

Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



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CFO BOARD MINUTES

Lisa Edwards, Secretary

The regular quarterly meeting was held April 17, 2004, at 11:00 A.M. Board members present were: President Peter Gent, Treasurer David Waltman, and Directors Cheryl Day, Sharon Dooley, Rachel Hopper, and Bill Schmoker. Also present were Doug Faulkner, *Colorado Birds* Editor, and Tony Leukering, CBRC Chair. The minutes of the January 2004 meeting were accepted as finally presented.

WEBSITE

- 1) COBirds has 661 members.
- 2) New CFO website – It will take about a month to have all the templates ready, then Rachel Hopper needs to move all the data over which will take 2-3 months. The County Birding pages are progressing well, mostly being worked on by Andrew Spencer and Nathan Pieplow.

CBRC

- 1) Documentations for 2002 and 2003 are currently in circulation.
- 2) Tony Leukering and Chris Wood's terms expire at the end of 2004. One position will be filled by Rachel Hopper. Tony proposed that Larry Semo be the next CBRC Chair, starting in January 2005.
- 3) Tri-fold Checklists – a revised version will be made in conjunction with the American Birding Association. CFO will order 500 copies, with one put in each Convention package. The motion passed unanimously.

Awards

A plaque was presented to Jerry Craig by Rachel Hopper. The Ron Ryder award is ready for Richard Biedleman who will receive it at the CFO Convention. A Landowner's Appreciation Plaque will be presented to Tina Jones at the CFO Convention.

Field Trips

The possibility of a hummingbird trip to Powderhorn was put forward by Cheryl. The CFO pelagic trip to North Carolina in June has 18 participants.

Membership

CFO has 480 members.

Project Fund

Elizabeth Reynolds' project had been funded for \$1600. There was a long

discussion of the Bouricius hummingbird project request. It was pointed out that this is a scientific project and should be published in the literature. Awarding the \$560 towards the cost of a camera was passed unanimously.

Nominations

Tom McConnell and Mark Peterson have agreed to serve on the Board, replacing outgoing members Rich Levad and Mark Yaeger.

New Business

- 1) Lisa and Rachel are working on an archive of recent CFO Board decisions.
- 2) Convention 2005 – Tony will inquire about La Junta facilities; otherwise everyone liked Lamar in early May.
- 3) Colorado Wildlife Commission – Peter has written to them saying CFO is against a Greater Sandhill Crane hunt in the San Luis Valley.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for 11A.M. on Saturday, August 28, at Chico Basin Ranch.

The meeting adjourned at 4:23 P.M.



CFO Project Fund

Help support avian research in Colorado. Support the CFO Project Fund with your tax-deductible donation. Make checks payable to Colorado Field Ornithologists, clearly marked "Project Fund". Send to: David Waltman, CFO Treasurer, PO Box 19131, Boulder, CO 80308.

Remember that CFO is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation and members can designate the CFO Project Fund in estate planning or wills.

JERRY CRAIG RETIRES FROM THE COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

Rachel Hopper, CFO Board Member

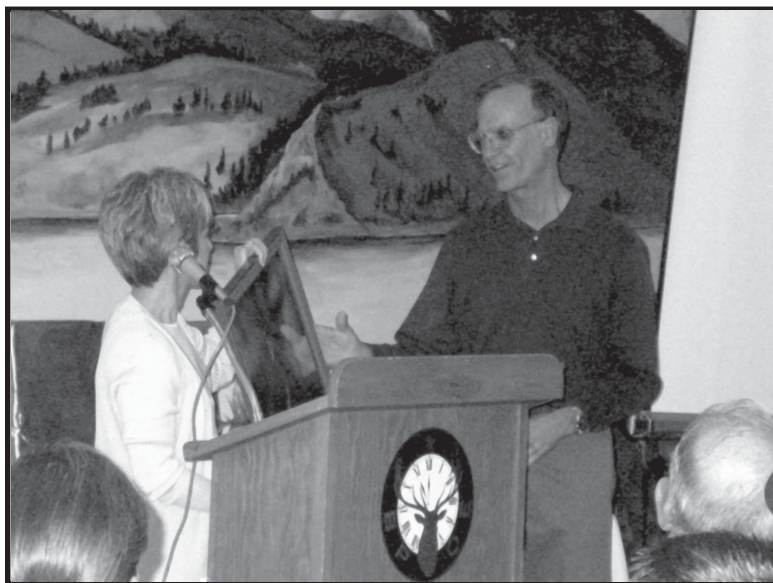
After 32 years, raptor biologist Jerry Craig has retired from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). Jerry had an exemplary career highlighted by the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon in our state. Additionally, in collaboration with Dr. Enderson, Jerry produced a monograph on the peregrine that will become one of the definitive works on the biology and management of this very important raptor.

Instrumental in the recovery of the Bald Eagle and Osprey in the Ft. Collins area, Jerry also served on the Mexican Spotted Owl recovery team. Jerry remains the only employee of the CDOW to have ever received the prestigious Chevron Conservation Award.

Jerry was a division employee for the people. He was one of the few within the division that spoke up for birds and birders alike. He was active in the birding community and provided anyone interested in conservation with numerous educational and volunteer opportunities.

Rappelling down sheer cliff faces to check on nesting peregrines or climbing up trees to band eagles in the nest, he always focused on helping birds. Because of his work, most of us have had the thrill of seeing Peregrine Falcons in Colorado. Each time we are privileged to see this amazing falcon, we should think of the years of effort he put into the peregrine's recovery.

Jerry will be missed very much. The birding community has lost a strong advocate at the Division of Wildlife. I know that we all wish him well in his retirement and, on behalf of birders everywhere, I would like to express our appreciation for his 32 years of reaching out to the community on behalf of the CDOW and for his dedication to helping the birds of Colorado.



Retired CDOW raptor biologist Jerry Craig receives a plaque of appreciation from the Colorado Field Ornithologists.

CFO WEBSITE

We invite you to browse the Colorado Field Ornithologists' website. If you don't own a computer, check your local library. Visit the site regularly, because new items and changes appear often. The Internet address is:

<http://www.cfo-link.org>

NEW BREEDING RECORD OF GRACE'S WARBLER FOR BOULDER, COLORADO

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Introduction and Background

The Grace's Warbler (*Dendroica graciae*) occurs from the southwestern United States (Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado) to northern Nicaragua (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Stacier and Guzy 2002). The species prefers open stands of mature pines, a habitat that has declined over time through forestry practices of logging and fire suppression (Stacier and Guzy 2002). As noted by Stacier and Guzy (2002), its habits (large territories, nests well hidden, and individuals hard to follow) make Grace's Warbler one of the least known North American warblers. In Colorado, Grace's Warbler is known as an uncommon summer resident on mesas and foothills from southern Uncompahgre Plateau in southern Mesa County southward on the western and southern slopes of the San Juan Mountains to central Archuleta County (Levad 1998). Griffiths et al. (1978) and Griffiths et al. (1980) reported Grace's Warbler as breeding in Rye, Pueblo County, based on singing males and juvenile birds. More recently, Leukering and Gobris found a small population south of Walsenburg, Huerfano County (Semo and Percival 2004). The birds were observed from 4-28 June 2003, but no breeding activity was reported.

We report here on the first breeding record for Boulder County, Colorado, and, to our knowledge, on the first nest found on the Eastern Slope of Colorado. Our Boulder County record is approximately 150 miles (240 km) north of Rye. We also summarize the known nesting information for Grace's Warbler for Colorado.

