NO. 13 SEPTEMBER 1972

the

Colorado Field Ornithologist

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COVER PHOTO: Nesting site of the Black Phoebe along the St. Charles River near Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado. Nest is located under the overhang of the rock in the left center of the picture which "points" across the river. Photographed by Jerry C. Ligon on 21 July 1972.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

19 August 1972

Mr. David W. Lupton, Editor
Colorado Field Ornithologist
Colorado State University Libraries
Fort Collins, Colorado 80521

Dear Mr. Lupton,

Perhaps COLAPTES CHRYSOIDES (Gilded Flicker) is not such a bad fellow though Van Remsen (CFO, No. 12, June 72, p. 7) suggests the bird best be forgotten. I disagree. "Gildy" may have sparked a useful CFO validations/records committee; general increased care in observations and reporting may have been whetted; and, it may be politic that a good friend not be forgotten.

On pages 51 and 52 of "Guide to the Winter Birds of Colorado" (Dr. Richard G. Beidleman, University of Colorado Museum, Boulder, Colorado, reprinted 1963) it is reported that the Gilded Flicker can be expected to occur about 5% of the time in suitable habitat in any part of Colorado. Dr. Beidleman defines southwest Colorado habitat as that to include sedimentary canyon and mesa country south from Grand Junction, and the mountains to include montane country above 6000 feet, especially the Colorado Front Range overlooking the Great Plains.

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 the sooner each of us sharpens curiosity and does better in gathering solid data in contrast to a 'doubting Thomas' approach, the better.

Best Wishes,

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BLACK PHOEBE NESTING IN COLORADO

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The first recorded nesting of the Black Phoebe (Sayornis nigricans) for the state of Colorado was confirmed on 21 July 1972 by Jerry C. Ligon. The location was at an elevation of 5300 feet above sea level along the St. Charles River about fifteen miles southwest of Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado. The Burnt Mill Road bridge across the river stands approximately 100 feet from the nest location.

This species was first added to Colorado's avifauna list on 13 May 1972 by Claire and Dannette Griffiths and Donna Bregenzer working as a field party during the Pueblo Audubon Society's annual Spring Count Day. The following dates are the chronological observations involving numerous individuals, coming from throughout the state and, each time, involving at least one and often two birds: May 14, 16, 18, 27; June 3, 8, 10, 20, 27; July 8, 21, 26; August 5, 12. The July 8 observation marked the last date on which both birds were observed and the where-abouts of the missing individual is undetermined as of 12 August 1972.

On the date that the nest was first located, one bird was flushed from under a rock overhang (see cover photo) and, after about fifteen minutes of hunting, the actual nest was found about four feet above the surface of the river. During a three hour period of observation a short distance from the nest, only one bird was observed to attend the nest, leaving very infrequently and returing after catching insects which were consumed. The bird's return to the nest was direct, flying low over the surface of the water. Alighting upon the nest terminated an upward arc during the last few feet in the bird's flight. The nest was attached to a nearly horizontal rock surface and was composed of plant material held together with mud. About four loose strands of straw hung down below the lower limits of the nest and gave the construction an unkempt appearance. The actual contents of the nest was never determined but it is very possible that eggs were present and perhaps at an early stage of incubation due to the almost total attention given the nest by the one adult.

On 3 August 1972 the nest was completely destroyed by a flood which caused the St. Charles River to crest at about four feet above the nest. On 5 August, Dave and Claire Griffiths observed one Black Phoebe in the area although some distance from the actual nest site.

There seems to be no observable uniqueness about this particular chosen location for the nesting of the Black Phoebe. Interested bird students should note that, indeed, there are innumberable such favorable

sites between this location and their typical habitat south and west of Colorado. The closest nesting location seems to be in New Mexico, near Las Vegas (James David Ligon, pers. comm.) which is approximately 215 miles south of this nesting site. Hubbard (Check-List of the Birds of New Mexico, 1970, p. 51) states that in New Mexico the species appears to have spread northward during the present century.

If this nesting attempt in Colorado is any indication of a range extension for the species, perhaps through changing weather conditions, then it is obvious that other nestings in Colorado should be looked for and expected.

