Creativity
Boulder, Colorado

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 11:06 A.M. by President Jim Beatty. Officers present were President Jim Beatty, Vice President Bill Kaempfer, Secretary Larry Modesitt, and Treasurer Maggie Boswell. Directors Ted Floyd, Brenda Linfield, Christian Nunes, Nathan Pieplow, Bob Righter, and Joe Roller were present. Director Lisa Edwards sent her regrets.

Board Changes

President Beatty opened the meeting by welcoming board member Doug Faulkner, who succeeded Larry Semo as Chairman of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC). The board expressed its appreciation

for Doug for taking on this important responsibility.

Secretary's Report—Larry Modesitt

Minutes of the 21 May Annual Meeting and the 15 August board meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Maggie Boswell

Using Maggie's third quarter financial reports as a basis, Jim Beatty brought up the fact that CFO's net worth had not increased in recent years. He wondered if a dues increase might be considered in the future. Larry Modesitt and Bill Kaempfer noted that CFO has strong financial health, but we also have some major requirements for funding. *Colorado Birds* is the major expense and dues nearly cover it. *Colorado Birds* is reputed to be the best, or nearly the best, of any state publication. Quality nevertheless continues to improve. Many other states have begun to distribute their journals entirely online. Some journals such as *Western Birds* and the *Wilson Journal* charge authors for submitting articles, but we have no interest in doing this. Excellent convention attendance and management has allowed convention returns to pay for additional publication costs, the website, and other administrative expenses.

2012 Convention Planning

Jim Beatty

Hotel Selection—Jim received a very recent report from the Trinidad and Las Animas Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, showing much interest in having our convention in Trinidad. With the chamber doing much of the planning instead of a major hotel, the opportunities are broadened. Activities could take place at the brand new Holiday Inn, Trinidad Lake State Park, and the A.R. Mitchell Western Art Museum,

which has space for 300 people. The combination of facilities is adequate for all of our venues, but logistics would need to be worked out. Using Trinidad as a convention site would require more coordination by CFO, but unusual birding opportunities are there. Jim Beatty will investigate further to determine firm plans—including transportation, parking, and costs—for board review. The decision on site location will be made by 1 November. Memorial Day weekend, 26-27 May, is our first choice. The backup date would be 19-20 May. We also discussed the substitute location of Colorado Springs. Prices are considerably higher, but there are more birding leaders available. The board unanimously voted for Trinidad, despite recognizing there would be considerably more work for the CFO board. Jim mentioned the need to have our publicity done well in advance, including having printer-ready copy of our brochure by 1 February. Field trips must be organized well before that, so that descriptions of the trips are accurate by that date.

Brochure—Ted Floyd will provide content, and Debbie Marshall will be contracted for format.

Keynote Speaker—Ted Floyd will continue to pursue possibilities, and will handle the public relations when site and speaker are determined.

Field Trips—Bill Kaempfer has a list of field trips already developed, with Mark Peterson's input.

T-shirts—Bob Righter will be planning and purchasing the shirts.

Exhibitors—Larry Modesitt will arrange exhibitors and site plans.

Programs—Nathan Pieflow will be in charge of both the Identification Challenge and paper session.

CFO Website—Brenda Linfield

Jim Beatty praised Brenda for the many improvements in the revisions to the CFO website. The emphasis is on constantly renewed information. There is a CFO News box, for articles to be submitted by directors. Brenda will contact Todd Deininger about adding CFO's role and a link to the CFO home page. COBirds will stream in automatically. News from the Field is requiring large amounts of time by compilers to get information from multiple sources (COBirds, eBird, and various submissions), so Nathan Pieflow is discussing other ways to secure the information, with assistance from Jim Beatty, Bill Kaempfer, Doug Faulkner, and Bob Righter. Bill suggested surveying members to determine how people are using News from the Field.

Membership data is fully online, password protected. Members can access their own information to check expiration date, change address, or update information. Listing birding

field trips organized by other Colorado birding organizations should increase traffic on the CFO site and lead viewers to other CFO information. An online forum is a possibility for limiting the amount of required work by Brenda.

Social Media Site

Christian Nunes and Ted Floyd

Twitter is available now, and Ted Floyd will help provide more and faster communication. This also will lead people to the CFO home page. Christian believes a Facebook page is essential, as it would reach many more people who aren't reading COBirds. Facebook's multiplier effect would be very good for publicity, especially regarding the convention. Christian will create a Facebook page.

Membership Database Transition

Brenda Linfield noted that this will be tested on the new website.

Rare Bird Reporting to CBRC Doug Faulkner

Doug is speaking with Mark Peterson about making past paper records converted to online informa-

Youth Scholarship Application Deadline

The CFO Youth Scholarship Fund provides financial help to young birders to attend summer camps, workshops, and training programs that introduce them to science and nature through the study of birds. If you or someone you know is qualified to apply for this scholarship, please download the application form from <http://cfobirds.org/business/funding.htm>, fill it out, and send it to Bill Kaempfer at the address listed on the form no later than **31 March 2011**.

tion. This is a huge amount of data, with 35 years of records. We now are averaging 150 newly submitted records per year. Prior to the online system, records not accepted were archived but they are not in the online database. While the CBRC site is advanced and a major improvement, Mark Peterson had noted difficulties in entering information online, and a programmer is needed for corrections. Moreover, Larry Semo's illness caused delays in processing. Also, we would like to make the CBRC records more accessible to all. Additional resources are necessary before we begin improvements. Brenda Linfield will communicate with Doug and Mark to decide what must be done and the cost to do this. She will make a presentation at the next board meeting.

CBRC Status—Doug Faulkner

Larry Semo's illness caused considerable delays in record review. Doug will attempt to catch up the more interesting birds by CFO's next board meeting. By the end of 2012, the goal is to be reviewing reports as they are submitted. We decided that the CBRC is responsible for maintaining up-to-date county checklists. Doug will supervise this, but we recognized that it is a lower priority. He is analyzing the status of the CBRC before deciding whether to add a non-voting CBRC secretary. His goal is to have one central master database, with the entire history of the voting records of the CBRC tied to our website for public access.

Committee Reports

Colorado Birds—Nathan Pieplow. The next issue will be mailed by the first week of November. Christian is now fully involved as photo editor. Nathan especially would appreciate suggestions for each edition's "Hungry Birder" article.

Publicity—Ted Floyd is publicizing the new website and generating content along with the goal of improving the rate of rare bird reports to the CBRC.

Membership—Lisa Edwards. No report.

Project and Youth Funds—Bill Kaempfer. No report is due, as December is the deadline.

Field Trips—Bill Kaempfer and Ted Floyd are reviewing the possibility of leading trips in conjunction with the Snow Goose Festival, along with trips to locate specialty birds.

Nominations—Joe Roller. No activity to report.

Awards—Joe Roller. The board discussed possibilities for upcoming awards, both those given at our convention and landowner appreciation awards.

New Business

There was no new business.

Our next meeting will be 28 January 2012. The location will be at the new convention site. The following meeting will be 14 April 2012.

President Beatty adjourned the meeting at 3:00 P.M. sharp.

Respectfully submitted,
Larry Modesitt, Secretary

Brenda Linfield

Edited by Jim Beatty

I first met Brenda at the 2003 CFO Convention in Frisco, where her husband Roger introduced us. I soon learned that Brenda, like Roger, was an avid birder, but her website business kept her busy at home while Roger was working diligently birding in every corner of Colorado. I had met Roger earlier on the backroads of Archuleta and Las Animas Counties, where almost no one goes except locals and birders.

Brenda is now CFO's very proficient webmaster. In the short time she's been on the board, she's already updated the website by improving the navigation links and giving the design a facelift; designed and installed a more efficient and easier-to-share membership database; modernized the convention registration form; and begun investigating with others how CFO can improve the Colorado Bird Records Committee database and make those records, both past and pending, more accessible to the public, which has long been a goal of CFO and the CBRC.

Brenda was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The first time she remembers being intrigued by a bird was when she noticed a roadrunner walking down the street and excitedly asked her father what it was. He told her that it was the New Mexico state bird and at the time she thought it was the only one in existence – and that it came walking down her street especially for her!

After high school Brenda matriculated into the prestigious California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo to study engineering. As a young college student she found herself stressed by all her challenging classes. She needed to do something purely for entertainment. While perusing the course offerings at Cal Poly, she noticed "Ornithology 101." It sounded interesting and she enrolled.

What an epiphany! Birds were terrific! She spent hours in the ornithology lab browsing through bird skins and field guides. And the weekend field trips were a great getaway: she met other young birders and began birding whenever her schedule allowed.

One of the great birding experiences of her life was sitting on the hood of her '67 Buick La Sabre (fondly named "La Bomba" because it was a bomb) on Tejon Ridge in central California in 1981 watching seven California Condors circling overhead. Some of them glided by less than ten feet above her. She felt very small at that moment and very awed.

After receiving her B.S. in Heating, Air Conditioning, and Solar

Engineering, Brenda went to work at Vandenberg Air Force Base to help build the West Coast Space Shuttle Launch Facility. She found it harder and harder to get out birding with her busy work schedule.

After the space shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986, the West Coast shuttle program was cancelled and Brenda took a position as a flight line engineer on the B-2 Stealth Bomber in California's Mojave Desert. At the same time, she started working on her Master's degree at night. Once again her busy schedule allowed little time for birding. But then she met Roger, her future husband, and to her delight, found that he too was a birder. They combined dating with birding. This was more efficient and twice as much fun!

Brenda and Roger married in 1996. They moved to Pasadena, California and she began designing roller coasters for Walt Disney Imagineering. They spent their vacations traveling to interesting places to bird.

Brenda states that one of the greatest things about birding is the wild places that you go to find birds. Brenda saw her life Gyrfalcon—a beautiful white-phase one—while backpacking on the north slope of the Brooks Range of Alaska on her honeymoon. (Not *everyone* honeymoons near the Arctic Circle.) She particularly enjoyed hiking down Sycamore Canyon in Arizona at the border with Mexico to see a Five-striped Sparrow—even if she did have to carry in all of her water for that hot, dry adventure. On top of Mount Whitney in California she was delighted to feed sunflower seeds from her hand to Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches while she enjoyed the view from the summit. Still another adventure was her helicopter ride from Juneau, Alaska over glaciers to see the Steller's Sea-Eagle that visited the remote Alaskan coast for several consecutive years. She found snorkeling around Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas and viewing the beautiful

Call for Papers: CFO Convention 2012

The annual convention of the Colorado Field Ornithologists will be held 18-20 May 2012 in Trinidad, Colorado. We invite proposals for presentations to be given during the scientific paper session. Speakers are expected to have between 30 and 45 minutes to present and answer questions. Topics of interest include ongoing research into Colorado birds or their habitats, advances in field identification of Colorado birds, and new information regarding their status or distribution. Submit abstracts electronically to Nathan Pieplow (npieplow@gmail.com) prior to **15 March 2012**.

warm-water marine life as exciting as watching the multitude of migrating warblers that stopped at the freshwater fountain inside the fort. Even slogging through the ball-bearing-like gravel on Gambell's beaches did not dampen her enthusiasm as she spotted her life Ross's Gull. She says, "I think it's safe to say that 'working' to find a life bird is not discouraging, but part of the adventure."

After moving to Colorado in 2001, Brenda succumbed to her love of computers and enrolled in a website development program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. After completing the program she started up her own website design company and

began working out of her home office. She was pleased to find that controlling her own schedule gave her more time to go birding—as long as she didn't mind working at night. COBirds became an indispensable tool for finding out where the rarities were. She started keeping a Colorado state bird list. Then Roger decided to see how many species he could see in each of Colorado's counties, and she often accompanied him on these county listing trips.

Soon after Brenda and Roger arrived in the state, they discovered the wonderful adventure that Colorado's Rocky Mountains offered. They climbed a couple fourteen-thousand foot peaks for fun and it soon became a passion. They decided to conquer all of Colorado's "fourteeners." Following on the heels of this decision came the idea of a "Fourteeners-Four Hundred" club. This is a list of people who have climbed all of Colorado's fourteeners *and* who have seen four hundred or more bird species in Colorado. This is an exclusive club



The CFO Webmaster, Brenda Linfield, on the tricky ascent of Crestone Peak (14,294 ft). Photo by Roger Linfield

and the list is very short. After surveying many people, Brenda has found only six who have accomplished this double milestone. The first was Thompson Marsh, who reached it in 1981, followed by Peter Gent in 1991, Duane Nelson in 1994, Hugh Kingery in 1995, and Greg Goodrich and Larry Modesitt, both of whom joined the club in 2008. She says that husband Roger is likely to be number seven and that she hopes to be number eight and the first woman. If you're interested in joining or reading about this elite group, Brenda created a website at <http://fourteeners400.com>. She believes a love of the outdoors is part of the mental makeup of every birder and a love of the mountains is an essential part of most Coloradans.

Brenda related that she was flattered and a bit nervous when she was offered the webmaster position on the CFO board. It was fortunate for CFO that she had just reduced her work schedule and had some time available. Furthermore, she realized that very few birders were "web geeks" and CFO needed her! She viewed the opportunity as her chance to give back to the organization that has helped her see so many interesting birds in Colorado. She enjoys her position on the CFO board and hopes to make the CFO website (<http://cfobirds.org>) the "go to" place for information on Colorado birds.

Brenda suggested that this article be titled "How does a 'web geek' get interested in birds?" She may consider herself a "web geek," but clearly she is a web genius, and her skills are greatly needed and appreciated.

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

Camp Chiricahua, 12–23 July 2011

Joel Such

Finally old enough to attend my first young birders' camp, I attended Victor Emanuel Nature Tours' Camp Chiricahua in Arizona to cap an already unforgettable summer of birds. Working around the recent fire-related closures, our knowledgeable leaders, Dave Jasper and Rob Day, guided our group of fourteen all across southeastern Arizona in search of its wonders.

Our 11-day excursion began in Tucson, where we sampled the saguaro-studded Sonoran Desert and the conifer-topped Santa Catalina Mountains, a typical "sky island" just north of the city. While winding up the Catalina Highway to the top of Mount Lemmon, one can really see the rich biodiversity of Arizona, as the road crosses through distinct biotic communities, each hosting its own suite of plants and animals. Upon waking amongst ponderosa pines at 7000 feet, we were greeted by numerous camp-scavenging Yellow-eyed Juncos, as well as Painted Redstarts, Olive and Grace's Warblers, Hepatic Tanagers, Greater Pewees, and Buff-breasted Flycatchers. A thousand feet higher, Red-faced Warblers were found in the mixed-conifer forest.

From the Santa Catalinas, we traveled to the small town of Portal at the foot of the Chiricahua Mountains, the perfect base for explorations to nearby sky islands, desert grasslands, and the Chihuahuan Desert. Portal hosted a spectacular hummingbird show with eight species (Lucifer, Violet-crowned, Broad-billed, Blue-throated, Magnificent, Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, and the ever-feisty Rufous) buzzing all around, fighting for spots on the sugar water feeders. Nights in Portal were spent observing a pair of Elf Owls ac-



Black-tailed Rattlesnake, Ramsey Canyon, Cochise County, AZ, 21 July 2011. Photo by Joel Such



Yellow-eyed Junco, Mount Lemmon, Pima County, AZ, 15 July 2011. Photo by Joel Such

tively feeding their young, searching the town's quarter-mile stretch of road for night-dwelling creatures of all kinds (arachnids, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and, of course, birds), and twice traveling up Cave Creek Canyon for Whiskered Screech-Owl. During a day hike up this canyon's south fork, we saw a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and heard the distinctive barking croak of an Elegant Trogon. Before long,

that stunning male trogon flew right over us and perched in a nearby sycamore, giving me a look at my 500th life bird!

As our trip began to wind down, we took up residence near the longest remaining free-flowing river in the southwest, the San Pedro. We continued making daily excursions for last looks at the southeastern Arizona specialty birds, witnessed a dramatic flash flood with ash-tainted soil crashing down a wash, marveled at an exquisite Black-tailed Rattlesnake, and enjoyed the camaraderie of new friends united by our interest in the natural world.

I'd like to express my appreciation to the Colorado Field Ornithologists for their generous scholarship, which helped me attend this camp. I returned home with 23 life birds, but more importantly, with a deeper understanding of southeastern Arizona's extraordinarily diverse biological communities.

Joel Such, 1186 Rowell Drive, Lyons, CO 80540, jbsuch@gmail.com

Turf Wars: Do Mockingbirds Pose Another Threat to Loggerhead Shrikes?

Susan H. Craig and David M. Elwonger

The spring of 2011 saw a large influx of Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) into some areas of eastern Colorado. While mockingbirds have been uncommon breeding birds on the eastern plains in recent history, migration in 2011 brought unprecedented numbers into drought-stricken eastern El Paso County.

Conversely, the number of breeding Loggerhead Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*) has been steadily declining across most of the continent, now including eastern El Paso County. In USDA Forest Service Region 2, which includes Colorado, shrikes are rated as “sensitive.” Partners in Flight accords them “regional concern,” and Colorado Parks & Wildlife says shrikes are a “species of greatest conservation need.”

Shrikes and mockingbirds occupy the same habitat; they both require trees or shrubs for nesting, along with sufficient insects as food items. Mockingbirds and shrikes weigh roughly the same: 48-50 grams. In length, mockingbirds are larger by an inch, with a two-inch wider wingspan. However, from a territorial standpoint, mockingbirds are significantly more aggressive toward other species than are shrikes. Interactions between shrikes and mockingbirds, in any season, often result in the shrike being displaced by the mockingbird. Mockingbirds are doggedly persistent in their harassment behavior, especially when the target is a shrike. In addition, ongoing drought has killed many trees used by breeding shrikes and mockingbirds, further increasing competition for nest sites.

During field and atlas work in 2011, the authors observed and charted a marked increase in mockingbirds, but fewer breeding shrikes. In one particular square-mile area east of Colorado Springs in El Paso County which Craig has monitored for over 15 years (Dearing Road at Myers Road), the number of shrike nests has fallen from a high of seven to a low of one in 2011. In that same area, there were at least four mockingbird nests, double the number from 2010.

Birders and atlas workers in the field have the unique opportunity to observe interactions between shrikes and mockingbirds during breeding season. While mockingbirds are relentless in their harassment of shrikes, it is unknown whether shrike eggs and/or chicks are

actually killed by mockingbirds. The authors are seeking documentation for any such nest destruction directly caused by mockingbirds. Please respond by email to Susan Craig (scraig10@q.com) or to Dave Elwonger (davidelwonger@msn.com).

Note: we ask that you refrain from approaching shrike nests to view the contents; please confine activities to observation only.