The Boulder County Record

As part of an on-going study of songbirds in Ponderosa Pine habitat (*Pinus ponderosa*) of Boulder County (e.g., Prather et al. 2002, Chace et al. 2003), we found a pair of Grace's Warbler in June 2003. The birds were observed at Heil Valley Ranch, Boulder County Open Space (BCOS). Heil Ranch encompasses a variety of habitats including Ponderosa Pine forest, Douglas-fir/mixed conifer forest, riparian habitat, and grassland. The area in which the Grace's Warbler nest was located, Red Hill (40.17618 N, 105.29097 W), is comprised of park-like, open canopy forest interspersed with grassy areas and denser stands of ponderosa pine. The main tree species is Ponderosa Pine with

diffuse Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). The understory contains various woody shrubs such as Wax Currant (*Ribes cereum*), Skunk Brush (*Rhus aromatica*) as well as various grasses (*Bromus*, *Achilla*, and *Stipa*). Red Hill has not received recent forest management and consists of many large, mature Ponderosa Pines interspersed with stands of denser, young Ponderosa Pine.

Nest site characteristics

The nest tree was a 14.5-m tall Ponderosa Pine tree with a diameter at breast height of 0.58 m. The nest was located approximately 45% up the tree at 6.5 m. The nest was on an upward facing branch 2.6 m from the trunk and 0.7 m from the tip of the branch. The nest orientation was 240 degrees from the trunk, and the lowest living branch on the nesting tree was 1.6 m. The average canopy cover around the nest (at a distance of one meter from the nest) was 38.5%. The tree was on a 10 degrees slope; the site aspect was 100 degrees bordering a dirt road (used only for researcher and park maintenance). Distance from the tree to nearest opening was 0.70 m. Shrubs in the area surrounding the nest included Wax Currant, Snowberry (*Symphoricarpus* spp.), Ponderosa Pine seedlings, and Small Ninebark (*Physocarpus monerus*). These shrubs comprised 5% of the overall groundcover, grass/forbs covered an additional 55%, and 40% of the ground was bare or covered in rocks. Tree density in the area surrounding the nest was 75 trees per hectare.

Our results are comparable to those collected in southwestern Colorado where Scott Hutchings (unpubl. data in Stacier and Guzy 2002) found that nests ($n = 3$) averaged 9.9 m (range 7.8-10.2) above the ground in Ponderosa Pines that averaged 15.1 m (13.7 - 17.5) tall and 8.9 m (range 7.9-10.4) in canopy width.

Nest, eggs and parental care

We first observed the Grace's Warbler pair on 3 June, when both the male and female were involved in nest construction. Our observations differed from Stacier who only observed the female involved in nest building (Stacier and Guzy 2002). The nest was a compact, open-cup nest. No nest dimensions were taken, but Hutchings (unpubl. data in Stacier and Guzy 2002) recorded an average outside diameter of 69 mm, outside height 56 mm, inside diameter 45 mm, and inside depth 32 mm for three nests in southwest Colorado.

Three host eggs (creamy white with speckles) and one Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) egg were in the nest. Only the female was observed incubating between 6-19 June. The male and female were observed bringing food between 23-27 June. On 1 July, the nest was empty and the male was feeding a cowbird approximately 50 m from the nest in a Ponderosa Pine. Levad (1998) notes that atlasers observed a Grace's Warbler feeding two fledgling

warblers and a fledgling cowbird in San Miguel County on 26 June 1989. Of the 3 nests observed by Hutchings, one was parasitized. Travis (1992) found 5 parasitized nests in Los Alamos County, NM.

Heil Ranch was acquired by Boulder County Open Space in 1995. Since that time, recreational use has been gradually introduced to the property and today an 8-mile loop trail is open for use by hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. Prior to its acquisition, Heil Ranch was a privately held, working cattle ranch with little public access, and the avifauna of this area was poorly known. As a consequence, there is a possibility that Grace's Warbler may have bred in the area prior to 2003. However, we did not observe Grace's Warblers in any year of our study dating back to 1999. This summer (2004), as we continue with our studies on Heil Ranch, we will look for further evidence of breeding activity by Grace's Warbler.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for funding from the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department and the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at the University of Colorado.

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CFO SUPPORTS ETHICS CODES

The Colorado Field Ornithologists is dedicated to the conservation of avian species and to increasing the public awareness of human impact on birds. As one step toward achieving these goals, the CFO Board has endorsed the American Birding Association's (ABA) *Birding Code of Ethics* and the Ornithological Council (OC) of North American Ornithological Societies' *Code of Ethics*.

PARTIAL ALBINISM IN A GRAY-HEADED JUNCO

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Albinism occurs in organisms due to a defect in the production of the pigment melanin, generally arising from somatic or germline mutations. Albinism is widespread, albeit uncommon, among birds (Ross 1963). Partial albinism, in which pigment is absent from the eyes, plumage, or unfeathered parts, but not all three, is more common than complete albinism, in which pigment is totally lacking (Sage 1963, Gross 1965). Although cases of albinism are widely reported, our understanding of interspecific variation in the incidence of albinism is limited due to bias in the observability of this trait. Species that are hunted, are commensal with humans (e.g., House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*), or that are large and wide-ranging (e.g., Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*) may appear to have a higher incidence of albinism simply because they are readily observed. However, accurately estimating the frequency of albinism in different species is useful for studies of natural selection (e.g., Slagsvold et al. 1988), as an index of environmental quality (for example, partial albinism increased dramatically among populations of Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) exposed to radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear accident; Ellengren et al. 1997), or in studies of genetic variation in wild populations (e.g., Jehl 1985).

Here, in the interest of providing documentation of albinism for species in which the incidence of this abnormality is relatively unknown, I provide a description of a partially-albinistic Gray-headed (Dark-eyed) Junco (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) observed on several occasions over a two-day period in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. This individual was first observed at c.a. 1600h on 19 April 2004, feeding on thistle seed that I had cast beneath the canopy of a large Englemann Spruce (*Picea engelmanni*), and was observed later that day and again the following day, at which point it disappeared. The partially-albinistic individual was in a group of 9-16 other Gray-headed Juncos, and appeared to interact normally with the other individuals.

I observed this individual for approximately 25 minutes over the two-day period during which it was present, at distances of 3-5 m. The individual had all of the typical markings and colorations of a Gray-headed Junco, except for

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a broad white patch extending vertically from the top of the superciliaries to the base of the auriculars and horizontally from the lores and malar region to the front of the nape. The nape itself was gray, with a very faint white line at the base of the nape. Both eyes were dark, as in typical individuals, as were the unfeathered eye rings. The bill of this individual was noticeably paler than those of the other individuals in the group. The partially-albino individual was not noticeably different in size from the other individuals.

Formal reports of albinism exist for Oregon (Dark-eyed) Juncos (*J. h. oregonus*), including an individual captured in Oregon that had features similar to the individual described here (white patches across the face with an unusually pale bill; Dowlan 2000), and Slate-colored (Dark-eyed) Juncos (*J. h. hyemalis*; Kolb 1991), but I believe this to be the first published description of albinism in the breeding race local to the Rocky Mountains. This trait is almost certainly more common than suggested by a review of the literature, and thus the continued accumulation of observations of albinistic individuals will be of use in arriving at more accurate estimates of the incidence of albinism in natural populations.

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A BIT OF JOURNAL HISTORY

10 Years Ago in the Journal...

Dave Hallock summarized ten years of data collected on the Indian Peaks Bird Counts.

15 Years Ago in the Journal...

Bob Richter, Hugh Kingery, and Rob Wilson recounted their observation of a singing House Wren at 11,800 feet elevation on 19 June 1989. If nesting did occur, it would be about 2,000 feet higher than previously recorded in Colorado.