There are a few points of conjecture which came to light during this present examination that should be noted. The fact that the adult birds were observed to be carrying nesting material during the later part of May, which later proved to be unsuccessful attempts at nesting, and the fact that their actual nesting occurred fairly late in the season, seems to indicate a situation whereby certain reproductive requirements of the species may have been only marginally fulfilled by the site conditions. This situation may certainly occur when any species extends its range beyond its present limits.

Another point to consider is, barring destruction of the nest, would this nesting attempt have been successful and could it have been so with only one adult in attendance? Surely these questions will be apparent and hopefully resolved in the future concerning this species' status in Colorado.

The authors wish to express thanks to Ivan Hankla, 813 Brown Avenue, Pueblo, Colorado for allowing entrance to his property for our investigations.

COLORADO CHRISTMAS COUNT FOR 1971

compiled by

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Full details of twenty of the twenty-two 1971 Colorado Christmas Counts appear in American Birds, Volume 26, Number 2, April 1972, pages 464-472.

Bonny Reservoir -- January 2, 1972. Paul Julian, compiler. 6 observers. 53 species and 1 additional hybrid; about 26,190 individuals. 3 Blue Geese (good study by 6 observers with scopes), 1 adult Goshawk, and 31 hybrid Yellow-shafted X Red-shafted Flickers are sightings of interest.

Boulder -- December 18, 1971. Paul Julian, compiler. 39 observers. 78 species and 1 additional hybrid flicker; about 13,020 individuals. Of note: 1 Barn Owl, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (leisurely study from 15 feet by 3 observers), 2 Loggerhead Shrikes (all field marks carefully studied, 2 parties). An additional 4 species were observed during the count period, but not on count day, including Common Redpoll and White-throated Sparrow.

Colorado Springs -- December 26, 1971. Dominic A. Bartol, Jr., compiler. 50 observers. 78 species and 1 additional hybrid flicker; about 5,575 individuals. Of note: 2 Peregrine Falcons (good studies by 4), 1 Pigeon Hawk (15 feet, study by 5), 1 Mockingbird, 1 Myrtle Warbler, 2 Brown Towhees, and 3 White-winged Juncos. An additional 4 species were seen during the count period, but not on count day, including Turkey, Plain Titmouse, and Brown Thrasher.

Denver -- December 18, 1971. David Hutchinson, compiler. 110 observers. 104 species; about 16,162 individuals. Interesting sightings include 4 Harlan's Hawks, 12 Blue Grouse, 1 Glaucous Gull (good study), 1 Pygmy Owl, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 1 White-necked Raven (new to count), 2 Clark's Nutcrackers, 1 Long-billed Marsh Wren, 1 Mockingbird, 1 Hermit Thrush (new to count), 1 Purple Finch (new to count), and 6 Common Redpolls. Two additional species were seen during the count period but not on count day, including Black Rosy Finch.

Durango -- January 1, 1972. Richard Stransky, compiler. 14 observers. 49 species; about 3,383 individuals. 700 Pinon Jays, 15 Pygmy Nuthatches and 4 Tree Sparrows are sightings of interest. Two additional species were seen during the count period, but not on count day, including 1 Bewick's Wren.

Evergreen-Idaho Springs -- December 19, 1971. Edna Thomas, compiler. 34 observers. 46 species; about 4,600 individuals. Of note: 3 Goshawks,

2 Pygmy Owls, 1 Winter Wren, 7 Black Rosy Finches; Red Crossbill photographed on nest with 4 eggs!--eggs hatched December 28, 1971 but strong winds on January 10, 1972 blew the nest from the tree, destroying it--young should have fledged on about January 15, 1972; and 1 White-winged Crossbill. Two additional species, including Band-tailed Pigeon, were seen during the count period but not on count day.

Fort Collins -- December 22, 1971. Ronald A. Ryder, compiler. 34 observers. 77 species; about 3,351 individuals. Of interest: 1 Blue Goose, 1 Ruddy Duck, 2 Harlan's Hawks, 1 California Quail (introduced), 1 Gray Partridge (introduced), 1 Pygmy Owl, 1 Long-billed Marsh Wren, 3 Myrtle Warblers, 1 Brewer's Blackbird (close, at feeder) and 1 Fox Sparrow. Two additional species were seen in the area during the count period, but not on count day, including 7 Ross's Geese.