Susan Craig, 1530 Robidoux Circle, Colorado Springs, CO 80915, scraig10@q.com

David Elwonger, P.O. Box 4708, Woodland Park, CO 80866, davidelwonger@msn.com

The Extent of Hybridization between Black and Eastern Phoebes

SeEtta Moss and Nathan Pieplow

Introduction

Interspecific pairing between Black Phoebes and Eastern Phoebes has been observed in Colorado for just over a decade (Leukering and Wood 2000). In recent years, observers have begun to collect photographic and spectrographic evidence of hybrids (Pieplow et al. 2008), and an increase in reports suggests that the frequency of hybridization is on the upswing. In this article we review reports of hybrid phoebes in order to document the extent of this phenomenon, and we report several observations of successful nesting by mixed-species pairs and by apparent hybrids paired with phenotypically pure phoebes. These observations raise the question of whether genetic introgression may be occurring between Black and Eastern Phoebes where their ranges overlap, and suggest that barriers to gene flow between the two species could be relatively low, despite their quite different plumages and vocal repertoires. The contact zone between these species may now cover much of the southeastern quadrant of Colorado and part of northeastern New Mexico (Pieplow et al. 2008), and it appears that hybridization may be widespread in this region.

So far, no specimens or genetic samples are known to exist from purported Black \times Eastern Phoebes. Three types of evidence of hybridization have been collected, sometimes concurrently:

- Observations of birds with **intermediate plumage** (documented in descriptions, photos, or videos);
- Observations of birds with **intermediate vocalizations** (documented in descriptions, audio recordings, or videos);
- Observations of **mixed-species pairings and nesting attempts**.

Plumage

Intermediate plumage is the most frequently reported evidence of hybrid phoebes, and its significance is perhaps obvious. McCarthy (2006) argues that “when birds have many traits that are intermediate between those of two other types, it is more than merely possible that they are hybrids—it is *probable*.”

The various reports of intermediate plumage documented in this article run the gamut from birds resembling typical Black Phoebes to those resembling typical Eastern Phoebes, with many combinations of intergrading features in between. The wide variation, including a



Fig. 1. Hybrid phoebe, east of Florence, 9 Apr 2010. This bird's song and calls appear in Fig. 11 and Fig. 13. Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 2. Apparent hybrid phoebe nestlings, east of Florence, 27 May 2010. Some Eastern Phoebe nestlings may be this dark. Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 3. Apparent hybrid phoebe, east of Florence, 2 Jul 2009. Note dark belly patches. Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 4. Juvenile apparent hybrid phoebe, Cañon City, 9 Jul 2011. Note pale throat. Photo by SeEtta Moss

significant number of birds that differ from the norm in only one or two subtle ways, suggests that backcrosses are not infrequent. It also suggests that observers should carefully study all phoebes for signs of hybridization, especially in the following characters (listed in rough order from most useful to least useful):

Belly contrast: In pure Black Phoebes, the snowy-white belly and vent are sharply demarcated from the charcoal color of the rest of the bird, and the white patch extends slightly up the center of the breast in an inverted “V.” In pure Eastern Phoebes, the underparts are primarily off-white, except for the sides of the upper breast, which blend gradually into a darker grayish-brown, giving the birds a vaguely “vested” appearance. Hybrid birds often show a pattern similar to that of Black Phoebe, but with a smudgy or indistinct border between the dark upperparts and the pale underparts (Fig. 1; see also photos in Pieplow et al. 2008). Some hybrids may appear more similar to Eastern Phoebes, but with the dark patches on the sides of the breast expanded and darkened (Fig. 2). Other apparent hybrids show extensive mottling below (Fig. 3).

In some hybrids that resemble Eastern Phoebes, the dark patches on the sides of the breast may meet in the middle, creating a “buttoned-up vest,” as it were. Some juvenile pure Eastern Phoebes can also sport this “buttoned-up vest,” so noting the age of the bird may be important.

Throat color: The throats of pure Black Phoebes are dark charcoal-gray, the same color as the rest of the head and the upper breast, from the nestling stage through adulthood. The throats of pure Eastern Phoebes are pale, nearly white, contrasting strongly with the dark-brown head color but blending into it gradually in the malar area and along the lower border of the auriculars. A commonly reported hybrid plumage appears largely typical of a Black Phoebe, but with a contrastingly paler throat (Fig. 4). “Eastern Phoebes” with throats darker than the center of the breast may also be hybrids. Some apparent hybrids resemble Eastern Phoebes but show a distinct dark “necklace” cutting across the bottom of a pale throat, separating it from the pale breast (Figs. 5-6).

Cinnamon forehead: Some phoebes have been found with patches of rich cinnamon brown on the forehead (Fig. 3, Figs. 7-8), a color that does not seem typical of either parent species. Some have shown this color on the tail as well. The exact significance of such coloration is unknown, but it seems a likely indicator of mixed ancestry.

Belly/vent color: The belly and vent of pure Black Phoebes are immaculate white, while the same area in pure Eastern Phoebes is

slightly grayer and often tinged with yellow. A yellowish wash on the belly of a “Black Phoebe” may be an indicator of hybridization.

Head/back contrast: Pure Black Phoebes are nearly concolorous above, with little contrast between the dark head and dark back, while pure Eastern Phoebes can show marked contrast between a darker head and a paler back. In both species, however, this character can be strongly influenced by lighting conditions and viewing angle, with Black Phoebes sometimes appearing to sport much darker heads than backs, and Eastern Phoebes sometimes showing little head/back contrast. Observers seeking hybrids should look for “Black Phoebes” with contrastingly paler backs and “Eastern Phoebes” with backs nearly as dark as their heads, but this field mark should only be used with caution and in conjunction with other marks.

Vocalizations

Intermediate vocalizations are less frequently documented than intermediate plumages, but perhaps an even better indicator of hybridization. Phoebes are suboscine birds in the family Tyrannidae, a family in which all vocalizations are believed to be innate—that is, genetically controlled, not learned (Kroodsma 1984, Kroodsma and Konishi 1991). Since hybrids have mixed genes, they are expected to give intermediate vocalizations, and since phoebe songs are not learned, intermediate vocalizations can be considered strong evidence of hybridity (see discussion in Pieplow et al. 2008).

The typical songs of Black Phoebe (Fig. 9a-b) and Eastern Phoebe (Fig. 9c-d) consist of two complex phrases that are usually alternated. In both species, the two song phrases share identical introductory portions but differ in their terminal portions. Both species typically sing highly stereotyped songs during the breeding season, meaning that consecutive renditions of the same song phrase from the same individual bird are usually indistinguishable from one another on the spectrogram. Black Phoebe’s song is markedly higher-pitched and much less rapidly modulated (burry) than Eastern Phoebe’s song.

Three hybrid phoebes have been recorded singing in Colorado, and all three sang songs that were poorly stereotyped, particularly in the introductory portion. The first bird, recorded in Loveland by Nathan Pieplow, sang with three song phrases, not two (Fig. 10). Two of the song phrases were complex, consisting of a non-stereotyped introductory portion and a stereotyped terminal portion. The third was simple, lacking an introductory portion, and was poorly stereotyped. For extensive discussion of this bird’s song, see McCallum and Pieplow (2010).

The second singing hybrid phoebe was videotaped by SeEtta Moss

in Cañon City on 9 April 2010. Only a few of its song phrases were audio recorded, but they show many similarities to the song of the Loveland hybrid, potentially including the three-part syntax (Fig. 11). However, it is possible that the last phrase in Fig. 11, which resembles the simple third phrase of the Loveland bird, may not be a song phrase at all, but instead related to the chatter calls that the Cañon City bird gives on the same recording (Fig. 12). Chatter vocalizations (CV) are fairly common in interpair interactions of Black and Eastern Phoebes (Smith 1969, 1970b). Not surprisingly, the chatter calls of the Cañon City hybrid were intermediate in form between those of its parent species (see spectrograms in Smith 1969, 1970b).

The third singing hybrid phoebe was recorded by Pieplow in Boulder on 24 April 2011. Like the other hybrids, it sang two complex phrases with a poorly stereotyped introductory portion (Fig. 13). However, the terminal portion of one of this bird's song phrases (the highly modulated or burry one) was also very poorly stereotyped. In several minutes of uninterrupted singing, this bird never produced a third song phrase, but its burry phrase was so variable that it sounded to the ear like the bird was producing at least three different song phrases, unlike a typical phoebe. In plumage this bird strongly resembled a typical Eastern Phoebe and it may well have been a backcross (see description of plumage below).

In the field, experienced observers may notice that the songs of hybrid phoebes often sound intermediate in pitch and "burriness" between the songs of Black and Eastern Phoebes. However, the differences between pure and hybrid songs can be difficult to hear, and making direct comparison in the field with recordings of typical phoebes can be very helpful. The easier characteristics to listen for are the variability of hybrid song phrases and the presence of a third song phrase. Smith (1970a) reported that Black Phoebes sometimes sing with three song phrases, but such songs are apparently rare. Songs with three phrases are unknown in Eastern Phoebes.

To document hybrids, it is important to make audio recordings whenever possible, even if they are low-quality recordings made with a mobile phone or a digital camera. Recordings of all three hybrid phoebes mentioned above can be heard at <http://earbirding.com/blog/archives/1956> and <http://earbirding.com/blog/archives/2898>.

Mixed-species Pairings and Nesting Attempts

McCarthy (2006) considers mixed-species matings to be "an unequivocal demonstration of breeding contact." Documentation of Black \times Eastern Phoebe pairings and nesting attempts is made difficult not only by the secretiveness of these birds near the nest, but

because both species breed in this region almost exclusively within a few feet of water in permanent riparian drainages, most of which are privately owned. Thus the nest sites of potential mixed pairs can be quite difficult to access and observe, as they tend to be either on private property with limited visual or physical access, or under road bridges with private property both upstream and downstream from the bridge.

Some nests and young of mixed pairs have been observed. McCarthy (2006) notes that young raised by mixed-species pairs are “usually assumed to be hybrid,” but recommends caution in this assumption due to the possibility of extra-pair matings: the adult that is caring for a fledgling may not be its biological parent. Sometimes the apparent siblings in broods raised by mixed-species pairs look quite different from one another, and it is not clear whether two parents of different species naturally produce this variability or whether it results from extra-pair matings.

REPORTS OF HYBRIDS

The following discussion lists all known reports of hybrid Black × Eastern Phoebe by geographic area.

Pueblo County, Colorado

The first presumptive observation of a mixed-species pairing between Black and Eastern Phoebe occurred in 2000 when a Black Phoebe and an Eastern Phoebe were observed at Burnt Mill Bridge, located on South Burnt Mill Road just before its terminus at South Waterbarrel Road, in Pueblo County, Colorado, by a number of birders (Leukering and Wood 2000, Leukering and Wood 2001). Leukering reported that both birds responded to a recording of an Eastern Phoebe, and that they interacted without antagonism. As she had permission to access the private property under the bridge, SeEtta Moss followed this mixed phoebe pair and visually located a nest under a rock shelf in a slickrock canyon section of the St. Charles River. She further observed both the Black Phoebe and the Eastern Phoebe frequenting this location and apparently attending to this nest, bringing food to nestlings that, due to difficult terrain, could only be heard, not seen. The appearance of the young was not observed. Leukering subsequently documented this event as “an apparent mating” (Leukering and Wood 2000).

Pieplow et al. (2008) cited a personal communication from Brandon Percival that he observed a phoebe on 29 August 2007 that appeared intermediate in plumage between Black and Eastern Phoebe at Rock Canyon in Pueblo Reservoir State Park, less than 20 miles

from the Burnt Mill Bridge. No photographs, sound recordings, or detailed descriptions of the bird are known to exist.

Fremont County, Colorado

Just upstream from Pueblo County on the Arkansas River drainage, Fremont County has been the epicenter of recent hybrid phoebe reports. The county's population of Black Phoebes has increased significantly since the species was first discovered in Cañon City in 1995 by SeEtta Moss, and it is now found during breeding season all along the 70+ miles of the Arkansas River as it winds through this county, as well as along some tributary streams and irrigation canals. Eastern Phoebes also breed in many locations in Fremont County, overlapping those locations where Black Phoebes have been observed breeding. Although Moss observed apparent hybrid phoebes in Fremont County on several occasions prior to 2009, it was in 2009 that she began making a concerted effort to document her observations.

On 15 May 2009, Moss observed an apparent hybrid phoebe near Cañon City sitting on a nest located in the same area as an apparent male Black Phoebe that appeared to be in a pair bond with her. The possible hybrid appeared in most ways typical of an Eastern Phoebe, but had a dark feather "necklace" across the base of the throat (Figs. 5-6). Though the nesting attempt failed, the mixed pair was observed closely, in fact almost daily, and in sufficiently close proximity to observe many interactions. The nest, which was on the underside of a footbridge, could only be seen by hanging the top half of one's body over the edge. This footbridge had been used the previous several years by nesting pairs of Black Phoebes. From an upside-down view the nest could be seen attached to a concrete pier underneath the center of the bridge. Moss did observe the apparent hybrid sitting on the nest on one occasion but she quickly flushed. Subsequently, when the bird was observed flying under the footbridge and staying there, it was assumed that she was sitting on the nest.

The apparent male Black Phoebe appeared to be at the proverbial "beck and call" of the female apparent hybrid. For example, she would leave the nest calling vociferously and he would fly in to where she was perched within less than 30 seconds, and often in less than 10 seconds, from where he had been perched in a tree about 40 feet from the nest location. The male Black Phoebe started bringing food to the apparent hybrid when she would come out from under the footbridge. When she would not take the food from him, the Black Phoebe would fly under the bridge in what appeared to be an attempt to bring the food to the nest himself; however, he would always fly back out with the insects still in his mouth and eventually consume

them. This went on until 8 June, over two weeks from when the female was first seen sitting on the nest and well beyond the time when the eggs should have hatched. Eventually she stopped spending time under the footbridge, though she stayed nearby and would call whenever someone went near the nest area. The Black Phoebe also stayed in the area where the nest was located for another week, showing protectiveness by chasing off other birds that came near the nest. After remaining in the area for about another two weeks, both phoebes moved away.

On 2 July 2009, Moss found and photographed an apparent hybrid east of Florence, Colorado (Fig. 3), which showed whitish underparts with some black on the chin and the throat and extensive blackish patches on the flanks, extending into the breast and belly areas. It also had a small cinnamon-brown patch on its forehead. Moss heard this bird sing like an Eastern Phoebe.

Moss and another birder found a probable Black \times Eastern hybrid feeding a nestling in August 2009 along a tributary of the Arkansas River near Florence. This probable hybrid looked more like an Eastern but repeatedly gave a “tseep” call that sounded similar to that of a Black Phoebe. There was a second, silent phoebe in juvenile plumage a few hundred feet away that may have been a fledged offspring of the adult. This was the first phoebe of any kind (other than Say’s) to be found nesting away from the Arkansas River in Fremont County.

On 9 April 2010, Moss found a phoebe east of Florence with a smudgy border between dark upperparts and pale underparts, with some white feathering extending all the way up the center of the breast to the chin (Fig. 1). Moss obtained a brief video of this bird singing (Fig. 11) and giving chatter vocalizations (Fig. 12). Both the song and the chatter vocalizations were intermediate between those of the parent species (see discussion above).

Moss was unable to return to the location of the videotaped hybrid for about a month, but when she returned in May 2010, she found a different-looking probable hybrid paired with an apparent Eastern Phoebe. The probable hybrid had a white belly that intruded in an inverted “v” shape into the black breast area, and a white throat. In this instance Moss was able to photograph the nestlings in the nest on 27 May (Fig. 2). Two of the young birds fledged later that day, and the other two fledged the following day. Moss was able to follow them after they fledged for several days as the parents moved them farther from the nest site. The apparent Eastern Phoebe parent was likely the female, as it attended the nest most often. The fledglings showed variable amounts of white and dark in the underparts.

In late July of 2010, Moss documented another successful nesting



Fig. 5. Apparent hybrid phoebe, near Cañon City, 21 May 2009. Note dark "necklace." Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 6. Same individual as in Fig. 5. Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 7. Apparent hybrid phoebe, near Cañon City, 26 Mar 2011. Note brown forehead. Photo by SeEtta Moss



Fig. 8. Apparent hybrid phoebe, near Coaldale, 8 May 2011. Note brown forehead. Photo by SeEtta Moss

of an intermediate-plumaged probable Black \times Eastern hybrid with a mostly typical Black Phoebe on private property near Cañon City. The probable hybrid in this mixed mating was a very distinctive bird that appeared similar to a Black Phoebe but with a brown patch on its forehead and brownish tail feathers. Its mate had somewhat unusual but not clearly intermediate plumage; its head and upper back showed a more brownish appearance than is typical for pure Black Phoebes. Moss was fortunate to be near the nest site when at least two of the possible three young phoebes fledged. She subsequently followed the family daily for 10 days, obtaining both still and video documentation of the family as it moved downstream from the nest site. On the fourth day post-fledging, the phoebes had moved a half mile from the nest site, which is quite impressive for four-day-old fledglings. The fledglings fit the description of typical young Black Phoebes, with very dark black head, upper back, and breast; white belly intruding into the breast area in an inverted “v”; cinnamon wingbars; and buffy tips to the body feathers.

Apparently the same brown-fronted probable hybrid, again paired with an apparent Black Phoebe, was photographed at the same location on 26 March 2011 (Fig. 7). Another brown-fronted bird (Fig. 8), or possibly the same one, also paired with a seemingly normal Black Phoebe, was photographed on 8 May 2011 near Coaldale, Fremont County, about 30 miles upstream from the prior location.

Starting in the early spring of 2011, Moss observed a very unusual situation along the Arkansas River across from the Cañon City Riverwalk. On 5 April, she observed a Black Phoebe associating with a possible hybrid phoebe that looked like an Eastern but with a dark “necklace.” They appeared to be in a pair bond as they foraged near each other without antagonistic behavior next to a large culvert that looked like a good phoebe nest site. Before any nesting began, however, the Eastern/possible hybrid phoebe disappeared, and two apparent Black Phoebes engaged in building a nest in that culvert. Both birds took part in bringing nest material to the site, though one appeared to be doing most of the building. After a few days they had built an unusually tall but otherwise typical Black Phoebe nest.

On 6 June, only one Black Phoebe was observed, an apparent male, along with the Eastern/possible hybrid, likely the same bird that was there on 5 April. The possible hybrid began building a nest directly adjacent to the first nest built by the two Black Phoebes. This time the Black Phoebe did not assist in the nest building, though it stayed close by and interacted occasionally with the other bird. They both also would forage near each other, behavior that is consistent with a mated pair. Several days after nest construction ended, the

female began sitting on the nest, which was much shorter than the other nest adjacent to it and more typical for both Eastern and Black Phoebes. When the eggs hatched, the male Black Phoebe assisted the female in bringing food to the nest. At least one nestling could be seen from across the river, but there may have been more than one in the nest.