20 Years Ago in the Journal...

A photo accompanied a short note by Bart Bantol of his observation of a melanistic Western Kingbird near Colorado Springs.

30 Years Ago in the Journal...

Richard Schroeder II published a paper on his study of the nesting behavior of Western Meadowlark near Fort Collins.

AN INTERPRETATION OF SOME ASPECTS OF BLACK SWIFT BEHAVIOR

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Introduction

During many years spent studying the Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) and hundreds of hours observing them, I recorded several incidents of Black Swift behavior which I attributed variously to alarm at nesting site intrusions, attempts to intimidate nesting site intruders and predators, or foraging with other species. After considerable reflection, I have come to doubt these customary explanations.

Field Observations

Incident #1 – Following the discovery of the first nesting colony of Black Swifts in Colorado (Knorr & Bailey 1950), my colleague, Lang Bailey of the Denver Museum of Natural History, and I climbed to the top of the gorge in which the colony was located and stood at the edge of a cliff several hundred feet above the 150-foot waterfall where we had found a nest. There was a group of a half dozen or more Black Swifts circling several hundred feet above us. Suddenly, we were startled by the passage of a Black Swift diving down the mountainside at extremely high speed not more than a foot or two in front of us. We stepped back from the edge of the cliff and looked up to see several more swifts in succession do a half roll, a half loop, and dive vertically downward a few feet in front of our faces at blinding speed. They were traveling so fast when they passed us that there was a sound like ripping cloth. We interpreted this behavior as an attempt to divert our attention from the vicinity of the nests; although, we were hundreds of feet above them.

Incident #2 – One morning I was watching a group of swallows feeding on a cloud of small insects at the approximate location where Frank Drew (1881) collected the first Black Swift in the state of Colorado east of Silverton in the Animas River Valley. This low-flying flock of swallows was joined by about a dozen Black Swifts which commenced to zoom in and out of and around the swallows at high speed. They showed no signs of feeding such as sudden changes in direction of flight to capture an insect. Possessing a collector's permit at that time, I took several specimens of swifts and subsequently determined that their crops were essentially empty. Already aware that Black

Swifts usually do not forage with other species, the question arises—what were they doing?

Incident # 3 – The Drew location mentioned above is close to our first discovery of Black Swifts in Niagara Gulch (op cit) consisting of a rather large colony of at least a dozen pairs. Being a falconer and having a large female peregrine, I was curious what the Black Swifts would do when a fast-flying predator arrived in their neighborhood. Proceeding to the place where I had seen the swallows and Black Swifts, I removed my bird's hood, slipped the leash out of her jesses, and cast her off. She climbed steadily while I kept the lure out of sight in my lure bag. When she had achieved about 500 or 600 feet and started waiting on (circling), I took the lure out and started swinging it. She immediately started her stoop toward the lure. Although I had seen no Black Swifts in the vicinity, one suddenly appeared from higher up diving, overtaking, and following the peregrine down for most of her dive before raking off in a different direction. There was a contrast in the diving flight of the two birds—the falcon with wings set to half-open and no deviation in flight path, while the swift, flying faster than the peregrine and following the same flight path was alternating shallow left and right banks. I exercised my bird for five or six passes at the lure, but no more swifts appeared. The swift showed no apparent aggression or concern about the presence of the falcon.

I witnessed another peregrine-Black Swift interaction in the early 1950s. I had found a colony at Jemez Falls in New Mexico and, just east of this colony, I saw several Black Swifts diving on and swooping around a male peregrine, far outflying him. I assumed they were concerned about the proximity of the falcon to their nesting site, but it looked very much like they were teasing him.

Incident #4 – Some years ago I hiked the long trail to Feather Falls in Butte County, California, and found a large colony of Black Swifts (Knorr 1993). Located on the Fall River, a tributary of the Middle Fork of the Feather River, the falls is a very impressive sight in terms of volume of water, height of free fall, and amount of spray. Wondering how this waterfall would look from the air, I returned to home base and the next day flew my airplane to the site. I started circling at about 500 feet AGL as slowly as was safe (about 60 mph). I was suddenly surrounded by about a dozen Black Swifts flying around the aircraft, diving, climbing, and swooping about in general. After a few minutes of this, they disappeared and I didn't see them again for the rest of the flight. I assumed they were concerned about the noisy machine so close to their nests.

Discussion

As an airplane pilot, I am in awe of the flying ability of the Black Swift. Early

observers wrote about their great powers of flight. For example, Rathbun (1925) says, "...All may be gliding about when suddenly - perhaps from a far height, a swift will dash at one beneath, this followed by erratic flight on the part of both and their disappearance in the distance. This dive I have seen made with such speed that the eye could scarcely follow it..." and "...On one occasion, ...I saw a pursuit by one black swift after another that lasted a full 15 minutes...". Hoffman (1927) writes, "...The flight of the Black Swift is amazingly swift; it includes sudden sharp turns, steep downward plunges and hurried upward flights...". Many times I have seen the flight of Black Swifts in the brief period between the time they return to the nesting site from foraging all day and the onset of darkness when they go to roost. For about a half hour, they circle and dive, climb and chase one another at high speeds. There is no feeding or courting, just incredible feats of flying with what can only be described, anthropomorphically, as exuberance.

Conclusion

As a biologist, I do not believe the standard explanations for the behavior described in the incidents above. These birds have nothing to fear from anything. They are not alarmed at nesting site intrusions (their nests are inaccessible), they were not attempting to intimidate nesting site intruders and predators, and they were not feeding with other species of birds. I am convinced they were using their superior powers of flight to play. My colleague in the first incident above remarked that it seemed like the birds were playing a game of seeing how close they could come to us on the edge of the cliff without actually striking us. Lapsing deeper into anthropomorphism, I believe in several of these incidents, the swifts were having "fun" showing less gifted flyers (feathered and aluminum) what real flying is all about.

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WRITING BIRD DESCRIPTIONS: RULING OUT OTHER SPECIES

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A friend once said that using only one field mark, it is impossible to separate Red-eyed Vireo from Black-crowned Night-Heron. As a member of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC or Committee) for the past six years, I have seen the truth of that statement many times. As stated in many CBRC reports in this journal, most of the reports submitted to the Committee that were not accepted, were not accepted simply because the birds were not described well enough to make the case for the reported identification. I can point to few reports that were the result of obvious mis-identification. With the hope of clarifying the features that Committee members look for in a written description in order to vote to accept a record, I present my thoughts on writing documentation, particularly in ruling out all other reasonable species from consideration.

You might be surprised to know that some documentations received by the CBRC have **no** written description and no photos—nothing in the way of information to enable committee members to judge whether the identification is correct. With the provision of at least some description of plumage, structure, and behavioral features, which most documentations have, each CBRC member then determines whether the description is convincing. So, the more details, the better.

The most critical aspect of any rare bird documentation is the written description of what was seen, referring to the plumage and other features of the bird and its behavior. The written description is the “scientific” proof that an individual (or multiple individuals) of a particular species of bird occurred at a particular place on a particular date. This description is critical even if excellent photos support the identification. Without written descriptions, many pieces of information are lost forever. While pictures are great and you will not hear a single CBRC member complain about too many photographs, those photos are single images of a bird or flock of birds; they may not convey everything that a thorough, well-written description could provide.