Grand Junction -- December 19, 1971. Lorna Gustafson, compiler. 18 observers. 66 species; about 19,287 individuals. Interesting sightings include: 2 Ferruginous Hawks (4 observers), 1 Virginia Rail (good study), 1 Spotted Sandpiper (no details), 1 Plain Titmouse, 1 Audubon's Warbler, and 70 Black Rosy Finches. One additional species was seen during the count period but not on count day.

Gunnison -- December 19, 1971. Sidney Hyde, compiler. 6 observers. 35 species; about 1,248 individuals. All three species of rosy finch and both species of shrike were recorded. An additional 5 species were observed during the count period, but not on count day, including Snow Bunting.

Hotchkiss -- December 26, 1971. Theodora Colborn, compiler. 4 observers. 49 species; about 4,582 individuals. 1 Pigeon Hawk and 1 Rock Wren (all year) are sightings of interest. 7 additional species were observed during the count period but not on count day.

Lake Isabel -- January 1, 1972. Van Truan, compiler. 10 observers. 33 species; about 788 individuals. Of note are three additional species seen in the area count period, but not on count day: Snowy Owl, Evening Grosbeak, and Brown Towhee.

Longmont -- December 28, 1971. Gilbert Whitney, compiler. 15 observers. 64 species; about 15,997 individuals. Of interest: 1 Virginia Rail, 10 California Gulls (unsatisfactory details), 75 Franklin's Gulls (unsatisfactory details), and 2 Audubon's Warblers. Two additional species were seen during the count period but not on count day.

Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge -- December 28, 1971. Randy Sarvis, compiler. 3 observers. 32 species; about 15,697 individuals. Of note is 1 American Bittern.

Nunn -- December 20, 1971. Clait Braun, compiler. 16 observers. 22 species; about 2,829 individuals. Of note is 1 Rock Wren.

Pikes Peak -- December 31, 1971. Hugh Kingery, compiler. 29 observers. 40 species; about 2,280 individuals. Observations of interest are: 1 Goshawk, 263 Common Crows (all time high), 481 Mountain Chickadees (all time high), 55 Common Bushtits (all time high), 24 Brown Creepers (all time high), 63 Townsend's Solitaires (all time high), 22 Golden-crowned Kinglets, and 555 Brown-capped Rosy Finches (all time high, compared to a previous high of 54!).

Pueblo -- December 18, 1971. Claire Griffiths, compiler. 9 observers. 64 species; about 16,610 individuals. Observations of note include 1 Blue-winged Teal, 1 Barrow's Goldeneye (since Dec. 5), 1 Red-breasted Merganser, 1 adult Goshawk, 2 Yellow-shafted Flickers, 2 Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and 38 Brown Towhees.

Red Feather Lakes -- January 1, 1972. Gustav Swanson, compiler. 47 observers. 28 species; about 922 individuals. Of interest: 1 Turkey, 1 Brown-headed Cowbird, and 10 Pine Grosbeaks. This report is not included in American Birds--consult Ptarmigan, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1972 for details.

Rocky Mountain National Park -- December 18, 1971. Ronald A. Ryder, compiler. 33 observers. 44 species; about 1,540 individuals. Species of special note include 2 Barrow's Goldeneye, 1 Prairie Falcon, 4 White-tailed Ptarmigan, 1 Scrub Jay (weeks at feeder), 2 Common Crows, 196 Robins, and 19 Common Redpolls (in 2 flocks). Seen in the area during count period but not on count day: Lapland Longspur.

Spanish Peaks -- December 20, 1971. Van Truan, compiler. 9 observers. 29 species; about 702 individuals. Of note are 313 Common Ravens.

Weldona-Fort Morgan -- December 21, 1971. Donald Thatcher, compiler. 4 observers. 26 species; about 4,066 individuals.

Westcliffe -- December 19, 1971. Van Truan, compiler. 4 observers. 35 species; about 1,007 individuals. Of note are all three species of rosy finch. One additional species was seen in area count period, but not on count day.

Yuma -- December 31, 1971. Robert E. Glover, compiler. 2 observers. 9 species; about 313 individuals. This report is not included in American Birds--species observed similar to Nunn, Colorado.