In July, the nestling(s) apparently fledged, as the parents stopped going to the nest with food and the nest appeared empty. The parent bird would return to the shrubs near the nest site with food. Finally, one of the fledglings was observed and photographed by Moss on 9 July (Fig. 4); it had intermediate plumage, with a whitish throat, charcoal gray upperparts and breast like a classic Black Phoebe, and a white belly intruding into the breast area in an inverted "V." Later she saw a second but clearly different phoebe in juvenile plumage that looked more like an Eastern Phoebe, but with some intermediate characteristics, including a lack of yellowish tones on the underparts that was not likely an artifact, as the bird was viewed from various angles and in various lighting conditions.

Las Animas County, Colorado

On 20 July 2008, Ted Floyd and Chip Clouse reported up to three possible hybrid phoebes along the Purgatoire River and Trinchera Creek (Pieplow et al. 2008). This remains the only report from the county, but nearly all of its drainages are privately owned, so there are few opportunities for observations. Floyd and Clouse were in an area that is not normally open to the public (pers. comm.).

Colorado Front Range

The Front Range region of Colorado is not normally home to Black or Eastern Phoebes, but three apparent hybrids have been found there. In April and May 2007 a male bird with intermediate

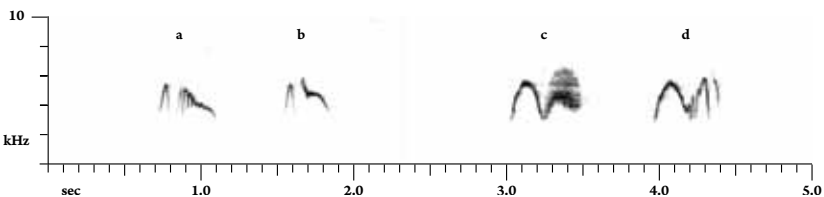


Fig. 9. Spectrogram of typical song phrases of Black Phoebe (a, b; Clark County, Nevada) and Eastern Phoebe (c, d; Baca County, Colorado). Note that the beginning portion of each song phrase is identical within each species. Recordings by Nathan Pieplow

plumage and intermediate vocalizations was well documented along the Big Thompson River in Loveland, Larimer County, where it initiated a brief nesting attempt with an apparently pure Black Phoebe. This individual was the subject of the first published report of hybridization in the genus *Sayornis* (Pieplow et al. 2008), and its song is depicted in Fig. 10.

On 8 May 2009, Walter Szeliga reported a possible hybrid phoebe from the Twin Lakes area of Boulder, Boulder County. In a post to the COBirds listserv, Szeliga wrote, “My first impression was that the bird was a Black Phoebe since the upperparts and back of the bird were jet black. However, the chin was white and the belly was stained yellow, like an Eastern Phoebe. Overall, the bird gave the same impression as the Larimer County hybrid Black \times Eastern Phoebe from a few years back” (Szeliga 2009).

On 24 April 2011, Nathan Pieplow made audio recordings (Fig. 13) of a phoebe singing an intermediate song at Twin Lakes in Boulder, about half a mile west of the location of Szeliga’s sighting. Phenotypically, the bird closely resembled an Eastern Phoebe, with a dark brown head, lighter brown upperparts and wings with a slightly grayish tone, and faint brownish wingbars. Its underparts were mostly

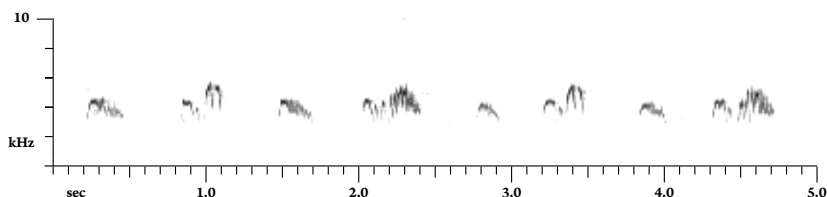


Fig. 10. Spectrogram of song of hybrid phoebe, Loveland, Larimer County, Colorado, 2 May 2007. Note the three different types of phrases, and the variability of the beginning portions. This individual was the first documented hybrid phoebe (Pieplow et al. 2008, McCallum and Pieplow 2010). Recording by Nathan Pieplow

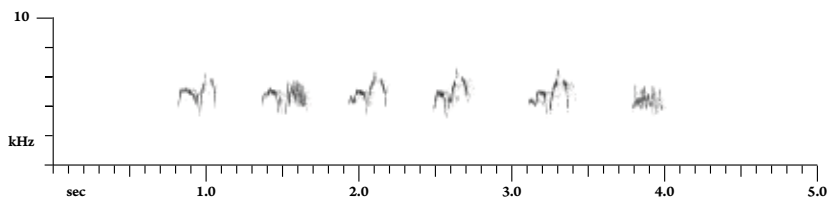


Fig. 11. Spectrogram of hybrid phoebe song, Fremont County, Colorado, 9 April 2010. Note variability of beginning portions. Last phrase may be part of chatter call (see Fig. 13). From video recording by SeEtta Moss

pale, but slightly darker on the upper breast, fading gradually down to the belly, which had a slightly yellowish cream color. From the front the bird had a very vague “vested” appearance caused by the slight contrast between darker flanks and yellow central belly. Unfortunately, the precise color of the throat and the level of contrast between throat and face were not noted.

New Mexico

New Mexico has produced two reports of possible hybrid phoebes. The first came from the upper Pecos River in San Miguel County on 4 April 1981, where John Hubbard reported a pair of Eastern Phoebes, but included the note “one darker, may be hybrid with Black Phoebe?” (NMOS 2007, database record 14355).

In a post to the KSBIRD-L listserv on 15 June 2004, Robert Broyles, Jr. reported finding a male hybrid Black \times Eastern Phoebe paired with a female Eastern Phoebe in Algodones, Sandoval County, New Mexico, during the week of 6 June 2004. According to his description, “the male had a black head and throat, like a Black, but its wings and back were like an Eastern, even down to the faint wingbars” (Broyles 2004). He reported that the female was incubating on a nest.

Discussion

The number of reports of hybrid and cross-paired Black and East-

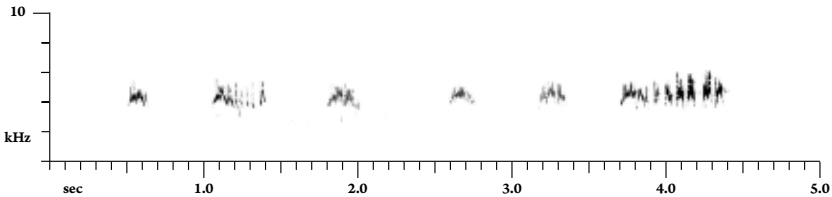


Fig. 12. Spectrogram of chatter calls of hybrid phoebe (same individual as in Fig. 11), given during interpair interaction. From video recording by SeEtta Moss

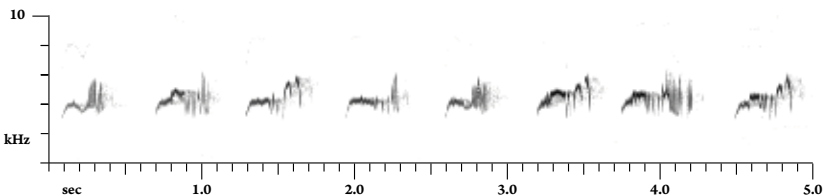


Fig. 13. Spectrogram of hybrid phoebe song, Boulder County, Colorado, 24 April 2011. Note variability of entire song. Recording by Nathan Pieplow

ern Phoebes in the past ten years strongly suggests that hybridization between these species is of regular occurrence in the contact zone. The broad variation in intermediate plumages and the frequency of reports of hybrids paired with pure birds seem to indicate that hybrids tend to be fertile, and backcrosses may be frequent. If hybrids and backcrosses are successfully reproducing with “pure” phoebes, further mixed pairings could eventually lead, at least in this area of sympatry, to a “hybrid swarm” in which all non-Say’s Phoebes are hybrids (Al-lendorf et al. 2001).

Seeking to explain why hybridization among suboscine birds is generally rare, Graves (1992) postulated that song is likely the primary premating isolation mechanism in these birds. He reasoned that since any deviation from a typical song is likely of genetic origin, females should be unlikely to choose mates with heterospecific or hybrid songs, and he further speculated that since song varies little from male to male, female errors in species recognition should be rare.

A few recent studies have provided some support for these hypotheses (e.g., Seddon and Tobias 2007), but regular hybridization by phoebes may call Graves’ ideas into question. It seems clear that barriers to hybridization between Black and Eastern Phoebes are significantly lower than in most other suboscine species, a surprising finding given their very different songs and their distinct plumages, which are identical in males and females. In the only other zone of regular suboscine hybridization that we know of—the contact zone between Cordilleran and Pacific-slope Flycatchers in the northwestern United States—the vocal and phenotypic differences between the hybridizing taxa are less obvious to human observers, and vary along a smooth continuum between the parental forms (Rush et. al 2009, Andrew Rush, pers. comm.).

It may be that the Black and Eastern Phoebes are unique among well-differentiated suboscine species in the frequency and extent of their hybridization. Alternatively, because many of the known suboscine sister species pairs are so similar in plumage—e.g., Willow and Alder Flycatchers, Brown-crested and Great Crested Flycatchers, and Tropical and Couch’s Kingbirds—hybrids may go largely undetected (Andrew Rush, pers. comm.). This study demonstrates the need for greater attention to suboscine songs in areas of potential contact and the importance of audio recording in finding and identifying hybrids.

It is interesting that all hybrid phoebe songs recorded to date have been poorly stereotyped. It is not clear why this should be the case. It is possible that stereotypy may be related to a disruption in the seasonal hormonal levels of hybrids, since pure Black and Eastern Phoebes produce less stereotyped versions of their songs in the fall

than they do in the spring breeding season (Pieplow, pers. obs.). Alternatively, the mixing of genetic material may have disrupted quality-control circuits in the sound production centers (Arch McCallum, pers. comm.). At least one other study (Collins and Goldsmith 1998, working with captive *Coturnix* quail) has found a lack of stereotypy in hybrids, and it may be that a lack of stereotypy may be a good indicator of hybridization in many birds.

Many questions worthy of further study remain unanswered. How extensive is the contact zone between the phoebes? How frequent is hybridization throughout the contact zone? To what extent do phenotypically pure phoebes prefer to mate with one another? What are the mate choice preferences of hybrids? What are the vocal characteristics of hybrids, and how do they correlate with genetics? Perhaps most importantly, do hybrids have lower rates of survival or fertility? The ultimate fate of the hybrids will determine the stability and significance of the hybrid zone.

The phoebes have much to teach us.

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Mountain Pine Beetle

Dave Leatherman

Twenty years from now, at a woodpecker reunion somewhere within 150 miles of Granby, an old Three-toed or Hairy with worn-down mandibles and white bristles around its bill base will take aside a hatch-year newbie. “You should have been there, Woodrow! During the pine and spruce beetle outbreaks of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, every one of us had our pick of a thousand nest trees, and all the food we could eat. It was Paradise on Earth!”

As I write this, the “good old days” for woodpeckers are winding down in the high country of Grand, Jackson, Routt, Summit, Eagle, Larimer, Boulder, Clear Creek, and Gilpin Counties, and perhaps just getting started in the lower mountains of the Front Range. Even trees planted in towns and in flatland, low-elevation windbreaks are experiencing the phenomenon.

While any number of bark and wood-boring beetles may be capable of huge outbreaks in the conifer forests of the West, the subject of this column is one in particular, *Dendroctonus ponderosae*, the mountain pine beetle (MPB, Fig. 1). At present, an estimated 800,000 of Colorado’s 22 million forested acres are infested by MPB. This is down from over 1,000,000 acres in 2009 and nearly 900,000 in 2010 (Ciesla 2011). These somewhat declining numbers reflect the current epidemic “running its course” in the lodgepole pine forests of north-central Colorado, where it has raged since the mid-1990s, but the infestation maintains a significant presence in those lodgepole forests still harboring live trees. Even more importantly, it has begun shifting its host to ponderosa pine in at least some parts of Larimer County. The consequences of this last trend have yet to play out.

Due to the cyclic nature of bark beetle outbreaks—which usually occur 50-300 years apart on average in any one spot and last about 10 years locally once they start—and also due



Fig. 1 Adult mountain pine beetle (actual length about 1/4 inch). Photo by Dave Leatherman

to their dramatic effect on woodpeckers, this system has been a frequent subject of study. Considerable literature documents the cause-and-effect interplay of bark beetles and woodpeckers along with the inseparable factor of wildfire.

Bark beetles like MPB thrive on pine forests under stress. Stress in pines can accrue from many sources, but the most important are adverse weather (especially drought and excessive heat), old age, excessive forest density, and fire. Bark beetles are one natural way that old forests renew themselves. By transforming pines from pitch-laden living plants to giant pieces of dead wood, bark beetles allow the addition of scavengers to the many phytophagous (wood-eating) and carnivorous organisms already in the ecosystem.

Pine Beetle Biology

Mountain pine beetles and the other bark beetles are newly classified as weevils. That is, they fall within the subfamily Scolytinae in the family Curculionidae. There are some 6000 species of bark beetles worldwide, about 500 in the United States, and about 100 in Colorado. Insects account for roughly 90% of the tree mortality in U.S., with bark beetles responsible for about 60% of this, killing an average of about 10 million trees per year since 1865 (Wood 1982). MPB is perhaps the most important of our bark beetles, both ecologically and economically, on account of its effect on human endeavors.

Bark beetles spend a lot of time in the dark. This is because they develop under the bark of their host tree. Eggs are deposited by the female beetles in a matrix of food (the relatively thin layer of phloem tissue between the bark and wood), in which their young will feed and mature. In MPB, the developmental time from egg to larva to pupa to adult has historically been exactly one year.

The MPB calendar begins on about the first of August, give or take a few weeks, at least according to “the book.” But due to the influence of climate change, “the book” is undergoing significant revision in some locales. Homeowners, forest managers, and interested readers should go outside and personally observe the version of “the book” describing the forest at hand.

Only during dispersal—that is, when newly formed adults emerge from recently-killed pines to fly and attack a new set of trees—are MPBs found outside the recesses of the inner bark. On that grand and glorious day in midsummer when the first MPB chews through the thick trunk bark of the large-diameter pine in which it developed, sunlight bathes its frons (forehead). A kaleidoscopic image of mountains and trees appears for the first time. The scent of coniferous resins must be overwhelming to its antennal senses. The time has come

to test its flying wings. Lifting its hard wings, the elytra which form the hard covering of the abdomen, the beetle unfolds its transparent flying wings and sets itself aloft.

In MPB, a monogamous species, the females emerge first. It is their job to find suitable pine hosts for the next generation of beetles. Once they find a suitable tree, they attract males with an aggregating pheromone, a species-specific “perfume” produced by modifying terpenes and other materials found in pine resin. This volatile substance attracts a critical mass of beetles for the purpose of overwhelming the pitch defense systems of the host trees under siege. If there is a robust population of MPBs within the influence zone of the initial pioneering females, the result is often referred to as a “mass attack.” Several hundred beetles arrive at the same big pine, pair up, and bore into its bark within a period of a few days.

The house-hunting females chew out little cavities, called “nuptial chambers,” just beneath the bark. After “pick-up lines”—chirps actually—the male enters the female’s domain. Each couple first fights as a test of fitness, and then, assuming the test is passed, they mate repeatedly. Usually a glob of irregular resin, a “pitch tube,” forms over the entry point of each pair. For humans, this is usually the first outward sign that a tree is under attack.

Once the female is fertilized, she soon leaves the male literally in the dust (or “frass”) and begins an arduous vertical tunnel excavation of several inches through the tree’s phloem layer, laying dozens of eggs as she goes. (At this point, from the male’s point of view, Peggy Lee’s 1969 song “Is That All There Is?” would be appropriate). The larvae hatch, usually in a matter of weeks, and for the next several months excavate feeding tunnels of their own roughly perpendicular to the vertical tunnel of their mother. The resultant system of trails is referred to as a “gallery pattern” (Fig. 2). The gallery pattern of each bark beetle species is fairly distinctive, and MPB’s is particularly



Fig. 2. Several gallery patterns of MPB evident after bark has been removed by hatchet. Vertical egg galleries made by females shortly after attack most evident. Also evident are subsequent horizontal larval tunnels and bluestain. Ponderosa pine on Monarch Pass. Photo by Dave Leatherman

unique. Central to the process is the introduction of a precise suite of fungi, collectively known as “bluestain,” that function in a myriad of roles, many not yet understood. Their most important role is to enhance the nutritional content of the phloem for the beetles, which is key to beetle survival and success.

Also involved in the beetle/tree battle are yeasts, bacteria, hitchhiking mites, parasitic wasps, predaceous flies and beetles, secondary wood-boring beetles, and wasps with ovipositors thick enough to penetrate half an inch into the outer wood rings. These and many, many more players are all interwoven in the fascinating world of the MPB. And, yes, there are hungry birds.

A Feast for Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are the primary benefactors of population surges by MPB (Fig. 3). Piced bills are designed to whack away the thick bark that protects bark beetles and other wood-inhabiting insects from most other would-be enemies. Since the bulk of MPBs occur in lodgepole and ponderosa pine forests at elevations from 5000 to 9500 feet, it follows that Three-toed and Hairy are the woodpeckers most closely associated with them. Apparently they find their prey not by random “test-drilling”, but rather by both hearing and sensing vibrations that result from the tunneling activities of bark beetles beneath the bark. They can hear and feel exactly where the insects are.



Fig. 3. Hairy Woodpecker preying on mountain pine beetle in a ponderosa pine, Estes Park, Larimer County, 4 February 2007. Photo by Dave Leatherman

In my 37+ years in the field looking at MPB, Hairy Woodpecker has seemed the big winner during pine beetle epidemics. I cannot recount how many times I have chopped at the base of an infested tree trying to investigate MPBs and associates while a Hairy Woodpecker did the same 20 or more feet above me. Parallels abound. My specimens went to the collection at CSU; theirs went to their stomachs. I often wished I had a tool with both the strength and precision of a woodpecker bill; maybe at some level they wondered if they could hold a hatchet with four toes, and if so, whether this would perhaps give them a competi-

tive advantage over those “other” woodpeckers with only three. [A formal analysis of these anatomical differences gives the higher impact advantage to Three-toed and the climbing advantage to Hairy (Spring 1965).]

Various accounts put the amount of animal food in the annual diet of Hairy Woodpecker at about 75%, with bark beetles accounting for about 31% of that—that is, 23% of the total food intake (Beal 1911, McAtee 1911, Neff 1928). For certain populations and individuals, in certain seasons (particularly winter), and during bark beetle outbreak years, the utilization of bark beetles is probably much higher (Hutchison 1951, pers. obs.). A single large-diameter tree may be an individual Hairy’s focus for weeks during winter. Targets in the lower two-thirds of the trunk are mostly bark beetles (particularly from the genus *Dendroctonus*) and secondary wood-borer larvae (in the beetle families Cerambycidae and Buprestidae and the wasp family Siricidae), while targets in the upper trunk and limbs are usually secondary bark beetles (primarily engraver beetles in the genus *Ips* and twig beetles in the genera *Pityophthorus* and *Pityogenes*).