In addition to describing why the bird is such a species, make sure to not only

describe the bird you saw, but also describe how you ruled out other, similar species from consideration. And, do not just consider the very obvious identification contenders. This elimination of other species needs to be done whether other species (or multiple other species) is more likely at the time and place or not. Try to look at your description from the point of view of a birder who does not know what the bird is supposed to be and that is attempting to identify the bird solely from your words. Could that person eliminate everything else? That is precisely what the CBRC members need to do.

So, a quick recap: a written description is critical. A thorough description is better than a sketchy description. Details on how other, similar, species were eliminated from consideration are also critical.

With that, let us get into the meat of the matter (or the tofu for the vegetarians among us). Below, I will provide some hypothetical examples of descriptions of birds compared to some actual descriptions of birds to illustrate what makes a good description and what sorts of details might subject a report to the Not Accepted category.

Example 1:

Someone reports a Red-eyed Vireo in December at Lathrop State Park, Huerfano County. Since the species is very rare anywhere in the United States in December, the observer is correct in submitting details to the CBRC as this would be a significant record. The only description of the bird that the observer provides is, "The bird had red eyes." The report has provided the species, location, date, time, and observer(s). So the Committee members reading the documentation will know what the purported identification is. However, I can guarantee that this report will not get a single vote to accept. From this description, my friend would point out, the members cannot tell whether the bird is a Red-eyed Vireo or a Black-crowned Night-Heron. Or a Common Loon. Or a Clark's Grebe. Or a Hairy Woodpecker. Or a Spotted Towhee. One field mark, even if distinctive for a regularly-occurring Colorado vireo, is insufficient support for what would be a continentally significant record. This description provides no basis for the identification other than eye color. No size, no shape, no behavior, no other field marks.

Now, a different hypothetical observer reports on the same occurrence and provides the following details: "crown darker than superciliary, red eyes, pale underparts." Okay, so now our CBRC members can eliminate Spotted Towhee from consideration, but all of the other possibilities mentioned in the previous example are still in play and the vote will still be 0-7 (0 votes to accept, 7 to not accept).

A third observer might submit these details: “a small bird foraging methodically in the canopy of a cottonwood; red eyes, no markings apparent on wings, no eye ring, whitish on chest.” Well, it’s getting better, but the voting members still have to make too many assumptions. The bird is “small,” but how small? Hairy Woodpecker is small, relative to Black-crowned Night-Heron, Common Loon, and Clark’s Grebe. Hairy Woodpeckers also forage rather methodically and often in the canopy of cottonwoods. The species also lacks eye rings. Additionally, the Rockies race of Hairy Woodpecker has no markings in the coverts on the wing, so the wing can appear unmarked, given a brief look or a poor angle. The third observer still has not convinced anyone on the CBRC.

A fourth observer’s effort: “An obvious vireo, due to the small size (similar to size of Yellow-rumped Warbler nearby in the same tree), bluish legs, and straight bill with a distinct hook and by its behavior of foraging in the canopy of the cottonwood it was in, peering at vegetation at length from one perch, then moving to another perch and repeating; the bird had a medium-gray crown contrasting with a whitish superciliary; a dark eyeline extended from the bill through the red eyes almost to the nape; the upperparts were greenish, as was the tail; the underparts were white, except for extensive pale to brightish yellow on the sides and flanks; the wings, which I saw well, were unmarked (no wing bars).” Okay! Now, we are getting somewhere. Would you vote to accept?

While this description would probably garner some accept votes, in the end, the report would probably wind up in the “Not Accepted” section of that year’s CBRC report. “Why,” you ask adamantly, “the details do a very good job at describing a Red-eyed Vireo. They definitely eliminate all those other species mentioned above.” Correct. Unfortunately, as I stated earlier, a Red-eyed Vireo in December would be incredibly out-of-the-ordinary and some other, rather unexpected species might be just as likely as Red-eyed Vireo. The above details do not eliminate the most likely of these, Yellow-green Vireo, which has a propensity to wander in fall to the West Coast of the U.S. with records into December. The details also do not eliminate the less-likely, but still hypothetically possible, Black-whiskered Vireo.

So, a convincing description of a Red-eyed Vireo in December will need to eliminate these two tropical vireos by mentioning the distinct blackish lower border to the gray crown, the brightness of the superciliary and its strong contrast in the supraloral region to both the crown and the eyeline, and the distinct lack of a dark lateral throat stripe, among other features *in addition to*

all of the other features mentioned by our fourth observer. Now, were the occurrence in June when the species is a lot more likely in Colorado, if the CBRC reviewed the report at all, it might allow a lot more leeway to the observer and the fourth description might be accepted.

Example 2:

A report of a Field Sparrow at Escalante State Wildlife Area, Delta County, in February has the following written details: "A sparrow, with pinkish bill and legs, reddish-brown on the crown, and white wing bars, foraging on the ground with three White-crowned Sparrows." While the description is certainly not inconsistent with an identification of Field Sparrow, do these details eliminate all other probably and possible (and not-so-possible) options? Remember, this bird is on the West Slope in winter, both aspects that are not associated with typical Field Sparrow occurrence in Colorado. Did you guess that the CBRC would almost certainly vote to not accept this report as correctly identified? You are correct. Remember that by using the phrase, "correctly identified," I am not at all ruling out the possibility that the bird was correctly identified. The Committee simply could not determine the accuracy of the identification by the details provided. In fact, the details could not even eliminate immature White-crowned Sparrow from consideration. A simple mention that the bird was obviously smaller than the nearby White-crowned Sparrows would have done the trick. And, that detail could have been presented in the description ("... foraging with, and obviously much smaller than, three White-crowned Sparrows") or in the section on how similar species were eliminated from consideration ("Not an immature White-crowned Sparrow, as that species is much larger..."). The last phrase has the added benefit of showing the CBRC members that the observer is aware that immature White-crowned Sparrows are different from adults and can be confused with Field Sparrow. I have seen this very mistake made more than a couple of times!

A recent, more thorough, actual submission to the CBRC included these details about a February report of a Field Sparrow: "The sparrow was noticeably smaller than the juncos it was found with. The throat, breast, and underparts were uniformly gray. There were no markings on the throat. The breast was clear with no streaks or central spot. The back was rufous and brown with lengthwise dark streaks. The head had a rufous crown. The bill was small and conical in shape and uniformly yellow-orange in color. The color was very similar to the bill color of a White-crowned Sparrow. The sparrow had a white eye ring that made a perfect circle completely around the eye. The eye ring was very conspicuous and immediately noticeable when the sparrow was seen in side view. The side of the head was gray below the rufous crown with a rufous stripe through the eye. The wings were brown with two conspicuous

white wing bars. The tail was long and narrow with a slight notch at the tip. (Neither the leg color nor the top of the crown were observed.) Similar species would be the sparrows with plain breasts and rufous crowns: American Tree Sparrow has a central spot on the breast, does not have a conspicuous eye ring, and the bill is bicolored. Immature White-crowned Sparrow is much larger and does not have a conspicuous eye ring. Chipping Sparrow has black line through the eye and white line above eye, no conspicuous eye ring, and the bill is not orange. Rufous-crowned Sparrow has black whisker marks on throat, no conspicuous eye ring, no white wing bars, and the bill is not orange. Rufous-winged Sparrow has black whisker marks on the throat, no conspicuous eye ring, and no white wing bars.”