COLORADO SPRING COUNT FOR 1972

compiled by

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Baca County -- May 5-7, 1972. Hugh Kingery, compiler. 3 observers. 127 species; about 4,033 individuals. Interesting sightings include 9 Swainson's Hawks (nesting), 1 Peregrine Falcon, 2 Turkeys, 2 Snowy Plovers, 2 Mountain Plovers, 23 Stilt Sandpipers, 1 Roadrunner, 3 Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, 7 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, 5 Eastern Phoebes (nesting), 2 Curve-billed Thrashers (nesting!--thought to be the first nest for Colorado; report to appear in a later issue of the Colorado Field Ornithologist), 30 Grasshopper Sparrows, 14 Rufous-crowned Sparrows, and 36 Cassin's Sparrows.

Bonny Dam -- May 13-14, 1972. Hugh Kingery, compiler. 2 observers. 125 species; about 2,271 individuals. Of note: 1 Common Loon, 1 Broad-winged Hawk, 1 Osprey, 20 Stilt Sandpipers, 12 Yellow-shafted Flickers, 5 Least Flycatchers, 2 White-necked Ravens, 91 Swainson's Thrushes, 1 Tennessee Warbler, 1 Nashville Warbler, 1 Magnolia Warbler, 1 Chestnut-sided Warbler, 1 Summer Tanager, 3 Field Sparrows and 1 Harris' Sparrow.

Boulder -- May 13, 1972. Louise Hering, compiler. 46 observers. 145 species and 2 additional hybrids; about 4,603 individuals. Of interest: 1 Black-necked Stilt, 1 hybrid Yellow-shafted X Red-shafted Flicker, 2 Eastern Phoebes, 1 hybrid Blue Jay X Steller's Jay (Editor's Note: see Williams and Wheat "Hybrid Jays in Colorado", Wilson Bulletin 83 (1971):343-346 for a report of these hybrids, the first reported hybrid jays in North America), 1 Gray-cheeked Thrush, 1 White-eyed Vireo (Editor's Note: new state record; details to appear in a later issue of the Colorado Field Ornithologist), 2 Tennessee Warblers, 1 Nashville Warbler, 1 Black-throated Gray Warbler, 3 Townsend's Warblers, 1 Blackburnian Warbler, 2 Blackpoll Warblers, 2 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and 2 Brewer's Sparrows. An additional 4 species were seen during the week, but not on count day: Black and White Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Cassin's Sparrow.

Colorado Springs -- May 13, 1972. Mahlon Speers, compiler. 49 observers. 157 species; about 10,782 individuals. Unusual sightings included 1 Turkey (new to the spring count), 14 Band-tailed Pigeons, 4 Black-bellied Plovers (new to the spring count), 2 Gray Flycatchers (studied as close as eighteen feet), 1 Bell's Vireo, 1 Parula Warbler (new to spring count), 7 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 2 Brown Towhees, 14 Tree Sparrows (late date; reported by 3 parties), and 1 Fox Sparrow.

Denver -- (Arsenal, Barr Lake and Banner Lake areas). May 13, 1972. Harold Holt (?), compiler. 6 (?) observers. 98 species; about 1,971 individuals. Included were 30 Double-crested Cormorants, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 1 Yellow-shafted Flicker and 1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak. For other counts conducted by members of the Denver Field Ornithologists on Count Day consult the Lark Bunting, Volume 7, No. 9, June 1972.

Durango -- May 13, 1972. Oppie Reames, compiler. 16 observers. 90 species; about 3,570 individuals. Included were 2 Chukar, 3 Black-chinned Hummingbirds, 12 Black-throated Gray Warblers, 1 Common Grackle, 40 Brewer's Sparrows, and 3 Fox Sparrows.