Three-toed Woodpeckers specialize more in bark beetles than do Hairy Woodpeckers (Yeager 1955, Baldwin 1960, Stallcup 1962, Goggens 1988, Steeger 1997, Fayt 1999). Further, the considerable sexual dimorphism in this species apparently allows them to partition bark beetle resources within infested trees and, thus, reduce intra-pair competition (Hogstad 1993). The smaller females exploit smaller diameter trees and the more distal parts of bigger trees (tops and limbs) than do males.

The Three-toed Woodpecker response to MPB can bring them to lower elevations than we associate with this typically high-elevation species. During summer 2011, the author discovered a nest in Rist Canyon west of Fort Collins, Larimer County, Colorado in an aspen cavity at an elevation of just over 7300 feet (see front cover photo). This location is at the lower elevational limit of their breeding range and appeared to be strongly influenced by the epidemic of MPB in both lodgepole and ponderosa pines throughout the nest area.

Much less documented is predation on MPB by birds other than these two woodpeckers. However, this is presumably due to the difficulty of documenting such predation rather than its rarity. During their brief weeks of flight (perhaps stretching into months in the new climate change scenario), undoubtedly they are opportunistically eaten by many forest bird species. No doubt Swainson’s and Hermit Thrushes, American Robins, Townsend’s Solitaires, nuthatches, chickadees, Western Tanagers, towhees, grosbeaks, sparrows, and many other birds would not pass up a flying pine beetle or one crawl-

ing past on a trunk. Swallows, “flycatching” sapsuckers, and genuine flycatchers like Olive-sided very likely take bark beetles on the wing during those mass-attack afternoons.

Recognizing Woodpecker Predation Patterns

Learning how to recognize the evidence of woodpecker predation on MPB has a practical application, as it is one of the most useful early signs that a tree is under attack, the other signs being pitch tubes and boring dust at the tree bases. Eventually, a fourth sign of attack becomes obvious when the entire tree crown turns brown.

The foremost visual clue that woodpeckers have been hunting beetles is missing outer bark. Inner bark is usually a different color than weathered outer bark, and even in the absence of obvious woodpecker holes, lighter or brighter patches of bark often indicate woodpecker activity. In winter, particularly when snow covers the ground, flakes of bark on the ground (and atop the snow) are often quite conspicuous and telling.

Once one locates a suspect tree, verification of woodpeckering further requires an interpretation of various holes in the trunk bark. Clean, round holes with a diameter of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or less are made by insects, either the bark beetles themselves during exit from the tree, or other insects burrowing into or out of the bark. Woodpeckers, by contrast, whack fairly rough-edged holes and patches of various sizes in the bark. Three-toed Woodpeckers “clean their plate” better than Hairy Woodpeckers; some MPB-infested trees worked on for weeks by Three-toed Woodpeckers appear to have been pretty thoroughly stripped of bark over several feet of the trunk surface. Hairy Woodpeckers usually leave patches of bark intact between excavation sites, resulting in a more patchy pattern of predation.

If an individual excavation patch is fairly isolated and about the size of a quarter, it was likely the site of the extraction of a lone, large, wood-boring beetle larva rather than a bark beetle larva. If the holes are penny-sized, inches apart, and somewhat lined up in a vertical fashion, they probably represent the extraction of smaller bark beetle larvae, the size of cooked grains of rice, siblings from a single gallery. The vertical pattern of holes accrues from all the larvae having fed in a horizontal direction roughly equidistant from the main vertical gallery made by their mother just after she attacked the tree months earlier.

Conclusion

Mountain pine beetle and other bark beetle epidemics are major ecological disturbances to vast forest areas, and they can often be downright frightening from a human perspective. But to wood-

peckers and other birds that exploit them, they represent the “best of times.” For birders, they can be a great source of wonderment. And who knows? Maybe the beetles will someday attract Colorado’s first Black-backed Woodpecker.

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THE HUNGRY BIRDER

Leadville

Tim Kalbach

With Lake County's *lowest* point measuring well above 9,000 feet and Mt. Elbert famed as Colorado's highest "fourteener," a visiting birder will expect "mountain birds" and shouldn't be disappointed. (If ptarmigan and rosy-finches define mountain birds for you, however, bring lots of time, stamina, and luck.) High elevation influences everything, from the extremely changeable weather to the diversity of bird life to how frequently you need to pause for breath on that steep trail. If visiting in winter, with a little luck and a well-stocked feeder, you might find all three rosy-finches by driving around Leadville side streets; the worse the weather, the better your chances.

While migration in the High Country is most often a mere trickle compared to Front Range reports, late spring storms or early fall snows can ground birds unexpectedly and provide a day list of 80–90 species, occasionally including lower-elevation overshoots like Bewick's Wren, Cedar Waxwing, or Virginia's Warbler. Twin Lakes and Turquoise Lake, while less "birdy" than the lower-elevation Park County reservoirs, often stay ice-free later into the fall than their shallower neighbors and can attract a wide range of waterbirds, including both swans, all three scoters, and the occasional flock of Barrow's Goldeneyes. The potential for rarities is good, and these lakes are visited only rarely by birders.

Brief, cool summers attract hordes of cyclists and various athletic events to the mountains, sometimes challenging a driver's patience and filling up restaurants. The town of Leadville is centrally located in one of the state's smallest counties, so stopping for a meal en

route to any trailhead or lake isn't a problem. It's a small town with limited choices (only two national chain restaurants that can't be missed on a drive through) and a fluctuating mining-town economy that isn't particularly conducive to the long-term success of new dining establishments. Several former restaurants persist as cyberspace ghosts, so don't believe everything you find with Google.

Since we all enjoy lists (admittedly or not), I'll list the restaurant options for quick reference. I've put a star (*) beside those I personally recommend.



COFFEE & BREAKFAST

***Cookies with Altitude**

717½ Harrison Avenue

(303) 720-3683, Facebook page updated daily

Mon-Thurs 6:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.; Fri-Sat 6:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.; Sun 6:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

This place serves breakfast burritos, bagels, coffee, gourmet cookies, and fudge, as well as a daily soup special. Gotta try that jalapeno fudge! There's only one kind of coffee; this isn't Starbucks. The lady behind the counter may have a county bird checklist if you ask.

Cookies with Altitude, Leadville, Lake County. Photo by Tim Kalbach

***Provin' Grounds Coffee & Bakery**

(soon to be called City on a Hill Coffee & Espresso)

508 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-0797

6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. daily

Try the Greek quiche or turkey pepper-jack croissant. The place has coffee-house choices, but you can still buy a cup of drip coffee without a ten-syllable name. The ownership and name of this establishment are in the process of changing.

D'Love Gourmet Coffee & Ice Cream

605 Harrison Avenue

Mon-Sat 10 A.M. – 5 P.M.; Sun 11 A.M. – 5 P.M. (hours may vary seasonally)

This is an ice cream/smoothie shop with lots of other items, including hot dogs, pretzels, etc.

***Tennessee Pass Restaurant/Café**

222 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-8101

7:00 A.M. to at least 9:00 P.M. daily

This is “eclectic dining,” with breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I’ve never been disappointed with a menu choice here, and there are some interesting choices!

The Golden Burro Café & Lounge

710 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-1239; www.goldenburro.com

Open daily from 6:30 A.M.

The Golden Burro has another pretty eclectic menu. It’s a good place to absorb some of the local history. The Golden Burrito is a meal in itself.

LUNCH AND DINNER

***High Mountain Pies**

115 W. 4th Street

(719) 486-5555; Facebook page

Mon 11:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.; Tues 11:30 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.; Wed-Sun 11:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.

You can’t go wrong with this local favorite pizza place. In addition to pizza they serve calzones, sandwiches, salads, ribs, and wings. There’s limited seating inside, but outdoor tables are available during warmer weather. Listen for Warbling Vireos.

Szechuan Taste II

500 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-0484

Fri-Sat 11:00 A.M. to 9:30 P.M.; Sun-Thu 11:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.

Here you can expect the standard American Chinese menu. Service is fast and it’s rarely crowded. If you’re craving a bowl of hot and sour soup, this is the only place in Lake County.

***Quincy’s Steak & Spirits**

416 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-9765

Winter hours 5:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. nightly; summer hours 4:30 P.M. to 9:30 P.M.

This inexpensive local favorite is probably the only place in Leadville where you may have to wait to get a seat.

It’s a dinner-only steak-and-potato establishment with a very limited menu, but it’s done well. Sunday through Thursday they serve filet mignon; Friday and Saturday they have prime rib. Vegetarian lasagna is the only non-carnivorous choice.

***Zichittella's Italian**

422 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-1298

Tues-Sun 11:30-9:30; breakfast served 7:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.

Good Italian food is served here in a quiet atmosphere. Service can be slow, but it's usually worth the wait.

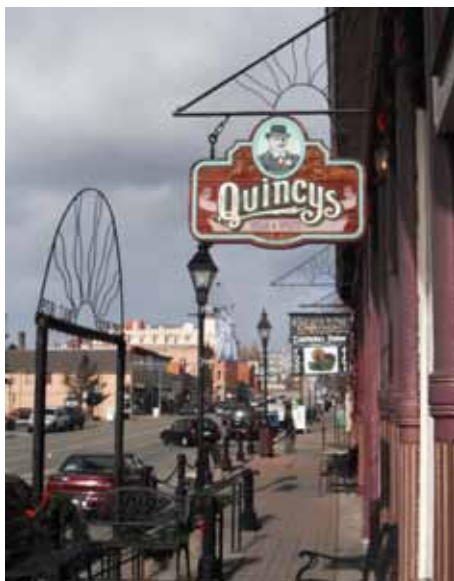
***Manuelita's Restaurant**

311 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-0292; www.manuelitasrestaurant.com

Daily 10:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.

Right next to the Silver Dollar Saloon, Manuelita's serves good food, including seafood choices. The menu is available online. It's the only Mexican restaurant on the main drag (Harrison Avenue).



Quincy's Steaks and Spirits, Leadville, Lake County. Photo by Tim Kalbach

***The Grill Bar & Café**

715 Elm Street

(719) 486-9930; www.grillbarcafe.com

Opens for dinner at 4:00 P.M. every day except Tuesdays; lunch served in summer on Sundays starting at noon; closes for the holidays.

An excellent Mexican restaurant with a full bar, The Grill is often crowded.

Casa Blanca Restaurant

118 E. 2nd Street

(719) 486-9969

Mon-Sat 11:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.; closed Sun

A Mexican place that takes cash only.

ADDITIONAL CHOICES

Gringo's

102 Mountain View Drive (just west of the traffic light by Safeway)

(719) 486-3227

10:30 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. every day

Gringo's serves Mexican/American food (burgers and fries, burritos and tacos); it has a drive-through, a true rarity in Leadville.

Wild Bill's Hamburgers & Ice Cream

200 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-0533

Open for lunch and dinner

Wild Bill's has an average hamburgers-and-fries menu; they don't accept checks.

Pastime Café Bar

120 W. 2nd Street

(719) 486-9434

Open for lunch and dinner

This too is hamburgers-and-fries fare; don't expect fast food. Cash only.

Silver Dollar Saloon

315 Harrison Avenue

(719) 486-9914

11:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. daily

The menu has standard burgers, soups, and sandwiches.



Pastime Café and Bar, Leadville, Lake County. Photo by Tim Kalbach

Callaway's

Reservations: (800) 748-2004; office: (719) 486-1418; www.delawarehotel.com

700 Harrison Avenue

Open spring and summer only; check with office for hours.

This is an interesting historical hotel with gift shops.

BEST-KEPT LOCAL SECRET

The cafeteria at Colorado Mountain College's Timberline Campus in Leadville is open to the public and offers the best lunch value in town, but is only open when classes are in session. To get there, head south on College Road off of Highway 24 as it leaves the southwest corner of town. That seemingly endless song you hear on your way in? Just another Red Crossbill.

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The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Bird Records Committee: Twenty-five Years (1972–1996)

Jack Reddall

[Editor's note: This interesting account of the founding of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) was found among many other papers in a box left to the new CBRC Chair, Doug Faulkner, by the late Chair, Larry Semo. The account was written in 1996 by Jack Reddall, a former Chair who passed away in 2001. We publish it here for the first time, unedited. The narrative was accompanied by an annotated version of the official CFO state checklist as it stood in 1996, with notes on many first state records, the number of accepted vs. rejected reports of each species, etcetera. Those wishing to view the unabridged document, including the checklist, can find it on the CFO website at <http://cfobirds.org/records/reports.html>]

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Bird Records Committee (née the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Official Records Committee) recently concluded its review of Sight Record Reports submitted for 1996. This rounded out 25 years that the Committee has been reviewing sight reports of rare and unusual species observed within the state and ruling on their validity. Since its inception in 1972, the Committee has received 2211 records covering 349 species, 4 hybrids and 3 records assigned only to genus which were submitted by Colorado field observers as well as out-of-state observers (for an average of 88.4 records per year). Of this total, 2135 were reviewed and ruled upon by the Committee for an acceptance level of 80.9% (1727 records). An additional 76 records were also received but were not reviewed by the Committee, primarily because the reported species was not on a current "Review List" at a particular point in time. Currently there are 2784 individual Sight Record Reports supporting the 2211 records contained in the Committee's files housed in the Department of Zoology at the Denver Museum of Natural History. These files also contain considerable correspondence and important documents covering mostly opinions from experts outside of Colorado where the Committee Chairman requested assistance in evaluating individual sightings involving difficult and/or tricky field observations.

Incorporated within the files at the Museum are 590 35mm slides covering photographs and slides submitted by field observers as cor-

roborating evidence associated with a particular Sight Record Report. All manner of photographs (large, small, color, black and white) have been submitted over the years. These have been converted to 35mm slides by Museum volunteers responsible for file maintenance. All original photographs were properly catalogued and forwarded to the Museum Archives Department for safekeeping. The 590 slides have been put into acetate folders and placed in a large ring binder for inspection by interested parties. Each slide is cross-referenced to its corresponding Sight Record Report and vice-versa. Both the record files and the photographic evidence are available to the public for review and/or research during regular Museum hours (Monday through Friday) in the Department of Zoology. There is also a video tape of a sighting of a Pomarine Jaeger on file as well as a cassette tape of a Whip-poor-will.

On October 2, 1971, Van Remsen (now Dr. J.V. Remsen, Jr., Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA) wrote a letter to Mr. Dave Lupton, Editor of the *Colorado Field Ornithologist* strongly suggesting that the CFO should be responsible for the establishment of an official State Bird List. He also presented a proposal for an Official Records Committee and a standardized, detailed sight observation sheet for reporting purposes. Mr. Remsen further stated that what stimulated his suggestion was the vast range in quality of the details of sight observations in a recent issue of the *Colorado Field Ornithologist*.

During December 1970, Mr. Dominic A. Bartol, Jr., a Colorado Springs resident, amateur photographer and birdwatcher, observed and photographed what he identified as a Gilded Flicker (*Colaptes chrysoides*) that had been coming to his yard for five days. Shortly thereafter, the Gilded Flicker sighting appeared on the Colorado Springs, December 27, 1970, Christmas Bird Count Summary (Mr. Bartol, compiler) as an undocumented report published along with other Colorado Christmas Counts in the *Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 10, page 30, November 1971. Next, the sighting was published in *American Birds*, Volume 25, Number 2, page 450 (71st Christmas Bird Count) which listed the Gilded Flicker in bold print without further details, corroboration or explanation as "seen in the area during the Count Period, but not on Count Day". A search of the 1970 Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count in their local publication, the *Aikorns*, Volume 12, Number 3, did not reveal this sighting at all!

On February 24, 1972, Mr. Michael P. Schultz of Security, Colorado wrote to Dave Lupton (*Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 11, page 2, March 1972) stating that he was greatly distressed by an undocu-

mented report of a Gilded Flicker that was included in the 1970 Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count. In his letter, Mr. Schultz stated, "to my knowledge, the Gilded Flicker has never before been recorded in the state" (the Gilded Flicker is normally a sedentary resident in desert areas from southern Arizona and southeastern California south into Mexico). Mr. Schultz continues that he contacted Mr. Bartol and received his photographs of the bird and found them lacking in detail and Mr. Bartol's recollection of the bird somewhat hazy. In closing, Mr. Schultz made a plea for the creation of an "accurate, detailed reporting system".

About the same time in Denver, Jack Reddall became interested in the Gilded Flicker controversy and wrote to Mr. Bartol asking him if he would be kind enough to send the photographs to Denver. Mr. Bartol quickly agreed and forwarded the set as requested. The pictures were black and white enlargements clearly revealing a flicker but little else. Reddall felt that the bird was probably a Yellow-shafted \times Red-shafted hybrid but that there was no way of knowing for certain based upon the photographs and Mr. Bartol had not made any written notes of his sighting.

Considerable correspondence continued to be generated over the controversy between Messrs. Schultz, Remsen, Lupton, Reddall and Bartol (*Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 12, pages 2-7, June 1972) with a letter from Remsen to Dave Lupton stating, "Concerning the controversy on the 1970 Colorado Springs Christmas Count over the 'Gilded Flicker' report, it seems odd no one has mentioned the possibility of the bird being a hybrid Red-shafted \times Yellow-shafted. All the field marks of a Gilded may have been seen and the bird could still be a hybrid with the wing coloration of a Yellow-shafted and the head pattern of Red-shafted. I think the bird is best forgotten". However, the central theme discussed throughout all of the correspondence was the obvious, urgent need for the establishment of a state records committee charged with receiving, reviewing and ruling on all sightings of rare and unusual birds in the state.

In Grand Junction, Colorado, Dr. William A. Davis, President of the Colorado Field Ornithologists and author of *Birds in Colorado*, had been following the controversy of the Gilded Flicker report with great interest. In the spring of 1972, Dr. Davis and Jack Reddall met in Denver to discuss the matter. A plan for the creation of an "Official Records Committee" was drawn up by the two which Dr. Davis presented to the CFO Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting in Boulder on May 20, 1972. The Board approved the plan and on May 30, 1972, the Official Records Committee came into being and [was] charged with the following duties:

- a) to establish criteria for records of birds in Colorado, including a standard form reporting sight records.
- b) to draw up a Colorado State Bird List based upon these criteria and publish it.
- c) to review new reports of species new to the state or of rarity and decide on the acceptability of the record.
- d) to maintain the records.