This excellent description (record #2002-29), written by Rich Miller, was accepted by the CBRC by a 7-0 vote. Its key qualities:

- First, that the observer systematically described the bird: the underparts from stem to stern and then the upperparts from head to tail, rather than jumping from the wings, to the beak, to the legs, to the back, to the eyes.
- The observer made the CBRC aware that some parts just could not be seen. They were not ignored, the details were not forgotten—they were not seen despite effort to see them. The Committee is very appreciative of people doing this, as the members are then aware that the observer was aware of the importance of these features, such as the pink legs and gray central crown stripe of Field Sparrow, in the species’ separation from similar species, but that he or she simply could not see them.
- Finally, the observer eliminated all possible identification contenders, even going so far as the sedentary and extremely-unlikely-to-occur-in-Colorado Rufous-winged Sparrow for which there are no records north of southern Arizona. The CBRC would not have cared had the observer not considered that species, but commends such thoroughness, which points out to the Committee that the observer was thinking about all possibilities, no matter how remote, when identifying the bird in question. Thinking of all the possibilities reduces the likelihood of going astray when identifying any bird, but is critically important when describing a rare bird.

Example3:

In this example, remember that gulls are particularly difficult and incredibly

variable in plumage. Thus, sometimes, excruciating detail is required to convince the Committee, though the final description in this example, in my opinion, is not “excruciating.”

In a hypothetical documentation submitted to the Committee, an adult Mew Gull is reported in November from Sullenburger Reservoir, Archuleta County. Details included are: “Gray wings, dark eyes, yellow bill, yellowish-green legs.” Anyone who has spent any time at all identifying gulls knows that most of the world’s species, in some plumage or another, could be covered by this description, including the most likely species to occur at that place and time, Ring-billed Gull. This common Colorado species does have gray wings, yellow bill, and yellow or yellowish legs after its first year. Also, Ring-billed Gulls can still have dark eyes in their second cycle when their wings are gray and their bills are yellow. The description does not say that the bill was unmarked, that is, lacking the typical ring of a Ring-billed Gull. It does not mention the darkness of the gray. It does not even determine the age of the bird (something very critical in some groups, such as shorebirds and gulls). The description also does not eliminate the next most likely species, California Gull. In fact, if it weren’t for the color of the legs, the description would not even rule out Yellow-billed Loon or Elegant Trogon! The vote will be 0-7.

A better set of details is provided by another observer: “A gull (gray upperparts, white underparts, black wingtips, swimming in lake) slightly smaller and slightly darker-mantled than a nearby Ring-billed Gull; unmarked yellow bill, dark eyes, distinct scapular crescent and broader tertial crescent than the Ring-billed.” Good. The observer managed to eliminate both Ring-billed and California gulls and Mew Gull is probably the most likely candidate. Unfortunately, the vote should still be 0-7, as Black-legged Kittiwake is not eliminated by the details provided.

Here is an actual description of a Mew Gull from a recent circulation: “The bird was an obvious smaller white-headed gull among Ring-billed Gulls which were slightly bigger than it. The white head was heavily mottled with brown, with a distinct concentration of brown mottling on the nape. The bill was shorter and thinner than those of the Ring-billed Gulls and was virtually unmarked yellow. The eyes were dark. The mantle was a medium gray, a shade or two darker than those of the Ring-billed Gulls. The wings were long, with the wingtip extending well past the tail (the tail only reached the tip of P7). The underparts were white and the legs were a weird greeny-yellow. The outermost primary (P10) had a very large mirror and P9 had a smaller, but still substantial, mirror. Each of these mirrors was considerably larger than the respective mirrors on the Ring-billed Gulls. P8 had only a small amount of black proximal to the white tip. Similar

species eliminated: Ring-billed Gull can be easily ruled out by bill size and pattern, eye color, head pattern, mantle color, and wingtip pattern. Common Gull (*L. c. canus*) is more difficult to eliminate from consideration, but wingtip pattern does the trick, as does (probably) mantle coloration. California Gull is ruled out on size, bill pattern, and wingtip pattern. Black-legged Kittiwake is eliminated by head and wingtip patterns and by leg color.” The vote on this record was 7-0 - though it was supported by an excellent photograph.

While both of the actual descriptions provided in this paper may seem long, tedious, and bothersome to write, in actuality, they do not take all that long. I am the author of the Mew Gull description (2002-157; see Leukering and Semo 2004); it took me only 15 minutes to complete the entire form. And Mew Gull is one of the more difficult species to sufficiently describe in words! Granted, I had already written notes in my field notebook and I also had pictures to review to help me write the description, but it still took relatively little time. Imagine how quickly you could write a convincing description of an adult male Painted Bunting!

So, if I have any writing skill at all, you now have a better understanding of what the Committee would like to see in rare-bird documentation. Hopefully, you are now going to get into the habit of submitting more, and more thorough, documentations to the Committee. The easiest way to do this is to visit the Colorado Field Ornithologists’ website (www.cfo-link.org) and follow the links to the Colorado Bird Records Committee. Two electronic documentation forms, either one of which you can fill out and submit to the CBRC, are currently on that site; however, very soon, that site will host a state-of-the-art all-electronic submission and review system for rare-bird records. I and the rest of the CBRC hope that you will find this an easy and enjoyable way to contribute your important records to further the state’s ornithological knowledge.

Acknowledgments

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Literature Cited

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Colorado Field
Ornithologists



Lark Sparrow singing along the Devil's Backbone near Loveland in May 2004. Photo by Rachel Hopper.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD: THE WINTER 2003-2004 REPORT (DECEMBER - FEBRUARY)

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Colorado had near average temperatures this winter, but most of the state was much drier than average. The precipitation total in Denver was only 0.56 in, compared to the normal of 1.66 in. February was the eighth month in a row with below average precipitation in Denver. The snowfall in most of the state's mountain ranges was also below average. The average temperature at Denver International Airport (DIA) in both December and January was 2 F above average, and the average temperature in February was 2 F below average. The highest winter temperature at DIA was 68 F on January 8th and 27th, and the coldest reading was -11 F on January 5th. No temperature records were set during the season.

Along with the weather, the birds were also rather average during the season. There were no invasions of northern birds, either those that come in ones and twos, or those that come in large flocks. A couple of the rarest birds this winter were first found in the fall of 2003. For example, the Anna's Hummingbird remained at Tina Jones' house in Denver through all of December. Also, the Black Brant seen in Broomfield was the same bird seen during the fall in Greeley; thanks to Bill Schmoker for the comparison photographs. Other rare species seen include Blue-winged Teal in Rocky Ford, Glaucous-winged Gull in Lafayette, Varied Thrush north of Golden, Yellow-throated Warbler in Canon City, Pine Warbler in Greeley, and LeConte's Sparrows just west of John Martin Reservoir.

The dove invasion of Colorado continues, with four Inca Doves seen in Lamar all season, and White-winged Doves seen in many locations across the state. Eurasian Collared-Doves also continue to increase with a flock of over 100 seen in Lamar throughout the winter. Also, more species are overwintering in the state - Band-tailed Pigeons were seen in several places this season, and Lesser Goldfinches were seen in good numbers across a large proportion of Colorado.

There were very few mountain species reported from the plains this winter. Dave Hallock's Indian Peaks winter summary explains why. The 27 birds seen

per count hour were 50% above the 20-year average, and have only been exceeded by 1999's 29 birds per count hour. That year there were many Bohemian Waxwings present, with one flock of 1,000 birds. Where were they this year, with only three being seen throughout the state? But I digress, why the high numbers? Food played the largest role, as many participants mentioned a good cone crop on most of the trees, and the large number of birds was in the montane, not the subalpine, areas of the count. The species contributing to the high count included irruptive seed eaters (Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Grosbeak and Red Crossbill), residents (Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, all corvids, Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches and Brown Creeper), and vertical migrants (Northern Flicker, Townsend's Solitaire, American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco and House Sparrow).