Charter Members of the Official Records Committee

Jack Reddall, Chairman, Englewood
 Dr. William A. Davis, Grand Junction
 Dave Griffiths, Pueblo
 Dr. Paul Julian, Boulder
 Hugh Kingery, Denver
 Dr. Thompson Marsh, Denver
 Richard Stransky, Durango

The first General Meeting of the Official Records Committee was held on May 18, 1973 at the Stater Hotel in Durango in conjunction with the Eleventh Annual CFO Convention. During this meeting, Dr. Davis presented the Bylaws of the CFO Official Records Committee which he had drawn up and they were adopted by the Committee on the following day, May 19, 1973 (*Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 18, pages 4-8, December 1973).

The first Official State List of the Birds of Colorado was compiled by the Committee as of June 1, 1973, and published in the *Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 17, pages 3-14, September 1973. The list contained 426 species arranged in accordance with the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds, Fifth Edition, 1957. The 426 species were represented by 395 specimens housed in museum collections, nine were included on the basis of recognizable photographs and an additional twenty-two based upon accepted sight reports. It should be pointed out that this list and future updated lists were subjected to numerous changes involving taxonomic rulings and findings made by the American Ornithologists' Union Nomenclature and Classification Committee, new species found in Colorado and further decisions enacted by the Official Records Committee itself. The current State List of Birds stands at 458.

The first CFO Official Records Committee Report, "1973 Accepted and Not Accepted Reports of Rare and Unusual Records" appeared in the *Colorado Field Ornithologist*, No. 19, pages 19-41, March 1974. A total of 124 records were submitted, with 97 found acceptable (78.2%).

POST SCRIPT

American Birds , Volume 26, Number 2, page 145 (72nd Christmas Bird Count) published this statement by Allan D. Cruikshank:

"In the 1970 Colorado Springs Count, a Gilded Flicker, a species never recorded in the state, was accepted because of the explanation that the bird was studied carefully and photographed . A recent check of these photos reveals that they lack sufficient details to separate this bird from many hybrids that occur in the area".

As for Dominic A. Bartol, Jr., he took all of the controversy generated by his Gilded Flicker good naturedly and philosophically. On August 19, 1972, he wrote a letter to Dave Lupton in which he says, "Perhaps COLAPTES CHRYSOIDES (Gilded Flicker) is not such a bad fellow though Van Remsen suggests the bird best be forgotten. I disagree. 'Gildy' may have sparked a useful CFO validation/records committee; general increased care in observations and reporting may have been whetted; and it may be poetic that a good friend not be forgotten. My feeling is that 'Gildy' will show up again. Birds are mobile. Habitats are not. As human encroachment proceeds, many birds must shift for food, water and shelter. Weather can precipitate unusuals. Field Ornithology will help fill bird knowledge voids, but sooner each of us sharpens curiosity and does better in gathering solid data in contrast to a 'doubting Thomas' approach, the better". Well stated Mr. Bartol! Well stated! And thanks to you too, "Gildy".

In the years immediately following the Gilded Flicker episode, Dominic Bartol and I became good friends, corresponding now and then by mail. Occasionally he would inquire of me to recommend good birding "hot-spots" where he and his wife, Ellen, could travel to in order to pursue his hobby of bird photography. In return I could always expect to receive photographs of some of his best shots to keep. I still retain these pictures in my personal bird records.

In the summer of 1972, Dominic cinched the first Colorado record of a Blue-throated Hummingbird with his color photographs of a female at the home of Bernhardina Johnson on Lytle-Star Route in Colorado Springs. He provided excellent written documentation to go along with his pictures. At the end of his report was this footnote: "If 'Gildy' had only known."

The one and only time I met Dominic was on November 2, 1983. He was crammed into a small, camouflage photo blind at the residence of Martha and Ed Curry in Colorado Springs attempting to photograph the state's first record of a Brambling.

Lieutenant Colonel Dominic A. Bartol, Jr., USAF (ret.) passed away on March 7, 1988.

Jack Reddall, 1996

The 61st Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee

Doug Faulkner

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

Introduction

This 61st report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) presents the results of deliberations that took place during 2011, involving 85 reports submitted by 34 observers and documenting 61 occurrences of 36 species (or recognizable forms). Per CBRC bylaws, all accepted records received a final 7-0 or 6-1 vote to accept. Each report that was not accepted received five or fewer votes to accept.

Highlights of this report include first state records for Western Gull and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, second state records for Crested Caracara and Black-chinned Sparrow, the third state record of Ross's Gull, and the transfer of Mew Gull from the Main Review List to the Conditional Review List. With publication of this report, the state list now stands at 493 species.

Committee members voting on these reports were Coen Dexter, John Drummond, Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Rachel Hopper, Joey Kellner, Bill Maynard, Ric Olson, Bill Schmoker, Larry Semo, David Silverman, and Glenn Walbek.

Committee Functions

The Committee solicits documentation of reports in Colorado for all species published in its review list, including both the main list (http://www.cfobirds.org/records/review_list.htm) and the conditional lists (Semo et al. 2002; <http://www.cfobirds.org/records/reports.htm>), and for reports of species with no prior accepted record in Colorado. Documentary materials should be submitted online at the CBRC website (<http://www.cfobirds.org/CBRC/login.php>).

Committee News

We are saddened by the loss of Larry Semo, who held the CBRC Chair position from 2005 until his passing on 20 August 2011 (see *Colorado Birds* 45:3). Larry's many contributions to CFO included leading the CBRC during a period of transition from paper-based documentations to the online system currently in place. Upon his passing the CFO Board promptly conducted a search for a new Chair, soliciting candidate names from board members, current and former

CBRC members, and other Colorado birders. Doug Faulkner was selected as Chair and will serve in that capacity per CBRC Bylaws. Doug was a voting CBRC member for two consecutive terms (2005-2010) and held a non-voting Secretary position in 2011 until his selection as Chair. To replace him as Secretary, the CBRC welcomes Rachel Hopper as a non-voting member. Rachel brings experience as a former voting member and active contributor to the CBRC. She will assist the Chair with record and database management, particularly with the older paper documentations, videos, and slides/photos, as we prepare to make those available online.

Dave Silverman's first term on the CBRC ended on 31 December 2011. He is eligible for a second term and has agreed to continue serving as a member of the Committee.

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 during the most recent full 10-year time period (2001-2010) and including any 2011 records listed in this report. The latter number is of importance, as it is one of the criteria for a species' continuance on or removal from the statewide Main Review List (Semo et al. 2002).

The records in this report are arranged taxonomically following the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Checklist of North American Birds (AOU 1998) through the 52nd Supplement (Chesser et al. 2011). 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, the second and third rounds (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 (or people) contributed documentation; additional contributors' initials follow in alphabetical order by last name. If the finder(s) is (are) known with certainty, but did not submit documentation, those initials are underlined and presented last. Observers submitting a photograph or video capture have a dagger (†) following their initials; initials of those who submitted video 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 is listed 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” 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, abbreviations are used for Lamar Community College (LCC), Reservoir (Res.) and State Park (SP).

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Eurasian Wigeon – *Anas penelope* (38/16). An adult male was found at Lake Catamount, Routt, on 12 November 2010 (TLi; 2010-177; 7-0). This is the first record for Routt.

Red-throated Loon – *Gavia stellata* (43/15). The Committee belatedly reviewed documentation for an adult in basic plumage at Jumbo Res., Logan/Sedgwick, on 19 November 2005 (SL; 2010-67; 7-0). A very rare occurrence was the presence of two individuals at Chatfield SP, Douglas/Jefferson, where an adult was present 10-27 November 2010 and a juvenile was observed for only one day on 10 November (JK†, CW; 2010-144; 7-0). An adult was at Cherry Creek

SP, Arapahoe, on 19 November 2010 (CW, GW; 2010-150; 6-1).

Yellow-billed Loon – *Gavia adamsii* (22/7). The vast majority of Yellow-billed Loons in Colorado are found from late October through late December, so one on Blue Mesa Res., Gunnison, was most unexpected on the date of 20 June 2010 (CW†; 2010-114; 6-1). The identification was not without controversy, as some observers and some out-of-state experts thought it was a Common Loon with worn, summer-faded plumage, and one Committee member thought that the bird could not be conclusively identified as a Yellow-billed. The reporting observer provided opinion from two outside experts who both agreed that the photos pointed fa-

vorably to Yellow-billed. The species is very rare during summer along the Pacific coast of the contiguous U.S. (Wahl et al. 2005; California Bird Records Committee 2007). In the interior U.S., at least Iowa and Wyoming have single records for Yellow-billed Loon in summer (Iowa Ornithologists' Union 2009; Faulkner 2010).

Brown Pelican – *Pelecanus occidentalis* (20/8). A sub-adult at Highline Lake SP, Mesa, was documented for only 9 June 2010, although it was reported to have been present for about a week (CW†; 2010-113; 7-0). This represents the first record for Mesa and the third for the West Slope.

Reddish Egret – *Egretta rufescens* (11/6). A white-morph juvenile was observed at John Martin Res., Las Animas, from 18 August to 7 October 2010 (CW†, DN; 2010-121; 7-0). Of Colorado's 11 records, three (28%) have pertained to white-morph individuals.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – *Nyctanassa violacea* (24/10). The Committee accepted two records of this species: one of an adult at Hansen Nature Park on the southern end of Fountain Creek Regional Park, El Paso, from 16-19 April 2010 (BM†, BKP†, CW†, KL; 2010-16; 7-0), and another of an adult at Blue Spruce Pond (near Blue Spruce Drive and Willox Avenue) in Ft. Collins, Larimer, on 21 April 2010 (RH†, CW†, DE; 2010-73; 7-0).

Crested Caracara – *Caracara cheriway* (2/1). The state's second caracara made a brief visit to the Chalk Cliffs Fish Hatchery near Nathrop, Chaffee (ST†; 2010-125; 7-0). It was first reported on 6 October 2010 to a local

birder who was able to photograph and document it on 7 October. The bird was not reported after that date.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – *Tryngites subruficollis* (33/10). One was observed at a pond immediately south of the I-76 Dodd Bridge exit in Morgan on 18 August 2010 (DE; 2010-92; 7-0).

Red Phalarope – *Phalaropus fulicarius* (45/23). It seemed 2010 was a banner year for this species, with three records. The first was of an adult in basic plumage at Huerfano Lake, Pueblo, on 18 September 2010, surprisingly the first for that county since 1972 (DS; 2010-98; 7-0). Another adult in basic plumage visited the West Slope's Redlands Parkway South Pond near Grand Junction, Mesa, for at least four days, 3-6 October 2010 (RB†; 2010-124; 7-0). Another Red Phalarope, this one of indeterminate age, was at Baseline Res., Boulder, where it was documented for 30-31 October 2010, although apparently staying into early November (TF†, CW; 2010-135; 7-0).

Black-legged Kittiwake – *Rissa tridactyla* (43/19). The fall 2010 onslaught of this species into the state was evidenced by the acceptance of six records from that time period. Three of those records were published in the CBRC's 59th report (Faulkner and Semo 2011); this report publishes the remaining three. A juvenile was a one-day wonder at Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe, on 10 November 2010 (CW†, GW; 2010-143; 7-0). Another juvenile lingered for about two weeks at Union Res., Weld, 4-18 December 2010 (TE, CW†; 2010-159; 7-0). The



Ross's Gull, Cherry Creek Reservoir, Arapahoe County, 23 November 2010. Photo by Bill Maynard

sixth Black-legged Kittiwake for fall 2010, also a juvenile, visited Lake Estes, Larimer, on 20 December 2010 (JN†; 2010-178; 7-0). Although dates for these individuals overlap in a few instances, it is possible that some of these sightings may pertain to the same individual. Alas, the Committee cannot make a determination on the number of individuals in the state based on the documentation received, and it considered each occurrence as a separate record.

Little Gull – *Hydrocoloeus minutus* (27/7). An observer photographed a juvenile at Chatfield SP, Jefferson/Douglas, on 8 September 2010 (BM†, GW; 2010-95; 7-0).

Ross's Gull – *Rhodostethia rosea* (3/2). A "chaseable" Ross's Gull delighted birders from across the country at Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe, 19-23 November 2010 (GW†, PG, BM†, BKP†, BS†, JR, CW; 2010-151; 7-0). The state's first record also tarried

(at Jumbo Res., Logan/Sedgwick, from 28 April to 6 May 1983), but the second record was only seen by the reporting observer.

Mew Gull – *Larus canus* (55/35). An adult at Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe, on 21 November 2010 gave the state its 35th record in the past 10 years (JD†, BM†; 2010-153; 7-0). According to the CBRC Bylaws, this species may be removed from the

Main Review List, as the number of records exceeds an average of three per year for the most recent 10-year period. The CBRC acted upon this in December 2011, removing Mew Gull from the Main Review List, but placing it on the Conditional Review List as a Special-Case species (Semo et al. 2002). The CBRC now requests documentation for all potential first county records, as well as all sightings for counties west of the Front Range 6,000-foot contour, but excluding the Front Range counties of Boulder, Douglas, Elbert, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Pueblo, and Weld. Mew Gull is very rare on the West Slope, with two records (15 November 1992, near Mack, Mesa, and 30 March 2001, Pastorius Res., La Plata), and there are no records for the San Luis Valley or the state's central, higher-elevation counties. The number of records per county is: Pueblo (21), Weld (8), Arapahoe (7), Boulder (4), Larimer (3), Jefferson*

(2), Denver (2), and one record each for Adams, Bent, Crowley, Douglas*, El Paso, La Plata, Mesa, Sedgwick, and Yuma. The * refers to one Mew Gull at Chatfield SP observed in both Jefferson and Douglas.

Western Gull – *Larus occidentalis* (1/1). Colorado's first Western Gull was found at Chatfield SP, Douglas/Jefferson, on 1 June 2011, and was likely observed by hundreds of birders through 18 June 2011, after which its whereabouts became unknown (GW†, DA†, PG†, BM†, BKP†, NP; 2011-81; 7-0). Based on the pale saddle coloration, this adult in alternate plumage was referable to the subspecies *occidentalis*.

Western Gull is endemic to North America. The AOU (1998) states that it breeds along the Pacific Coast from southern British Columbia, Canada, to west-central Baja California, Mexico. However, pure Western Gulls may not breed north of the central Washington coast (Campbell et al. 1990, Wahl et al. 2005; see below). The species is very rare inland, even in coastal states where it breeds (Grinnell and Miller 1944; Wahl et al. 2005). A review of states bordering Colorado revealed that only Utah (Utah Bird Records Committee 2011) and New Mexico (New Mexico Bird Records Committee 2011) have accepted records for this species.

Within its restricted coastal range, two sub-

species of Western Gull are currently recognized, *occidentalis* and *wymani*. These subspecies are generally separated by saddle coloration, which is lighter gray in *occidentalis* and darker in *wymani*; however, upperparts coloration is clinal, with the lightest and darkest individuals found at the northern and southern extremes, respectively, of the species' range. Typical *wymani* breed from California's Channel Islands southward; typical *occidentalis* breed from central California to approximately 42°N; and the birds in between are intermediate in appearance (Pyle 2008). From Oregon to southern British Columbia, Western Gull and Glaucous-winged Gull (*L. glaucescens*) form a hybrid zone in which up to 77% of breeding birds are hybrids (Bell 1996, Bell 1997, Gay et al. 2005, Price 2008). Through much of this zone, hybrids have superior fitness over "pure" birds of either species (Good et al. 2000).

The hybrid zone yields a wide ar-



Mew Gull, Cherry Creek Reservoir, Arapahoe County, 21 November 2010. Photo by Bill Maynard



Long-tailed Jaeger, Cherry Creek Reservoir, Arapahoe County, 6 September 2010. Photo by Nick Komar

ray of phenotypes, essentially spanning the phenotypic gap between Glaucous-winged and Western Gull (Howell and Dunn 2007). Hybrids can also be confused with other species, particularly Thayer's (*L. thayeri*) and Slaty-backed Gulls (*L. shistisagus*; Howell and Dunn 2007).

The Chatfield gull did not show any plumage or soft part coloration indicative of a hybrid, such as an infusion of the Glaucous-winged Gull's pink orbital ring, grayish wing tips, or lighter gray saddle coloration (Howell and Dunn 2007). The Colorado gull possessed a solid, bright yellow orbital ring, black wingtips, and a saddle coloration within the expected range of variation of *occidentalis*.

Iceland Gull – *Larus glaucoides* (12/11). A first-cycle individual was at Namacqua Road pond in Loveland, Larimer, on 5 December 2010. A first-cycle individual was then documented for Cherry Creek SP., Arapahoe, 9-11 December 2010. Due to the rarity of this species, the identical plumage,

and the relatively close dates for these observations, the Committee considered these occurrences as a single report (NK†, GW†; 2010-164; 7-0). Arapahoe joins Boulder, Larimer, and Pueblo with at least two records, while Pueblo holds the lead with a total of four records, including Colorado's first and second.

Arctic Tern – *Sterna paradisaea* (15/6). An adult in alternate plumage was an unexpected surprise at Jim Hamm Pond, Boulder, on 13 June 2010 (BKP; 2010-102; 6-1). This represents only the fifth record away from the fall migratory period; all non-fall records have occurred between 31 May and mid-June.

Parasitic Jaeger – *Stercorarius parasiticus* (10/3). A juvenile at Big Johnson Res. on 11 September 2010 provided El Paso with its first county record (BM†, JD; 2010-96; 7-0).

Long-tailed Jaeger – *Stercorarius longicaudus* (17/10). A light-morph juvenile at Cherry Creek SP, Arapahoe, on 6 September 2010 furnished the third record for the location and the county (NK†, GW; 2010-94; 7-0).

Snowy Owl – *Bubo scandiacus* (18/5). The Committee received photographic documentation of an adult male collected near Sedgwick, Sedgwick, on 9 February 1967. This specimen was found in the Colorado State University specimen collection (AS†, HE; 2010-55; 7-0). More recently, a living adult male (or nearly adult male, as the bird had some black feathering on the crown) was enjoyed by many

near Peyton, *El Paso* (BKP†, BS†, CW†, SC; 2010-05; 7-0). The owl was anecdotally reported to have been in the area from 27 December 2009 to 18 February 2010, but the Committee received documentation for only the single date of 11 January 2010.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – *Archilochus colubris* (12/7). Boulder recorded its second Ruby-throated Hummingbird when an immature male visited a private residence in Longmont on 22 September 2010 (BS†; 2010-99; 7-0).

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher – *Empidonax flaviventris* (4/3). The previous CBRC Chair, Larry Semo, delayed publishing these records with the intention of writing a longer report that would include a broader perspective on the rarity and identification of this species west of the Great Plains than can be done in the standard CBRC report format. The current Chair is publishing the records herein with the hopes that someone will fulfill Semo's desire for a full accounting of regional records and identification challenges presented by the yellow *Empidonax* (Acadian, Cordilleran, Pacific-slope, and Yellow-bellied) to Colorado birders.

Colorado's first state record was provisionally accepted as a single-observer report of a bird in Pueblo, *Pueblo*, on 28 May 2000 (MJ; 2000-165; 5-2, 6-1). This report remained the only acceptable documentation of the species until one was photographed and carefully scrutinized by two observers on 13 August 2005 at Box Springs, *Crowley* (LS†, TLE; 2005-163; 7-0). As if to up the ante, the state's third record was caught and banded at

the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory banding station at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, on 24 May 2006 (BG, BM†, BKP†; 2006-86; 6-1), where biometric analysis ruled out Cordilleran and Pacific-slope Flycatchers. The biometric measurements were not presented to the Committee, but the majority of members accepted the photographic evidence and written description as supportive for Yellow-bellied. Not to be outdone, Colorado's fourth Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was recorded calling at Two Buttes Reservoir State Wildlife Area, *Baca*, on 20 May 2008 (AS s; 2008-71; 6-1).

Vermilion Flycatcher – *Pyrocephalus rubinus* (41/25). A second-year male was found at LCC, *Prowers*, on 30 April 2002 (BG; 2010-57; 7-0). A mated pair was found during a Breeding Bird Survey near Karval, *Lincoln*, on 31 May 2010 (LE†; 2010-105; 7-0). The female was observed sitting on a nest that day, but a subsequent visit in mid-June failed to find the female or nest.

Blue-headed Vireo – *Vireo solitarius* (32/23). One was nicely photographed at Cope, *Washington*, on 9 October 2010 (JK†; 2010-170; 7-0), as was another on the same date at LCC, *Prowers* (DL†; 2010-171; 7-0).

Swainson's Thrush (Russet-backed group) – *Catharus ustulatus*. A member of the russet-backed (*ustulatus*) group was banded at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, on 13 May 2010 (BG†; 2010-26; 6-1). The russet-backed group typically breeds in the humid coastal region along the North American Pacific Coast from southeastern Alaska to southern Cali-

fornia and winters from Nayarit and southern Taumalipas, Mexico, south to Panama (AOU 1998). There is one previous record of this form in Colorado: a female found dead in City Park, *Denver*, on 22 September 1934 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). Bailey and Niedrach (1965) speculated that this form may be a more regular migrant than the single record would indicate. In recent years, it appears that three have been banded at Chico Basin Ranch since 2002, so it may indeed be a rare, or even regular, migrant in Colorado. Notably, recent evidence has found that the intergradation zone between the “Russet-backed” and “Olive-backed” (*swainsoni* group) Swainson’s Thrushes is narrow (Ruegg 2008a), indicating that these two groups may represent separate species (Ruegg 2008a, b).

Wood Thrush – *Hylocichla mustelina* (32/16). One was at the Chico Basin Ranch Headquarters, *Pueblo*, from 29 April to 5 May 2010 (BKP†, BM†;

2010-18; 7-0). A male serenaded Colorado City, *Pueblo*, 20-22 May 2010 (DS; 2010-35; 7-0), while another was only observed in Sondermann Park in Colorado Springs, *El Paso*, on 21 May 2010 (BM†; 2010-37; 7-0).

Varied Thrush – *Ixoreus naevius* (42/26). This species has become somewhat expected, as there have been multiple records every fall/winter since 2000, with the exception of 2005, which had only one record. Fall 2010 provided two more records, with an adult male near Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 3 November 2010 (DS; 2010-138; 7-0) and another adult male in Longmont, *Boulder*, documented for 26 December 2010 (TD, CW†, JG; 2010-166; 7-0).

Curve-billed Thrasher – *Toxostoma curvirostra*. The second record for Jefferson made Red Rocks its winter residence, frequently visiting the feeders at the Trading Post from 27 October 2010 to 7 May 2011 (MC, NK†; 2010-136; 7-0).

Sprague’s Pipit – *Anthus spragueii* (14/9). One was nicely photographed in flight at Davidson Mesa, *Boulder*, 29-30 September 2010 (PG†, CN; 2010-101; 7-0). The state’s first and *Boulder*’s only other record occurred at Table Mountain in 1976. Another Sprague’s was also photographed at what has become a reliable location for this species during fall migration near Bonny Res., *Yuma*, on 10 October 2010 (BKP†, 2010-130; 7-0).



Wood Thrush, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo County, 2 May 2010. Photo by Bill Maynard



Sprague's Pipit, Davidson Mesa, Boulder County, 1 October 2010. Photo by Christian Nunes

Ovenbird – *Seiurus aurocapilla*. An Ovenbird, first identified on 1 June 2010 by its distinctive song, stayed on a private property near Bayfield, *Archuleta*, through 30 June 2010 (SA; 2010-110; 7-0). This is the third documented for southwestern Colorado and one of very few occurrences for the West Slope away from the Yampa River in Routt (Righter et al. 2004).

Blackburnian Warbler – *Setophaga fusca* (47/15). A female or first-year male was observed along Forest Road 504 near Glade Lake, *Dolores*, on 26 August 2010 (CD; 2010-167; 6-1). This is the first record for *Dolores* and the third for the West Slope. A first-year male was at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, on 17 September 2010 (JK, GW; 2010-168; 7-0). A first-year female was observed at Last Chance, *Washington*, on 5 November 2010 (DL†; 2010-176; 7-0).

Pine Warbler – *Setophaga pinus* (39/21). An adult male was found at Fountain Creek Regional Park, *El Paso*, on 4 December 2010, representing that county's second record and its

first since 1980 (BM†; 2010-160; 7-0). Another adult male visited both suet and seed feeders at a private residence in Evergreen, *Jefferson*, on 31 December 2010 (DW†; 2010-180; 7-0).

Eastern Towhee – *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* (19/7). A first for *Huerfano*, a female was photographed coming to a feeder at a private residence near La Veta on 6 November 2010 (PN†; 2010-141; 7-0).

Black-chinned Sparrow – *Spizella atrogularis* (2/2). An astonishing five Black-chinned Sparrows were found on private property in *La Plata* on 28 June 2010 (SA, JB†; 2010-115; 7-0). At least three males were heard singing and another two thought to be females based on behavior and plumage characteristics were documented through 20 July 2010. At the wish of the property owner, no locality details were provided with the written documentation. The occurrence was documented for the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II with generic location information.

Red Fox Sparrow – *Passerella iliaca/zaboria* (18/17). The Committee reviewed and accepted six reports of Red Fox Sparrow for fall 2010 (Table 1). The Committee first began soliciting documentation for this species group in 2000 when discussion of a potential split of Fox Sparrow into several readily identifiable species was widespread. Since then, based on accepted records, this species group appears to be a rare but regular visitor to Colorado from October through April. The list of fall 2010 accepted



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso County, 24 May 2006. Photo by Brandon Percival



Western Gull, Chatfield Reservoir, Douglas County, 1 June 2011. Photo by Glenn Walbek



Blue-headed Vireo, Cope, Washington County, 9 October 2010. Photo by Glenn Walbek

Table 1. Records of Red Fox Sparrow accepted in this report

Accession #	# of Birds	Location	Date(s)	Observers	Vote
2010-127	1	Near Kit Carson, <i>Cheyenne</i>	10/8/2010	<u>BKP</u> †	7-0
2010-128	1	Fox Ranch, <i>Yuma</i>	10/9/2010	<u>BS</u> †	7-0
2010-172	1	Chico Basin Ranch, <i>El Paso</i>	10/12/2010	<u>BM</u>	7-0
2010-175	1	LCC, <i>Prowers</i>	11/9/2010	<u>DL</u> †	7-0
2010-152	1	Residence near Lamar, <i>Prowers</i>	11/20/2010	<u>JS</u> †	7-0
2010-157	1	Residence near La Veta, <i>Huerfano</i>	11/30-12/1/2010	<u>PN</u> †	7-0

records includes first county records for *Cheyenne* and *Huerfano*.

Eastern Meadowlark – *Sturnella magna* (11/6). Two were heard calling in a mixed flock of meadowlarks at the Craver Middle School, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, 17 October 2010 (DS; 2010-131; 7-0). While meadowlarks learn songs during their first fall, calls are innate and considered diagnostic for species identification. Without optics,

the observer noted only the extensive white outer tail feathers of the flying birds. No other plumage characteristics were observed and, thus, identification to subspecies (e.g., Lilian's Meadowlark, *S. m. lilianae*) was not possible.

Purple Finch – *Carpodacus purpureus* (39/10). An apparent immature male was well described near Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 3 November 2010 (DS; 2010-137; 7-0).

REPORTERS AND CITED OBSERVERS

The CBRC graciously thanks the following individuals for submitting records of or discovering the rare species in Colorado discussed in this report: DA: David Alcock; SA: Susan Allerton; JB: Jim Beatty; RB: Robert Bradley; MC: Mark Chavez; SC: Snook Cippolletti; TD: Todd Deininger; CD: Coen Dexter; JD: John Drummond; HE: Herman Eckardt; LE: Lisa Edwards; DE: Dave Elens; DF: Doug Faulkner; TF: Ted Floyd; JG: Jane Gabrilove; PG: Peter Gent; BG: Brian Gibbons; RH: Rachel Hopper; MJ: Mark Janos; JK: Joey Kellner; NK: Nick Komar; SL: Steve Larson; DL: David Leatherman; TLe: Tony Leukering; KL: Kara Lewantowicz; TLi: Thomas Litteral; BM: Bill Maynard; PN: Polly Neldner; DN: Duane Nelson; JN: James Nelson; CN: Christian Nunes; BKP: Brandon Percival; NP: Nathan Pieplow; JR: Joe Roller; BS: Bill Schmoker; LS: Larry Semo; DS: David Silverman; AS: Andrew Spencer; JS: Jane Stulp; ST: Stephanie Thompson; GW: Glenn Walbek; DW: David Wald; CW: Cole Wild.

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Summer 2011 (June–July)

Joel Such and Marcel Such

Each summer, something seems to set the season apart from all previous summers. That something may be breeding Magnificent Hummingbirds in Boulder County (we're not joking, it has happened), a surprise Fourth of July blizzard, or a spectacular first state record. This year, multiple "somethings" set this season apart. First, there were Cassin's Sparrows everywhere. Find an open grassy area east of the Rocky Mountain foothills, and you might just hear the plaintive whistling trill of this idyllic plains species. Typically restricted to the eastern grasslands of the state, these birds were seen all the way up into the foothills above Boulder. Many counties received first breeding confirmations, and even the West Slope had its second ever sighting.

Second, there was a minor expansion of Yellow-billed Cuckoos on the far eastern plains. Though it was not as large or as noticeable as the irruption of the Cassin's Sparrows, the stealthy and easily-overlooked cuckoos expanded out of their shady haunts in eastern Colorado's riparian corridors into small, rural wood groves far removed from the cuckoo's favored cottonwoods. In the course of our eastern plains breeding bird atlas-ing this summer, we personally found three individual birds in the thin wood belts surrounding abandoned and decrepit farmsteads. This is compared to only a single bird found outside of a riparian habitat over the course of the entire first Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas (Kingery 1998). And in their "proper" habitat along the Arikaree River in Yuma County, cuckoos seemed to be everywhere. In a single one-mile stretch of an Arikaree River tributary, we confirmed an outstanding total of three breeding pairs.

Third, there were also some great rarities including a likely third state record of Crested Caracara (currently awaiting review by the CBRC). This large and striking falcon-relative from the south thrilled chasers during its three-day stay in Bent County. But by far the biggest highlight of the season was the first state record of Western Gull in Douglas and Jefferson Counties. An attractive bird in adult plumage, this Pacific Coast specialty graced Chatfield Reservoir for 18 days, providing excellent viewing opportunities for its many admirers. Interestingly, this species was ranked 13th in a 2008 analysis of the most likely new state avifaunal occurrences by Tony Leukering and Larry Semo (Leukering and Semo 2008).

Following an unusually cold and late spring, the summer season was off by about a month compared to the 2010 season. As a result, trees leafed out and insects hatched later than usual, seeming to disrupt nor-

mal bird migration patterns (Dave Leatherman, pers. comm.). During the actual summer, however, things warmed up considerably and became substantially wetter, keeping the vegetation greener much later into the season than usual across most parts of the state. The exception would be the southeastern quarter of the state and the San Luis Valley, which were still in the clutches of a drought. In Denver, June recorded 2.43 inches of rain, 0.87 inches above normal, and July totaled 3.41 inches, an incredible 1.25 inches more than average. The temperature in June was only slightly warmer than the norm, with an average of 68.2 degrees Fahrenheit, 0.06° above normal. July, on the other hand, was much warmer than normal, with the average temperature being 75.9°, a full 2.5° hotter than normal. Wind currents were quite active, with a total of 26 thunderstorms recorded during the season.

“News from the Field” contains news and reports of birds sighted in Colorado. The news is compiled from online discussion groups and rare bird alerts (RBAs), with valuable contributions from a large network of statewide informants.

We would like to thank the many contributors for sharing their sightings, as well as the regional compilers and reviewers for adding their insight to county and regional rarities and breeding species. No matter what your level of expertise, you are encouraged to send your bird reports to COBirds, cobirds@googlegroups.com, eBird, <https://ebird.org>, and/or the West Slope Birding Network, wsbn@yahoogroups.com, where all sightings are compiled and tabulated by your regional compilers and by the chairman of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC), who then sends them in taxonomic order, along with comments, to the “News from the Field” editors for summary.

Note 1 – The reports contained herein are largely unchecked, and the report editors do not necessarily vouch for their authenticity. Underlined species are those for which the CBRC requests documentation. You should submit your sightings through the CFO website at <http://cfobirds.org/CBRC/login.php>. This is the preferred method of submitting rarity records. However, if you are “technologically impaired” and require a hardcopy form, use the one on the inside of this journal’s mailing cover. Mailed documentation of rarities should be sent to CBRC chairman Doug Faulkner (address on form).

Note 2 – The names of counties are *italicized*.

Abbreviations: **m.ob.** – many observers; **Res.** – Reservoir; **SP** – State Park; **SWA** – State Wildlife Area; **USGS** – United States Geological Survey; **WS** – West Slope.

Snow Goose: Though a relatively common wintering and migrant species, this Arctic breeder is decidedly rare during the summer. Neverthe-

less, there were four reports during the period. Two were seen at NeeNoshe Res., *Kiowa*, on 4 Jun (SML, TL, MP); a single, possibly injured bird was seen on the ground at an abandoned home-site in the sandhills of *Yuma* on 7 Jun (MS, JS, RH); a single immature bird was found at Fossil Creek Res., *Larimer*, on 10 Jun (SML, TC); and the final bird was found at Russell Lakes SWA, *Saguache*, on 28 Jun (TF, BSc, ABA Camp Colorado).

Canada Goose: A high summer count of at least 1,350 came from the high-elevation location of Antero Res., *Park*, on 18 Jun (TF, AF).

Mexican Duck: One individual of this subspecies of Mallard from the southwestern United States, thought by some to be a species in its own right, was seen at Brett Gray Ranch, *Lincoln*, on 22 Jul (TF, MP, BP).

Canvasback: Uncommon in summer on the WS, three were seen at Fruitgrowers Res., *Delta*, on 9 Jun (EH).

Redhead: Scarce in summer on the eastern plains, 28 were seen on Lake Cheraw, *Otero*, on 5 Jun (SML, TL, MP).

Lesser Scaup: A high summer count for the state was furnished by the 32 observed at Antero Res., *Park*, on 18 Jun (TF, AF).

Bufflehead: Very rare in summer, a single female was found at Antero Res., *Park*, on 3 Jul (SML, CWo, JBa).

Barrow's Goldeneye: Very rarely seen anywhere in the state during the summer away from their only known breeding area in Colorado, the Flat Tops of the WS, a single female was photographed at Echo Lake, *Clear Creek*, on 20 Jul (TB).

Hooded Merganser: Extremely rare during the summer, the two spotted during the period were significant. The first of these, a suspected juvenile, was observed at Spanish Village, *Weld*, on 18 Jun (SML); and the second, a juvenile, was reported from Lake Estes, *Larimer*, on 7 Jul (SML).

Common Merganser: In an unusual plains nesting occurrence, a female and two chicks were photographed at Windsor Lake, *Weld*, on 11 Jun (SML, TC). A single adult male was also seen at Lake Beckwith, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 11 Jun (DS).

Common Loon: Two in basic-type plumage were found at Jumbo Res., *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SML); and two others were seen at Big Johnson Res., *El Paso*, on 24 Jul (TF, m.ob.).

Neotropic Cormorant: Sightings of this species in the state seem to be increasing, with two found during the period. An adult was seen at the High Plains Sportsman Club in *Crowley* on 24 Jun (BK); and an immature was photographed at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, on 10 Jul, continuing to the end of the season (SML). If accepted, these would be the 19th and 20th state records.

Great Egret: Fairly rare on the WS and in the San Luis Valley, with only one or two seen a year, a single bird was photographed at Smith Res., *Costilla*, on 4 Jun (SML, TL, MP); and two others were seen in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 16 Jul (LA).

Snowy Egret: An uncommon WS find, one continued from the spring season until 5 Jun at the Craig area ponds, *Moffat* (FL).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron: Present in the Glenmere Park heronry in

Greeley, *Weld*, throughout the season, a presumed female was seen on a nest, possibly paired with a Black-crowned Night-Heron (BK, SMI, TC). It did not seem to hatch any young.

Glossy Ibis: Though ibis are very common migrants on the eastern plains, they are quite hard to come by in the summer months. That three Glossies were seen during the period is significant, as they are far rarer than the readily seen White-faced Ibis. The first was photographed at Beebe Draw, *Weld*, on 2 Jun (SMI); another was east of Greeley, *Weld*, on 11 Jun (SMI, TC); and a final adult was seen in Spanish Village, *Weld*, on 18 Jun (SMI).

Glossy × White-faced Ibis: A single hybrid was reported this summer, from Beebe Draw, *Weld*, on 2 Jun (SMI).

Black Vulture: Rare anywhere in the state, but particularly on the WS, the two reported from *Grand* on 30 Jun were extremely noteworthy (TD).

Osprey: A single bird was found in Crested Butte, *Gunnison*, on 11 Jul (LP).

Mississippi Kite: In only the species' second occurrence in Colorado City, *Pueblo*, one was seen at the Sewage Treatment Plant on 11 Jun (DS).

Common Black-Hawk: A single bird was seen and photographed during a Victor Emanuel Nature Tour in Delta, *Delta*, on 23 Jun (LZ). If accepted by the CBRC, this would establish the 10th state record for Colorado and the 5th for the WS.

Broad-winged Hawk: An adult first seen on 5 June was later joined by a juvenile at Welchester Tree Park, *Jefferson*, remaining through 18 Jul (NL, m.ob.). Another bird was also seen at

Chatfield SP, *Jefferson*, on 20 Jul (JK et al.). Finally, three juveniles were also found in Greenhorn Meadows Park, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 30 Jul (DS).

"Kriders" × "Eastern" Red-tailed Hawk: An adult individual with this uncommon parentage was photographed in Longmont, *Boulder*, on 7 Jul (SMI).