Thanks to everyone who mailed or e-mailed me their reports, and to everyone who collected the sightings from the COBirds listserve. Brandon Percival greatly aided the writing of this report, and reviewed it. An underlined species means that documentation is desired by the CFO Records Committee. Please send rare bird report forms, which can be downloaded from the CFO website at <http://www.cfo-link.org/leadpage.html> to Tony Leukering, CBRC Chair, at cbrc@cfo-link.org or to PO Box 660, Brighton, CO 80601.

Greater White-fronted Goose: The largest flock seen this winter was 78 at Jumbo Reservoir, *Sedgwick/Logan*, on 12 Dec (HA).

Snow Goose: The only West Slope report was a juvenile seen near Carbondale, *Garfield*, between 12 and 24 Jan (DFi, K&TM).

Ross's Goose: Two West Slope records this season were one seen at Nucla, *Montrose*, between 2 and 24 Dec (CD, BW), and one seen in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 12 Dec (LA).

Brant: The first-year Black Brant that was first seen in the fall, remained in Greeley, *Weld*, until at least 16 Dec (BG, RSi, J&KS, BSc, m.ob.). It was then seen at Lower Latham Reservoir, *Weld*, on 29 Dec (NKm), and then at Brunner Reservoir, *Broomfield*, between 5 Jan and 16 Feb (LS, EZ, PGe, MBo, JV, m.ob.).

Trumpeter Swan: A good winter for this species with five reports. Up to five were seen at Cattail Pond, *Larimer*, throughout the season (EC, m.ob.), four adults were at Lake Maria near Walsenburg, *Huerfano*, between 1 and 19 Dec (DSi, m.ob.), three adults and a juvenile were at Lake Valley, *Boulder*,

throughout the season until one of the adults died on 19 Feb (MO, DW, m.ob.). Two adults were seen at the Walker Gravel Pit, *Douglas*, on 6 Dec (GW), and another adult was at Horsetooth Reservoir, *Larimer*, between 16 and 21 Dec (P&JH).

Tundra Swan: Also a good winter for this species with six reports. Four adults and two juveniles were seen at Lake Maria, near Walsenburg, *Huerfano*, between 1 and 19 Dec (RMi, DSi, m.ob.), three adults were at Confluence Park, *Delta*, throughout the season (LA, m.ob.), and another three adults were at CF&I Lakes, *Pueblo*, on 4 Dec, (BKP, TL, P&CS). One was seen in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 16 Feb (RMo, LA), two were at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, on 23 Feb (DAL, DE), and two adults were seen at Long Pond, *Larimer*, on 27 Feb (BD, RH).

Eurasian Wigeon: An adult male was seen at Barr Lake, *Adams*, between 1 and 3 Dec (DFa, GGo, TL).

Blue-winged Teal: This species is rare in winter, but this season there were two reports. A female was at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, on 20 Dec (LS, TL), and a male in basic plumage was at Rocky Ford Valco Pond, *Otero*, between 19 Jan and 23 Feb (DAL, JT, DE).

Greater Scaup: Over 50 were reported this winter, with the largest flock being seven males and seven females at Marston Reservoir, *Denver*, on 6 Dec (TJ).

Surf Scoter: Only one just remained into the winter season, being seen at Horsetooth Reservoir, *Larimer*, on Dec 1 (JBn).

White-winged Scoter: One was seen in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 1 Dec (JBn), two females were at Aurora Reservoir, *Arapahoe*, on 12 Dec (GW, AS), and another female was near Florence, *Fremont*, between 14 and 17 Dec (TL, m.ob.), a first Fremont County record.

Black Scoter: A female was at Long Pond, *Larimer*, on 3 and 4 Dec (RH, DAL).

Long-tailed Duck: 21 reports this season, all from the East Slope, except for five seen at Jerry Creek Reservoir, *Mesa*, between 1 Dec and 13 Jan (RLe, m.ob.).

Barrow's Goldeneye: The largest flocks seen this winter were 28 at Jerry Creek Reservoir, *Mesa*, on 1 Dec (RL, m.ob.), and 74 near Carbondale, *Garfield*, on 1 Jan (J&TM).

Red-throated Loon: An adult in basic plumage remained at Standley Lake, *Jefferson*, between 1 and 8 Dec (LS, m.ob.).

Horned Grebe: Rare on the West Slope, one was seen at McPhee Reservoir, *Montezuma*, on 17 Dec (JBy).

Red-necked Grebe: Two were seen at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 1 and 4 Dec (BKP, m.ob.).

Eared Grebe: Very unusual in the middle of winter, up to five were seen at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 1 Dec and 20 Feb (BKP, GW, m.ob.), and one was at Lake Beckwith in Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 3 Jan (DSi, SMo, BKP, TL).

American White Pelican: Mid-winter sightings this season were one at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 19 Dec and 10 Jan (BKP, MP, TL, m.ob.), one at Neenoshe Reservoir, *Kiowa*, on 12 Jan (LP), and an injured bird at Upper Queens Reservoir, *Kiowa*, between 7 and 29 Feb (BKP, MP, LE, m.ob.).

Great Blue Heron: One was seen in the Blue River at Silverthorne, *Summit*, on 30 Jan (DFa). This might be the first high elevation, winter record for this species in Colorado.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Two adults and two juveniles were seen at a gravel pond at I-76 and Sheridan, *Jefferson*, between 13 Dec and 29 Feb (LS), an immature was along the Poudre River in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, on 12 Jan (DAL), and one was seen in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 16 Feb (RMO).

Osprey: A late lingering bird was seen at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 1 and 20 Dec (BKP, MP, m.ob.).

Sora: Up to eight were heard and seen near Fort Lyon, *Bent*, between 12 Dec and 1 Jan (DN, m.ob.).

Sandhill Crane: A late flock of 120 was at Ridgway Reservoir, *Ouray*, on 18 Dec (BW, CD). Larry Arnold reported 31 flocks of cranes in December totaling 1,582 birds. Ten years ago it was nearly impossible to see cranes in Grand Junction in December.

Spotted Sandpiper: A very late bird was one seen on the Grand Junction Christmas Bird Count, *Mesa*, on 14 Dec (CD, LA).

Least Sandpiper: One was seen at and below John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, between 4 and 11 Dec (DN).

Dunlin: Very unusual was two birds spending most of the season at Valco Ponds and Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 9 Dec and 20 Feb (SO, BKP, m.ob.).

Long-billed Dowitcher: Late lingering birds were five seen at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, on 4 Dec (DN).

Mew Gull: A very good winter for this species, with five reports. A juvenile was seen at Valmont Reservoir, *Boulder*, on 13 Dec (BSc, CLW), an adult was at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 19 Dec and 11 Jan (TL, MP, BKP, m.ob.), and just possibly the same adult was at Big Johnson Reservoir, *El Paso*, on 9 Jan (MP). A second-year bird was at Prince Lake No. 1, *Boulder*, between 21 Jan and 22 Feb (JV, PGe, CLW, TF), and another second-year bird was at Prospect Lake and Big Johnson Reservoir, *El Paso*, between 23 and 26 Jan (TF, BM, MP).

Thayer's Gull: There were 28 reports of this species this winter, with all but two from the Front Range. The other two reports were from John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, and Lake Holbrook, *Otero*.

Iceland Gull: One in first-winter plumage was seen at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, on 5 Jan (BKP), and an adult in basic plumage was at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, on 29 Jan (DN).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: There were 30 reports this winter, and again all but two were from the Front Range. The other two reports were from John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, and Lake Holbrook, *Otero*.

Glaucous-winged Gull: One in first-winter plumage was seen at Horsetooth Reservoir, *Larimer*, between 13 and 21 Dec (NKm, GL), and a second-winter bird was seen at Prince Lakes, *Boulder*, between 13 and 30 Jan (CLW, TF, JV, PGe, m.ob.). There was some debate about whether both these birds showed characteristics that indicated some Herring Gull genes in their heritage. Another bird was seen at Confluence Park, *Delta*, between 13 and 23 Feb which showed characteristics of an immature hybrid Western x Glaucous-winged Gull (DH*i*). There is a photograph of this bird on the CFO website under Bird Photos.

Glaucous Gull: There were 20 reports of this species this winter, with all but one from the Front Range. The other bird was seen at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*.

Great Black-backed Gull: The Colorado individual of this species returned to Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, for the whole season and for the 14th year (BKP, m.ob.), and another bird was seen at John Martin Reservoir, *Bent*, on 15 Dec (DN).

Arctic Tern: The adult seen in late November at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, remained until 3 Dec (BKP, m.ob.).

Band-tailed Pigeon: One of the events of the winter was this species being seen in several locations in Colorado. Up to 75 were seen near Richard Bunn's house, *Teller*, with the high count on 28 Dec (RB), ten were at 9000' in Coal Creek Canyon, *Jefferson*, on 13 Dec (GE), one was seen on the Christmas Bird Count just north of Boulder, on 14 Dec (SD, RD), 51 were seen in Cascade, *El Paso*, on 28 Dec (MP, BM, ABu), and 50 were at Green Mountain Falls, *El Paso/Teller*, on 6 Feb (BKP, MP).

Eurasian Collared-Dove: Expansion of their range to the northwest continues, with four seen in Rifle, *Garfield*, on 31 Jan (K&TM), and seven in Meeker, *Rio Blanco*, on 22 Feb (GK). Both groups are apparently residents in these locations.

White-winged Dove: Amazingly, up to 15 were seen in the Rocky Ford area, *Otero*, between 9 Dec and 14 Feb (SO, BKP, m.ob.).

Inca Dove: One remained in Mymm Ackley's yard in Pueblo until 25 Dec, and was seen again between 8 and 24 Feb (MA), one was seen in Lamar, *Prowers*, throughout the winter (JT, m.ob.), and an amazing seven were seen in Rocky Ford, *Otero*, on 10 Jan (SO).

Western Screech-Owl: The high count was 37 on the Grand Junction Christmas Count, *Mesa*, on 14 Dec (RL, m.ob.).

Eastern Screech-Owl: The high count was 27 on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (CLW, m.ob.).

Long-eared Owl: The high count was 25 also on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (CLW, m.ob.).

Anna's Hummingbird: The immature female seen in the fall at Tina Jones' house in Littleton, *Jefferson*, remained between 1 Dec and 5 Jan (TJ).

Williamson's Sapsucker: Unusual winter records were two females seen at the Holy-Cross Abbey in Canon City, *Fremont*, between 1 Dec and 13 Feb (SMo, MP, LE, m.ob.), another female was south of Canon City, *Fremont*, on 6 Dec (MP), another female was seen in Colorado City, *Pueblo*, between 3 and 11 Jan (SMo, m.ob.), and an adult male was at Horsethief Falls, *Teller*, on 29 Jan (MP, ABu).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: A juvenile was seen at Willow Creek Park in Lamar, *Prowers*, between 1 Dec and 7 Feb (DAL, JT), one was seen on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (CLW), an adult male was in Salida, *Chaffee*, on 22 and 23 Dec (SMo, m.ob.), another adult male was in Willow Creek Park in Lamar between 7 and 21 Jan (DAL, JT), and one was in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, between 9 and 12 Jan (LA).

Eastern Phoebe: A very rare West Slope sighting was one seen on Four Mile Road, *Garfield*, on 13 Dec (KP, HEK, K&TM).

Say's Phoebe: This species is an unusual winterer in Colorado. Two were seen at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 19 Dec and 14 Feb (BKP, MP, GW), and one was at Valco Ponds in Pueblo, *Pueblo*, 6 Jan - 29 Feb (SO, DN, MY).

Black-billed Magpie: Only 17 were seen on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (CLW), which was an all time low compared to the average of 67 birds.

Bushtit: This species is unusual on the far eastern plains. A flock was seen in the John Martin Reservoir area, *Bent*, between 3 and 15 Dec (DN, SO), another flock was at Cheraw, *Otero*, on 16 Dec (SO, TL), and seven were at Hudson, *Weld*, on 30 Dec (LS, CLW).

Winter Wren: The only sighting well east of the Front Range was one seen northwest of Rocky Ford, *Otero*, on 16 Dec (NKm).

Golden-crowned Kinglet: This species is unusual on the far eastern plains. One was seen at Willow Creek in Lamar, *Prowers*, between 1 and 17 Dec (JT), and another was seen in the same location on 29 Feb (TF, DHa).

Eastern Bluebird: Good numbers of this species seen along the Front Range were ten in the Colorado City area, *Pueblo*, between 2 Dec and 17 Feb (DSi), a

total of 25 seen on the Penrose Christmas Count, *Fremont*, on 14 Dec (m.ob.), and eight seen in Aiken Canyon, *El Paso*, on 23 Jan (MP).

Hermit Thrush: Several lingered into December along the Front Range, two were seen on the Grand Junction Christmas Count, *Mesa*, on 14 Dec (CD, LA), and one was seen in Poncha Springs, *Chaffee*, on 22 Dec (TL, BKP).

Varied Thrush: One was seen in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, between 7 and 10 Jan (RMo, RW, DSe), and an adult male was in Roxborough, *Douglas*, on 7 Feb (DFa, LS, BSc, ETF).

Sage Thrasher: One was seen in Penrose, *Fremont*, between 12 Dec and 27 Jan (MP, BKP), one was in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 14 Dec (CD, LA), and four were in Vogel Canyon, south of La Junta, *Otero*, (SO). Five were seen on the Pueblo Reservoir Christmas Count, *Pueblo*, on 20 Dec (MY), one was north of Black Mesa, *Baca*, on 30 Dec (BKP, TL), and one was at Setchfield SWA, *Bent*, on 3 Jan (DN).

Bohemian Waxwing: One was seen at the Lamar Community College, *Prowers*, on 17 Jan (DAL), and two were seen at Adam's Lodge, *Rio Blanco*, on 7 Feb (DHi).

Yellow-throated Warbler: One was seen at the Holy-Cross Abbey in Canon City, *Fremont*, between 1 Dec and 2 Jan (MP, TL, m.ob.).

Pine Warbler: One was seen in Greeley, *Weld*, between 19 Dec and 24 Jan (SMc, BG, RL, m.ob.).

Palm Warbler: One was seen in Highlands Ranch, *Douglas*, on 19 Jan (BBn).

Scarlet Tanager: An adult male was seen in Fort Collins, *Larimer*, between 6 and 21 Dec (DSw, RH).

Green-tailed Towhee: One and then two birds wintered at Connie Kogler's feeder in Montrose, *Montrose*, between 25 Dec and 29 Feb.

Eastern Towhee: A probable hybrid female wintered at Barbara Anderson's house in the Big Thompson Canyon, *Larimer*, between 22 Dec and 29 Feb (BA, RH, JMm, DAL, BSc).

Chipping Sparrow: An adult was seen at the Lamar Community College, *Prowers*, between 18 Jan and 29 Feb (DAL, JT, m.ob.).

Field Sparrow: Unusual along the Front Range was one seen in Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 5 Dec (DSi), and perhaps the same bird was seen below the dam at Lake Beckwith, *Pueblo*, on 12 Dec (DSi).