Crested Caracara: One of the biggest highlights of the period, an adult was found at John Martin Res., *Bent*, on 7 Jul, and observed by many people before its departure on 9 Jul (DN). This occurrence was documented and will furnish the third state record if accepted by the CBRC.

Purple Gallinule: Another potential third state record was furnished by a single bird photographed at the Country Club Hills, Sterling, *Logan*, on 7 Jun (MHi).

Black Rail: At least five were at the Brett Gray Ranch, *Lincoln*, from 21-22 Jul (MP, TF, BP). These sightings extend the species' known range well north of the Arkansas River Valley in Colorado.

Snowy Plover: Unusual away from the few Colorado breeding areas, one was photographed at Smith Res., *Costilla*, on 4 Jun (SMI, TL, MP); and another was seen at Antero Res., *Park*, on 3 Jul (SMI, CWo, JBa).

Mountain Plover: Farther west than normally expected, one was seen near Coalton/Greenbelt Plateau, on the border of *Boulder*/*Jefferson*, on 16 Jun (CN, m.ob.).

Solitary Sandpiper: A bit early for a fall migrant, one was observed at the Hollydot Golf Course, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 2 Jul (DS).



Long-billed Curlew chick, south of Nee Noshe Reservoir, Kiowa County, 12 July 2011. Photo by Dave Leatherman



Northern Cardinal, Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso County, 5 June 2011. Photo by Bill Maynard



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Simmons State Wildlife Area, Yuma County, 1 July 2011. Photo by Joel Such



Prairie Warbler, Bear Creek Canyon, Jefferson County, 21 June 2011. Photo by Bill Maynard



Brown-headed Cowbird being fed by foster parent Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Grandview Cemetery, Fort Collins, Larimer County, 12 July 2011. Photo by Dave Leatherman

Greater Yellowlegs:

Casual on the WS in July, two were seen in Grand Junction, Mesa, on 10 Jul (LA); and a single bird was found east of Gunnison in *Saguache* on 13 Jul (CDe, BWr).

Willet: In two late spring sightings, one was seen at Lower Latham on 2 Jun in *Weld* (SMI) and another on 5 Jun at Lake Cheraw in *Otero* (SMI, TL, MP). The first presumed fall migrant was seen at Antero Res., Park, on 3 Jul (SMI, CWo, JBa).

Whimbrel: A late bird was photographed at Lower Latham Res., *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI).

Long-billed Curlew: A total of 15 were seen at Lake Cheraw in *Otero* on 5 Jun (SMI, TL, MP), a good distance away from their normal breeding areas in southeastern and northeastern Colorado.

Pectoral Sandpiper: A bit early was a single bird found on CR 59, *Weld*, on 30 Jul (SMI, BSc).

Stilt Sandpiper: Four were seen at NeeNoshe Res., *Kiowa*, on 4 Jun (SMI, TL, MP); and a single bird was observed on CR 59, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI).

Long-billed Dowitcher: Casual in summer on the WS until the last week of July, a single bird seen on 16 Jul in Grand Junction, Mesa (LA) was a couple of weeks ahead of schedule.

Red-necked Phalarope: Late for a spring migrant, one was seen at Lower Latham Res., *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI). An



Western Gull, Chatfield Reservoir, Douglas County, 1 June 2011. Photo by Bill Schmoker

even more unusual find was a female seen at Antero Res., Park, on 15 Jun (VT).

Laughing Gull: A first-summer plumaged bird was seen at Chatfield SP, *Douglas*, on 9 Jun (GW).

Franklin's Gull: The fourteen seen at Antero Res., Park, on 18 Jun were notable both for the late date and for the birds' behavior—sitting amid aquatic vegetation as if nesting (TF, AF).

Rough-billed Gull: Uncommon in *Mineral*, a single bird was seen on the FR 523 ranch pond, *Mineral*, on 28 Jul (CDe, BWr).

Western Gull: The highlight of the season, an adult bird showed up at Chatfield Res., *Douglas/Jefferson*, where it remained to the delight of many for a total of 18 days from 1-18 Jun (GW, m.ob.). This first state record has already been accepted by the CBRC (see page 50 of this journal).

Least Tern: Slightly out-of-range at

Lake Cheraw, Otero, was one seen on 5 Jun (SML, TL, MP).

Caspian Tern: Always a good find in the state, this species generated five reports of ten individuals. Three were seen in Grand Junction, Mesa, on 8 Jun (LS); two were seen at Kechter Pit, Larimer, 10-11 Jun (CWi, NK); one was found at Walden Ponds, Boulder, 11-12 Jun (SML); two were observed in Fort Collins, Larimer, on 18 Jun (SML); and two were seen at Ridgway SP, Ouray, on 13 Jul (CT), making for a first county record.

Common Tern: One late spring migrant was photographed at Big Johnson Res., El Paso, 18-19 Jun (MP).

Jaeger sp.: In what would be a very rare summer report, a possible jaeger of unknown species was observed at Aurora Res., Arapahoe, on 19 Jun (AS).

Band-tailed Pigeon: Though the species is unusual in the Colorado River drainage from Garfield and Rio Blanco east to Grand (Andrews & Righter, 1992), a single bird was found at Ruedi Reservoir, Eagle, on 10 Jun (CDo). Additionally, a roost site found by JC in 2008 near Paonia, Delta, was once again active this summer, with more than ten individuals.

White-winged Dove: Becoming ever more common in the state, this species was seen all through the season in Bent (SML, TL, MP), Boulder (NP), Mesa (BWa, NKe, LA, JC), Otero (SML, TL, MP), and Weld (SML).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Though relatively common along the riparian corridors of the far eastern plains, this is a rare species elsewhere in the state. One was seen on 4 Jun at Pike's Stockade in the San Luis Valley, Conejos,

where the species has been seen every year since 2003 (SML). Another two were found on the Front Range, with the first seen at Walden Ponds, Boulder, on 6 Jun (TF, HF, AF); and the other seen in Glenmere Park, Greeley, Weld, on 11 Jun (SML, TC). There were five reports of birds from the WS, all consisting of birds from the western race. One of these was found in Echo Park, Dinosaur National Monument, Moffat, in early Jun (fide JBe); another was found south of Montrose, Montrose, on 18 Jun (fide JBe); three others were observed in Hotchkiss, Delta, from 21 Jun through the end of the period (JC, JBe); and one other was seen at the Grand Junction Wildlife Area, Mesa, on 27 Jul (JC). A breeding confirmation was made near Hotchkiss on 12 Aug. Surveys in the SLV confirmed the presence of potentially breeding cuckoos at an elevation of 7900 feet on a private ranch on the Rio Grande River, Rio Grande (fide JBe), making for the highest-elevation breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos across their large range.

Greater Roadrunner: Unprecedented so far north, a single bird was seen at Jackson Res., Morgan, on 10 Jul (SML, TC).

Western Screech-Owl: Rare in Moffat, a single bird was seen in Bowers Gulch, Dinosaur NM, Moffat, on 2 Jun (CDo).

Long-eared Owl: An uncommon find was one in the Shoshone USGS block, Garfield, on 15 Jun (TM, KMc, KH).

Lesser Nighthawk: Two males and one female were observed throughout the period at Nucla, Montrose, where the species is becoming regular (CDe,

m.ob.). Additionally, a single female bird was reported flying over a south-east Loveland residence, *Larimer*, on 29 Jul (CW).i).

Common Nighthawk: An amazing 260 birds were observed along a hog-back south of Meeker, *Rio Blanco*, on 29 Jul (JC).

Black Swift: Interesting were two seen at Graneros Gorge, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 29 Jul (DS).

Chimney Swift: In an interesting find, a dead swift was found in a Norwood yard, *San Miguel*, on 5 Jun (GS). Jason Beason measured the bird to confirm its identification.

Magnificent Hummingbird: Returning for the second year in a row, an adult female was observed and photographed at the Tunnel Campground near Cameron Pass, *Larimer*, 20-24 Jul (CK, BSc).

Black-chinned Hummingbird: Though this species is increasing its range in the state, it is still uncommon along the Front Range and in the mountains. One female was observed at Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, on 12 Jun (SML, TC); three females were seen on Apple Valley Road, Lyons, *Boulder*, on 16 Jun (SML); a female was at a nest at Teller Farms, *Boulder*, on 22 Jun (TF, BZ); a single male was found on 3 Jul in Grant, *Park* (SML, CWo, JBa); at least two males and two females visited a feeder near Tantra Lake, *Boulder*, throughout the season (RP, CN); and multiple individuals were seen in Lafayette, *Boulder*, throughout the period (TF, m.ob.).

Red-headed Woodpecker: Common on the eastern plains, this species becomes rare as you near the Rockies to

the west. Historically, this species was locally common along the foothills in the Front Range (particularly *Boulder*), but its population has diminished exponentially in recent years. However, this season experienced a rash of sightings on the Front Range, with six seen in *Boulder* (including two nests) and four reported in *Larimer*. Three additional sightings came from the WS, with one from Carbondale, *Garfield*, on 5 Jun (TM, DF, VZ); a second from Escalante Forks, Mesa, on 14 Jun (MHe); and a third from Cedar Mesa, near Cedaredge, *Delta*, on 12 Jul (fide AR).

Downy Woodpecker: An individual, apparently of the Rocky Mountain race, was paired with a more expected Eastern Downy Woodpecker at Glenmere Park, Greeley, *Weld*, on 11 Jun (SML).

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Somewhat late on the southeastern plains were two birds observed at Tempel Grove, *Bent*, on 5 Jun (SML, TL, MP).

Alder Flycatcher: Continuing from the spring, a single bird was observed on the University of Colorado's East Campus, Boulder, *Boulder*, through 1 Jun (AB).

Willow Flycatcher: Though common as a breeder in higher-elevation riparian areas, this species is extremely hard to come by during the summer in the lower elevations, particularly on the eastern plains. Despite that, a total of seven were seen on the plains this summer, with reports coming from *Bent* (2 reports), *Boulder*, *El Paso*, *Logan*, and *Weld* (2).

Least Flycatcher: Though the species is historically extremely rare on the WS, the three reports of six individuals this

summer reflect the steadily increasing population in the area. Two were seen in Plateau City, *Mesa*, from 27 Jun to 8 Jul (JBa, m.ob.); one was found in Paonia, *Delta*, on 29 Jun (JBa); and finally two calling birds were seen in Craig, *Moffat*, from 30 Jun to 29 Jul (JC).

Gray Flycatcher: A single singing male bird found on the Shanahan Trail in west Boulder, *Boulder*, on 5 Jun, was noteworthy so far away from breeding locales in pinyon/juniper shrubland on the WS (CN).

Cordilleran Flycatcher: Unusual so far east, especially at such a late date, was a single bird at Tempel Grove, *Bent*, on 5 Jun (SML, TL, MP). Even later and farther east were two silent birds of the "Western" flycatcher group (Cordilleran or Pacific-slope) not identified to species, but significant nonetheless. The first was a bird seen on CR L and CR 33, *Kiowa*, on 21 Jun (CDe, BWr); a second was found on CR 34, *Cheyenne*, on 22 Jun (CDe, BWr).

Black Phoebe: Found in an unusual location, a single adult bird was observed in Parachute's town park, *Garfield*, on 13 Jun (FL). Another was found at the Greenhorn Meadows Park, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 18 Jul (DS).

Eastern Phoebe: Continuing from the spring season, a breeding pair nested in Chatfield SP, *Douglas*, raised one or two young, and remained through 20 Jul (GW, m.ob.). In addition to these nesting birds, a singing male was seen at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SML); and another was seen at the unusual high-elevation location of Hartsel, *Park*, on 19 Jul (JD, JH, JM). *Boulder's* first confirmed nest produced three nestlings on 18 Jun along the

South Boulder Ditch at the Canyon Ditch headgate, with an adult remaining in the area throughout the report period (CN). Another nest was reported at Boulder Creek and 75th Street on 6 Jun (TF).

Vermilion Flycatcher: Continuing from the spring season, a displaying male was present at Thompson Ranch, *Lincoln*, from the beginning of the period through 9 Jun (MP, GW, m.ob.).

Ash-throated Flycatcher: It was a bit of an irruption year for this species, likely due to drier than normal weather in the southwest. Three were seen north of their normal range. The first was singing and investigating cavities at the Eldorado Mountain Open Space, *Boulder*, on 3 Jun (CN); the second was found at Parker Regional Park, *Douglas*, on 11 Jun (SS); and the final bird of the period was seen at Horsetooth Res., *Larimer*, on 22 Jun (AC).

Phainopepla: Furnishing an eleventh state record if accepted by the CBRC, an adult male was photographed at the Cottonwood Canyon campground, *Las Animas/Baca*, on 16 Jun (RS).

Cassin's Kingbird: Farther north than expected were single birds seen at Shanahan Ridge, *Boulder*, on 19 Jun (CN); at Fossil Creek Res., *Larimer*, on 16 Jul (SB); and at Rabbit Mountain, *Boulder*, on 25 Jun (TF, BZ).

White-eyed Vireo: An unusual summer find was a singing male observed on the Marina Sandspit at Chatfield SP, *Douglas*, on 11 Jun (JK, m.ob.). Another singing bird was seen at Greenhorn Meadows Park, Colorado City, *Pueblo*, from 18 Jul through the end of the season (DS, m.ob.).

Warbling Vireo: Quite a bit east of its normal range, a single bird of the "Western" race was seen and heard at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SMI). West of their normal range, singing birds of the "Eastern" race were found near Saint Vrain SP, *Weld*, 12 Jun and 22 Jun (SMI); at Walden Ponds, *Boulder*, on 13 Jun (TF); at Teller Farms, *Boulder*, from 19-22 Jun (TF, SMI); at Greenlee Preserve, *Boulder*, on 21-23 Jun (TF); at Pella Crossing Park, *Boulder*, on 25 Jun (TF, BZ); at South Boulder Creek Management Area, *Boulder*, on 26 Jun (TF); and at Coal Creek Open Space, *Boulder*, on 2 Jul (TF).

Red-eyed Vireo: An uncommon but regular summer visitor from the east, one was seen at Tempel Grove, *Bent*, on 5 Jun (MP, SMI, TL); a male was persistently singing at Hygiene, *Boulder*, from 6-25 Jun (TF, m.ob.); another was at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI); a singing male, a rare WS find, was observed in Paonia, *Delta*, from 29 Jun to 6 Jul (JBe); and at least two were singing at the Brett Gray Ranch, *Lincoln*, on 22 Jul (TF, MP, BP).

Blue Jay: Unusual at such a high elevation, a single bird was seen at Webster, *Park*, on 18 Jun (TF, AF).

Purple Martin: A rare find on the Front Range was one seen in northern *Boulder* on 6 Jun (PP).

Bank Swallow: An extraordinary count of 1,200 was furnished by a flock observed at Beebe Draw, *Weld*, on 30 Jul (SMI, BS).

Mountain Chickadee: Establishing a possible low-elevation record for breeding, some chickadees were thought to be breeding at 4600 feet

of elevation near Fruita, *Mesa* (BWr). The birds were observed all through the season.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: On a late date for the eastern plains, one was found at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI).

Carolina Wren: Rare in the state, a singing adult male was photographed in Deerfield, Franktown, *Douglas*, on 23 Jun (KMe, GW).

House Wren: In an indication of the large numbers of House Wrens in the cottonwood riparian areas of the eastern plains, an incredible total of 77 were counted at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SMI).

Winter Wren: Though they are not an uncommon find during the winter months, Winter Wrens are decidedly rare during the summer. A singing male was found at Calypso Cascades in Rocky Mountain National Park, *Boulder*, from 17-25 Jul (MB). One was also found singing here in the summer of 2001.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: One of these petite late spring migrants was seen at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 2 and 9 Jun (SMI). Another was found northeast of its normal range at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SMI).

Eastern Bluebird: Having bred at this location for several years now, a male returned to Eldorado Mountain Open Space, *Boulder*, on 3 Jun (CN).

Veery: A singing male was observed at Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, on 12 Jun (SMI, TC). The species breeds not far upslope.

Gray-cheeked Thrush: Rare for Colorado, this seldom-seen skulker of



Bay-breasted Warbler, Lake Estes, Larimer County, 1 June 2011. Photo by David Waltman

the undergrowth was found at Van's Grove, *Bent*, on 4 Jun (TL, MP, SMI).

Swainson's Thrush: Late were three found in *Weld* on 9 Jun (SMI). At a lower elevation than usual for singing males, several were heard at 6000 feet in *Mesa, Mesa*, on 28 Jun (JBe); some WS observers felt the species invaded lower elevations as a breeder this summer, perhaps because of late high-elevation snowpack (L. Arnold, pers. comm.). Uncommon in *San Juan*, one was found at a reliable spot on Old Lime Creek Road, *San Juan*, on 1 Jul (RM); and another was seen on Roaring Fork Road, *Montezuma*, from 5-30 Jul (JBr, JRo, JBy).

Wood Thrush: A rare find was one photographed at Stulp's Farm, *Prowers*, on 16 Jun (JSt, JT).

Northern Mockingbird: Unusual on the Front Range, one was seen near Lyons, *Boulder*, on 13 Jun (SMI); and a singing male was found at Dixon Res.,

Larimer, on 18 Jun (SMI).

Brown Thrasher:

In what appears to be a first *Boulder* breeding confirmation since 1886 (Betts 1913; Steve Jones, pers. comm.), a single bird was observed carrying food for unseen nestlings into a thicket of shrubs near Rabbit Mountain Open Space, *Boulder*, on 22 Jun (RH, JS).

Northern Parula:

Unusual in summer, a singing male was

observed at Pueblo City Park, *Pueblo*, from 12-19 Jun (VT, BKP); and another bird was seen at Lake Isabel, *Custer*, on 16 Jun (VT).

Chestnut-sided Warbler: A rare mountain find was a female seen at Lake Estes, *Larimer*, on 10 Jun (CW, KSt); and a singing male was found at Welchester Tree Park, *Jefferson*, also on 10 Jun (IS, TS).

Magnolia Warbler: Another rare mountain find at Lake Estes, *Larimer*, was one seen on 1 Jun (CW, KSt).

Yellow-throated Warbler: A singing male was found near Cattail Pond, *Larimer*, on 9 Jun (CW).

Prairie Warbler: Making for a very intriguing record, a male sang in Corwina Park, *Jefferson*, from 1 Jun to 16 Jul (IB, MR, m.ob.). The initial report mentioned a female as well, but her presence was never confirmed.

Bay-breasted Warbler: This rare species was found at the particularly

productive migrant trap along Lake Estes, *Larimer*, on 1 Jun (CW, KSt).

Blackpoll Warbler: A late migrant male was seen and photographed feeding on the ground at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, on 5 Jun (BM).

Black-and-white Warbler: An unusual find was a male singing in a ponderosa pine in the foothills northwest of Lyons, *Larimer*, on 23 Jun (JS).