Black-throated Sparrow: One was in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, on 13 Dec (RMO).

Lark Bunting: One was seen at Higbee Canyon, *Otero*, on 20 Dec (SO).

Le Conte's Sparrow: Four were seen at the usual location near Fort Lyon, *Bent*, between 12 Dec and 29 Feb (DN).

Fox Sparrow: The red form of this species that was in Nucla, *Montrose*, during the fall, remained in the same location throughout the winter (CD, BW, GS, KG).

Swamp Sparrow: There were many reported along the Eastern Plains this season, and three from the rest of the state. One was seen at the Mount Ouray SWA in Salida, *Chaffee*, on 22 and 23 Dec (SY), one was at Lake DeWeese, *Custer*, on 22 Dec (MY), and one was in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, between 28 Jan and 17 Feb (LA).

White-throated Sparrow: This species was also seen in good numbers on the Eastern Plains, and one was seen in Redstone, *Pitkin*, on 2 Jan (LV, DFi, AL).

Harris's Sparrow: Away from the Eastern Plains, one spent the whole winter at Larry Arnold's house in Grand Junction, *Mesa*, (LA), and one was at Fish Creek above Estes Park, *Larimer*, on 8 Feb (BK).

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Up to two were seen at Fruitgrowers Reservoir and nearby Dave Galinat's house, *Delta*, between 28 Dec and 29 Feb (DG).

McCown's Longspur: A flock of about 50 birds was seen south of Adobe Creek Reservoir, *Bent*, between 7 Dec and 25 Jan (DN, m.ob.).

Snow Bunting: There were a smattering of sightings around the state this winter. Two were seen on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (CLW), one was at Big Johnson Reservoir, *El Paso*, on 29 Dec (MP), another was seen at Hudson, *Weld*, on 30 Dec (LS, CLW), five were in Elk Valley, *Routt*, on 1 Jan (JL, DFi), a total of six were seen near Hugo, *Lincoln*, on 17 Jan (MP), and very rare for the West Slope was one at Norwood, *San Miguel*, on 21 Feb (LA).

Rusty Blackbird: There were five sightings this winter. Three were seen at Valco Ponds, *Pueblo*, between 1 Dec and 25 Feb (BKP, m.ob.), one seen on east Boulder Creek, *Boulder*, between 14 and 23 Dec (CLW, BT), one was seen at the Lake Meredith feedlot, *Crowley*, on 16 Dec (NKM), another was seen at Bonny Reservoir, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (BKP, MP, m.ob.), and one was at Runyon Lake, *Pueblo*, on 31 Jan (RMI).

Brewer's Blackbird: Rare in the northwest part of Colorado in winter, one was seen at Craig, *Moffat*, on 30 Jan (DFa).

Common Grackle: There were a couple of quite large flocks seen this winter. 43 were seen at Lochbuie, *Weld*, on 30 Dec (LS, CLW), and eight were at the Lamar Community College, *Powers*, between 17 Jan and 29 Feb (DAL, m.ob.).

Great-tailed Grackle: Large flocks reported this winter were 103 at Fruita, *Mesa*, on the Grand Junction Christmas Count on 14 Dec (RL, m.ob.), 100 at Nepesta Marsh, *Pueblo*, on 7 Feb (BKP, MP, LE), and a flock of at least 200 at Barr Lake, *Adams*, on 17 Feb (CBI).

Brown-headed Cowbird: Three were seen at Florence, *Fremont*, on 13 and 14 Dec (MP, BKP), two were seen on the Montrose Christmas Count, *Montrose*, on 20 Dec (m.ob.), and one was east of Boulder, *Boulder*, on 17 Feb (PP).

Black Rosy-Finch: A very large flock of this species in Colorado was 110 seen at Unaweep Canyon, *Mesa*, between 9 and 11 Feb (RL, m.ob.).

Purple Finch: A female type bird was seen at Rye, *Pueblo*, between 12 Dec and 19 Jan (DSi), another was at Colorado City, *Pueblo*, on 3 Jan (SMo), and a third was near Las Animas, *Bent*, on 7 Jan (DN).

White-winged Crossbill: Two were seen on the Grand Mesa, *Mesa*, on 13 Dec (NKR), three female or immature-plumaged birds were near Copper Mountain, *Summit*, between 19 and 21 Dec (BSc), and two were near Tennessee Pass, *Eagle*, on 1 Feb (MW).

Common Redpoll: There were five reports of this species this winter. A male was in Rachel Hopper's yard north of Fort Collins, *LaRimer*, on 1 and 2 Dec (RH), two males and four females were seen on the Bonny Reservoir Christmas Count, *Yuma*, on 18 Dec (JK, GW, m.ob.), one was seen at Patrick Gould's house, *Teller*, between 26 Dec and 29 Feb (PGo, LE, m.ob.), one was at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, on 6 Jan (BKP, MP), and one was seen at Tamarack Ranch, *Logan*, on 31 Jan (HA).

Lesser Goldfinch: This species was seen in much greater numbers this winter than previously. More than 20 birds were reported from the West Slope throughout the period, a flock of up to 35 spent the whole winter in the Colorado City area, *Pueblo*, (DSi), and up to 16 were at Pueblo Reservoir, *Pueblo*, between 19 Dec and 9 Jan (BKP, MP, m.ob.).

Contributing Observers

Mymm Ackley, Barbara Anderson, Henry Armknecht, Larry Arnold, Jason Beason (JBn), Jim Beatty (JBy), Chris Blakeslee (CBl), Maggie Boswell (MBo), Bob Brown (BBn), Richard Bunn, Allan Burns (ABu), Elaine Coley, Raymond Davis, Coen Dexter, Beth Dillon, Sharon Dooley, Lisa Edwards, David Ely (DE), Gary Emerson, Doug Faulkner (DFa), Dick Filby (DFi), Ted Floyd, Dave Galinat, Peter Gent (PGe), Gregg Goodrich (GGo), Patrick Gould (PGo), Kathey Graaff, Bryan Guarente, David Hartley (DHa), Pat and Joel Hayward (P&JH), Donna Hilkey (DHi), Rachel Hopper, Tina Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Joey Kellner, Hugh Kingery (HEK), Glen Klinger, Nick Komar (NKm), Nick Korte (NKr), David Leatherman (DAL), Tony Leukering, Rich Levad (RLe), Al Levantin, John Lloyd, Roger Linfield (RLi), Greg Lugar, Joe Mammoser (JMm), Bill Maynard, Kay and Tom McConnell (K&TM), Steve Messick (SMe), Rich Miller (RMi), SeEtta Moss (SMo), Robert Moston (RMo), Duane Nelson, Stan Oswald, Linda Paulsen, Brandon Percival (BKP), Mark Peterson, Pete Plage, Kim Potter, Pearle and Clif Sandstrom-Smith (P&CS), Bill Schmoker (BSc), Jim and Karen Schmoker (J&KS), Larry Semo, Randy Siebert (RSi), David Silverman (DSi), Andrew Spencer, Deborah Steele (DSe), George Steele, Doug Swartz (DSw), Elena Thomas Faulkner (ETF), Janeal Thompson, Bill Tweit, John Vanderpoel, Linda Vidal, Glenn Walbek, David Waltman, Mr Wiesen, Christopher Wood (CLW), Rhonda Woodward, Brenda Wright, Mark Yaeger, Sherrie York, Eric Zorawowicz, many observers (m.ob.).



Great Blue Heron standing in the Blue River in Silverthorne, *Summit*, on 30 January 2004. Photo by Doug Faulkner.