American Redstart: At least five were seen this summer. The first was photographed at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 2 Jun (SML), while the same or possibly a different individual was seen on 9 Jun (SML); a first-summer male was found at Teller Farms, *Boulder*, 19-22 Jun (TF, SML); an immature male was seen in the Green Mountain area, *Jefferson*, on 22 Jun (BSH); one bird was singing at Hygiene, *Boulder*, on 25 Jun (TF, BZ); and the final bird was found near Lyons, *Boulder*, on 26 Jun (SML).

Ovenbird: This species is a local breeder in the Front Range foothills. A total of 27 singing males were heard from the counties *Boulder* (3 birds), *Douglas* (3), *Jefferson* (19), and *Larimer* (2). The impressive *Jefferson* count came from an annual survey at Willow Springs Open Space on 3-4 Jun (MHe).

MacGillivray's Warbler: Possibly an early fall migrant or non-breeding wanderer, one was seen at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, on 10 Jul (SML).

Hooded Warbler: Rare in summer, a singing male was seen in Pueblo, *Pueblo*, on 5 Jun (TI, RC); another singing male was found in Long Canyon, west of Boulder, *Boulder*, on 16 Jun (BA); and another singing male was observed

on the Poudre River Trail, Kodak, *Weld*, on 23 Jun (SML).

Eastern Towhee: This is a rare, localized species of riparian areas on the far eastern plains, and some observers have expressed doubt that reports from northeast Colorado in summer are valid, given the extensive hybridization with Spotted Towhee. However, an apparently pure bird heard calling and singing was photographed at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 2 Jul (SML). Two other birds of undetermined parentage were also seen and heard at this location and date, with both of the apparent hybrids looking like Easterns, but singing like Spotted Towhees (SML).

Green-tailed Towhee: Uncommon in summer on the plains, two late migrants were found at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SML).

Canyon Towhee: Rare north of *El Paso*, one was found in south Boulder, *Boulder*, on 12 Jul (RP, m.ob.).

Cassin's Sparrow: It was a huge irruption year for this plains species, with many birds seen on territory far to the west of their normal breeding range, from *Larimer* to *Douglas* along the Front Range. A single bird was found in *Rio Grande* on 16 Jun (MP), and the WS had its second and third reports of this species, with two birds found in the Paonia area, *Delta*, from 5-7 Jul (JBe, JC).

Field Sparrow: A rare find was a singing male at Nix Farm Natural Area, Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 1 Jul (AM).

Chipping Sparrow: The first nocturnal migration was noted over Lafayette, *Boulder*, on 18 Jul, with birds going over at 28 flight calls per hour (TF).

Black-chinned Sparrow: Providing

a third state record, the probable nesting pair at Colorado National Monument, *Mesa*, continued from the spring season through 18 Jun (m.ob.). As an interesting aside, of the three records for this species in the state, two have been thought to be breeding. In other words, only our first state record was a vagrant, a bird found in *Prowers* in 2006.

Black-throated Sparrow: Rare in *Moffat*, several were seen in Dinosaur National Monument on 15 Jul (VZ, SZ). Two were seen in *Higbee*, *Otero*, on 4 Jun (TL, SMI, MP). The species is an uncommon and highly local breeder south of the Arkansas River.

Grasshopper Sparrow: An unusually high-elevation report was furnished by a singing male found at Tarryall Res., *Park*, on 3 Jul (SMI).

Fox Sparrow: Though the species does not normally nest below 7500 feet of elevation, several singing males were found at 6000 feet on Plateau Creek, *Mesa*, on 28 Jun (JBe); and another singing male was found at 5700 feet near *Paonia*, *Delta*, on 29 Jun (JBe).

Lincoln's Sparrow: Rare during the summer months on the eastern plains, three apparent late migrants were found at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI).

White-crowned Sparrow: Rare in summer on the plains, a single dark-colored bird was photographed at Norma's Grove, *Weld*, on 2 Jun (SMI).

Rufous-collared Sparrow: The infamous Georgetown, *Clear Creek*, bird of unknown origin was seen throughout the reporting period (m.ob.).

Dark-eyed Junco: In a rare sum-

mer find, a White-winged (*aikeni*) Junco was photographed in the Pinebrook Hills subdivision, northwest of Boulder, *Boulder*, on 6 Jun (DW).

Hepatic Tanager: Two individuals of this uncommon but local breeder in southeastern Colorado, including one singing bird, were seen on Santa Clara Creek, Pryor, *Huerfano*, on 4 Jun (MP, SMI, TL).

Summer Tanager: Uncommon on the WS, a female was observed in Glenwood Springs, *Garfield*, on 1 Jun (VZ); a first-year male was seen in *Nuclea*, *Montrose*, from 5-9 Jul (JC, CDe, BWr); and another first-year male was found at Escalante Forks, *Mesa*, on 7 Jul (MHe).

Northern Cardinal: Very rare away from extreme eastern Colorado, one was photographed at Chico Basin Ranch, *El Paso*, on 5 Jun, providing a first record for that location (BM); and another was seen at a Boulder residence, *Boulder*, from 3-5 Jul (CDa).

Pyrrhuloxia: Furnishing what would be the fourth state record if accepted by the CBRC, an adult female was photographed at a private residence in *Alamosa*, *Alamosa*, from 8-10 Jun (JRa).

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Four were seen on the plains and Front Range this summer, with a report of a female from Oxbow SWA, *Otero*, on 4 Jun (TL, SMI, MP); a sighting of a second-year male at Hygiene, *Boulder*, on 6 Jun (TF, HF, AF); a report of a female at Crow Valley Campground, *Weld*, on 9 Jun (SMI); and one of an adult male along the Mesa Trail, *Boulder*, on 12 Jun (TF, JS, MS). Uncommon in southwest Colorado, one was

seen in Cortez, *Montezuma*, on 27 Jun (SMe). Incredibly, a male was found at the high elevation of 9050 feet in the Wet Mountains, *Custer*, from 27-29 Jul (BKP).

Blue Grosbeak: An unusually high count of 69 was recorded at Higbee, *Otero*, on 4 Jun (TL, SMI, MP).

Indigo Bunting: In a good season for this species, there were six reports during the period away from their summering locations on the extreme eastern edge of Colorado. One was at Santa Clara Creek, Pryor, *Huerfano*, on 4 Jun (SMI, TL); several were seen along the Dolores River near Gateway, *Mesa*, 5-10 Jun (BD); another, a singing male, spent the entire summer in the foothills near Lyons, *Larimer* (JS, MS); a single bird was photographed at Lake George, *Jackson*, on 8 Jun (CH); and at least three singing males were observed in Montrose, *Montrose*, from 21-30 Jun (EM, CDe). Colorado City, *Pueblo*, also had a large number of birds seen, with a total of six adult males in the area throughout the season (DS).

Painted Bunting: A great find was a first-year male found at Stulp's Farm, *Prowers*, on 16 Jun (JSt).

Dickcissel: Generally uncommon away from the eastern plains, this species irrupted much like the Cassin's Sparrows. Multiple birds were found on the Front Range, with reports from *Boulder* and *Douglas*.

Bobolink: Interesting high elevation reports of this species were of one at Lake Estes, *Larimer*, on 6 Jun (SMI); of a singing male at Hayden, *Routt*, on 12 Jun (FL), with a male, female, and two juveniles found later at the same

location on 29 Jul (JC); and finally of a pair at Tarryall Res., *Park*, on 3 Jul (SMI).

Orchard Oriole: Providing a potential first *Routt* record if documented, a first-year male was seen in Hayden, *Routt*, continuing from the spring season through 3 Jun (NM, m.ob.). A young male and a female were observed nesting in Boulder, *Boulder*, from 9 Jun-12 Jul (CN); and a single bird was seen at Walden Ponds, *Boulder*, on 9 Jun (TF, HF, AF). A female and singing immature male were also found at Fossil Creek Res., *Larimer*, from 11-18 Jun (SMI, TC).

Baltimore Oriole: Rare away from their breeding stronghold in the riparian corridors of far eastern Colorado, three were found on the Front Range and one was seen in *Huerfano*. On the Front Range, a first-year male was seen in Louviers, *Douglas*, on 5 Jun (GW); an adult female at Teller Farms, *Boulder*, on 19 Jun (SMI); and a single bird at Cherry Hills Village, *Arapahoe*, on 17 Jul (KSr). The *Huerfano* bird, a first county record if accepted by the CBRC, was an adult male photographed at a private residence in La Veta on 1 Jun (PN).

Red Crossbill: Rare during the summer on the eastern plains, an apparent Type 5 bird was seen and heard at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, on 10 Jul (SMI, TC).

White-winged Crossbill: Any day when you see one of these scarce boreal breeders is a good day. Two were seen this summer, one on La Manga Pass, *Huerfano*, on 4 Jun (SMI), and another on Slumgullion Pass, *Hinsdale*, on 17 Jun (CWi, KSt).

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Scapular and Tertial Crescents

Tony Leukering

Many birders consider gulls to be beyond them. Gulls sport too many plumages and are too variable. The frustration that gulls cause is due, I believe, to at least two phenomena, the first being the widespread “need” to put a name to every bird (which simply cannot be done with gulls), and the second being unfamiliarity with the complicated terminology unique to gulls. In this group, we don’t look for wingbars or supercilia or tail spots. No patagial bars, no central crown stripes, no flank streaking. We need to learn an entirely new set of terms, different body parts. And for what? So that we can identify a few dozen species of birds to which we, generally, cannot get close enough to be sure of our tentative identifications?

All is not bleak, however, as there are some aspects of gull identification that permit rapid reduction of possibilities. The first of these is, as with all birding, probability. In Colorado, only five gull species are regular in numbers: Bonaparte’s, Franklin’s, Ring-billed, California, and Herring. The middle three are the only likely species in summer, while Bonaparte’s is a spring and fall migrant and Herring is a wintering species. Unfortunately, three of the five (Ring-billed, California, and Herring) are white-headed, gray-backed gulls that cause particular consternation in non-lariphiles.

The other good way to winnow the possible identifications is to look for scapular and tertial crescents. Learning these marks can enable birders to sort quickly through large numbers of gulls, making identifications quicker and more certain. As always, this essay is intended to be read with reference to the pictures on the back cover of this issue.

Scapular and Tertial Crescents

The **scapulars** are the many rows of relatively large feathers that are attached to the back, but cover and smooth over

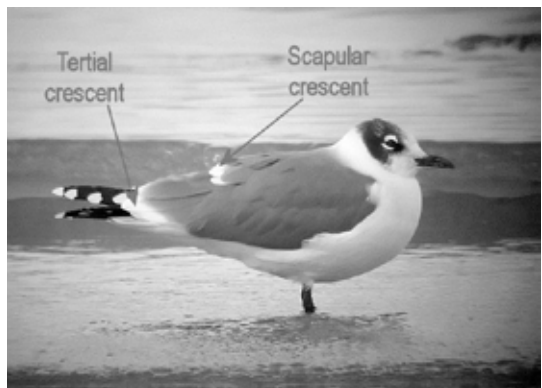


Fig 1. Franklin’s Gull, Standley Lake, Jefferson Co., CO, 24 September 2005, with scapular and tertial crescents indicated. Photo by Larry Semo

the area where the back and the wings meet. The **tertials** are the innermost three flight feathers on each wing (they are, essentially, modified secondaries) that cover and protect the rest of the flight feathers when the wing is folded.

In most adult gulls and terns, the tertials and one to three feathers in the most distal row of scapulars have white tips that come together when the wing folds to form crescent-shaped bands of



Fig 2. Adult Ring-billed Gull, North Cape May, Cape May Co., NJ, 8 February 2008. Note the lack of a scapular crescent. Photo by Tony Leukering

white contrasting with the gray or black of the back and wings. These white bands are called “tertial crescents” and “scapular crescents,” respectively (Fig. 1), and are **features of adult or sub-adult plumages**; juveniles and other first-cycle birds tend not to show these. The crescents may not be of full adult size in subadults, so should be assessed with caution. Additionally, birds in active molt may be missing critical feathers, reducing the apparent size of these crescents. By winter, though, molt of these tracts should be complete. Finally, as adults comprise the vast majority of gulls present in Colorado in winter, the lesser usefulness of the feature in younger birds is not critical.

The back-cover images present a single picture of adults of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls; the lower image presents enlarged versions of the parts of each bird to highlight the differences in scapular and tertial crescents in these two species. The birds are presented in the lower image as if they were approximately the same size, even though Herring Gull is decidedly larger than Ring-billed Gull. Scaling the image in this manner shows that the size of the bird is not a major factor in the appearance of the relative width of the crescents.

Because most ABA-area gull species sport both crescents, the importance of these features generally lies in **how wide and well-defined they are**. By “well-defined,” I mean how abrupt the meeting of white and adult upperparts color is. The degree of contrast of these crescents with the back and wing coloration is largely due to the darkness of the upperparts, but also to how sharply defined the white tips are, with some species showing a bit of blending between white

tips and upperparts color. The great advantage in studying these crescents is that similar-appearing species tend to sport crescents of differing thickness and/or definition.

Species Differences

Below, I note the useful aspects of the scapular crescents (SC) and tertial crescents (TC) in various ABA-area gull species. Every species shows at least some variability in aspects of both crescents, but most variability is slight and (usually) does not blur any distinctions noted. The descriptions of crescent thickness below are relative to gulls in general and are gross estimations of the percentage of the individual feathers covered by the white tip.

Ring-billed Gull: For most of the ABA area's birders, Ring-billed Gull is a commonly seen species, particularly in winter, when it may account for 75% or more of the gulls present at some locations. Thus, it is incredibly handy that the species shows such different crescents from all the other white-headed, gray-backed gulls of the ABA area. **The species often lacks a scapular crescent entirely** (see Fig. 2 and back cover photos). If present, the SC is usually thin and poorly-defined. The TC is of thin-to-medium thickness and moderately- to poorly-defined. These features enable one to quickly scan a sea of Ring-

billed Gulls, looking for anything with a SC on which to focus closer scrutiny. This feature is particularly helpful in picking Mew Gulls out of flocks of Ring-billed Gulls. I cannot overemphasize the usefulness of this character in this species.

Black-legged and Red-legged Kittiwakes: Black-legged has a thin and moderately-defined SC and a medium and very poorly defined TC; Red-legged has very well-defined crescents with a thick SC and medium TC.

Sabine's Gull: Sabine's has a thin, well-defined SC and a thick, moderately-defined TC.

Bonaparte's and Black-headed Gulls: Both species lack both crescents (see Fig. 3), though Black-headed occasionally shows a thin, moderately-defined TC.

Little and Ross's Gulls: Little has thin and moderately-defined cres-



Fig 3. Adult Bonaparte's Gull, Cape May Point, Cape May Co., NJ, 17 March 2008. Photo by Tony Leukering



Fig 4. Adult Mew Gull, Cherry Creek State Park, Arapahoe Co., CO, 12 November 2011. Photo by Glenn Walbek

cents, while Ross's crescents vary from thin and well-defined to medium and moderately-defined.

Franklin's and Laughing Gulls: Franklin's has a medium, well-defined SC and a thick, poorly-defined TC in keeping with the more extensively white wing (Fig. 1); Laughing has a thick, well-defined SC and a thin, poorly- to moderately-defined TC.

Heermann's Gull:

This species has a thick, well-defined SC and a medium, well-defined TC.

Mew and Common Gulls: These forms are currently considered by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU 1998) to belong to the same species. However, the New World form, Mew Gull, sports thick and well-

defined crescents (Fig. 4), while the Old World form, Common Gull, is similar, but with typically moderate definition to both crescents.

Western, Yellow-footed, Slaty-backed, and Glaucous-winged Gulls: All three dark-mantled species sport very thick and well-defined versions of both cres-

cents (Fig. 5), while Glaucous-winged has a medium, well-defined SC and a very thick, well-defined TC.

California and Lesser Black-backed Gulls: California has well-defined crescents, with medium-to-thick SC and thick TC (Fig. 6); Lesser Black-backed sports a medium-to-thick SC and thin-to-medium TC, both well-defined.



Fig 5. Adult Yellow-footed Gull, Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, Mexico, 21 February 2006. Photo by Tony Leukering

Herring and Thayer's Gulls: New World Herring Gulls (a.k.a. "Smithsonian Gulls," *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) exhibit a medium, well-defined SC and a thick, moderately-defined TC (see back cover photos). Old World forms of Herring Gull, currently considered by the AOU (1998) to be the same species, exhibit thicker and better-defined crescents. Thayer's has a medium-to-thick SC of moderate-to-strong defi-



Fig 6. Adult California Gull, Petaluma, Sonoma Co., CA, 15 November 2007. Photo by Tony Leukering

nition and a thick, well-defined TC.

Iceland and Glaucous Gulls: Ice-

land sports a medium-to-thick, well-defined SC and a thick, moderately-defined TC, while Glaucous exhibits its medium-to-thick, well-defined versions of both crescents.

Kelp and Great Black-backed Gulls: Kelp has thick, well-defined crescents; Great Black-backed sports medium-to-thick SC and medium TC, both well-defined (Fig. 7).



Fig 7. Adult Great Black-backed Gull, Wildwood Crest, Cape May Co., NJ, 8 December 2009. Photo by Michael O'Brien

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LITERATURE CITED

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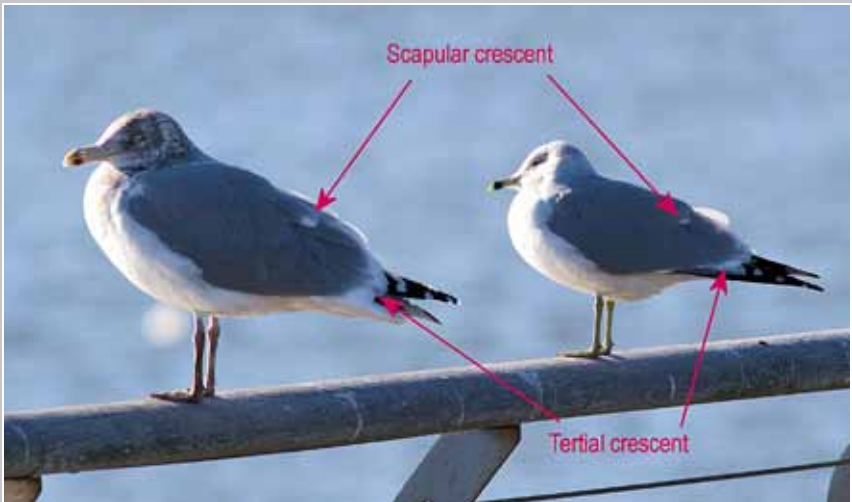
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Adult Herring and Ring-billed Gulls with scapular and tertial crescents indicated on both birds. The lower version directly compares these crescents, with both birds scaled to approximately the same size. North Cape May, Cape May Co., NJ, 11 December 2011. Photo by Tony Leukering