Fort Collins -- May 13, 1972. Ronald A. Ryder, compiler. 56 observers. 186 species; about 17,654 individuals. Unusual sightings: 260 White Pelicans, 160 Double-crested Cormorants, 3 Wood Ducks, 1 Red-breasted Merganser, 4 Goshawks (3 parties), 1 Osprey, 7 Blue Grouse, 16 Sage Grouse (North Park), 8 Mountain Plovers, 1 Upland Plover, 3 Stilt Sandpipers, 2 Knots, 19 Sanderlings, 7 Long-eared Owls, 4 Common Bushtits, 33 Rock Wrens, 1 Gray-cheeked Thrush, 2 Black and White Warblers, 1 Tennessee Warbler, 1 Cape May Warbler, 1 Townsend's Warbler, 2 Blackpoll Warblers, 1 Magnolia Warbler, 1 Ovenbird, 2 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 3 Grasshopper Sparrows, 1,926 Lark Buntings, 16 Sage Sparrows (North Park), 132 Brewer's Sparrows, 1 Harris' Sparrow (at feeder), 3 White-throated Sparrows, 13 McCown's Longspurs, and 13 Chestnut-collared Longspurs.

Grand Junction -- May 25, 1972. Lorna Gustafson, compiler. 9 observers. 101 species; about 3,028 individuals. Of note are 14 Black-chinned Hummingbirds, 8 Plain Titmice, 1 Bewick's Wren, 4 Gray Vireos, 5 Black-throated Gray Warblers and 4 Black-throated Sparrows.

Longmont -- May 13, 1972. Merle Thielen, compiler. 37 observers. 165 species; about 13,968 individuals. Interesting sightings: 85 White Pelicans, 15 Double-crested Cormorants, 65 White-faced Ibis, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 2 Pigeon Hawks, 5 Whimbrels, 1 Stilt Sandpiper, 13 Marbled Godwits, 2 Black-necked Stilts, 3 Band-tailed Pigeons, 1 Barn Owl, 1 Tennessee Warbler, 2 Grace's Warblers, 1 Summer Tanager, 1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 3 Fox Sparrows, and 35 McCown's Longspurs.

Pueblo -- May 13, 1972. Dave Griffiths, compiler. 34 observers. 185 species; about 14,397 individuals. Unusual sightings included: 15 White Pelicans, 2 Green Herons, 1 Common Egret, 2 Wood Ducks, 6 Sandhill Cranes, 2 Snowy Plovers, 1 Knot, 8 Stilt Sandpipers, 1 Common Tern, 2 Black Phoebes (new species for Colorado; see first article in this issue of the Colorado Field Ornithologist), 1 Gray Flycatcher, 5 Gray Vireos, 3 Parula Warblers, 1 Nashville Warbler, 1 Blackpoll Warbler, 1 Orchard Oriole, and 7 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Fourteen additional species were observed during the count week, but not on count day, including Common Loon, Peregrine Falcon, American Golden Plover, Long-eared Owl, Bewick's Wren, Black and White Warbler, Painted Bunting, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Baird's Sparrow.

Rocky Mountain National Park-Estes Park -- May 13, 1972. Warner Reeser, compiler. 13 observers. 79 species; about 2,555 individuals. Of note are: 2 American Widgeons, 2 Rough-winged Swallows, 1 Brown Thrasher, 438 Brewer's Blackbirds, 1 Lazuli Bunting, 150 Brown-capped Rosy Finches, 1 Rufous-sided Towhee, 15 Brewer's Sparrows and 2 White-throated Sparrows. An additional four species were seen during the count period, but not on count day, including Magnolia Warbler.

SOME CHALLENGES IN FIELD IDENTIFICATION FOR COLORADO BIRDERS

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I have found that once a birder learns the identification features of the common birds and learns which species are to be expected when and where, he tends to ignore the possibilities of the presence of very similar, very rare, and hard-to-identify species. Haven't we all been content to list all our scaup as Lessers and all our dowitchers as Long-billed? To me, one of the most satisfying aspects of field ornithology is the picking out of a rare species from a group of very similar but more common species. I present below a list of a few of these possibilities often ignored by Colorado birders. We would do well to keep these possibilities in mind wherever the more common of the species is found. Of course in the majority of cases, the rarer species will not be found, but persistence will eventually lead to some good finds as well as familiarizing the observer more thoroughly with the finer details of the more common species (and thus when the rarer species is found, the differences will be even more apparent). The purpose of this article is to remind Colorado birders of the possibilities, to urge them to be alert for these possibilities, and to relay field marks noted by myself, and others, not published in the commonly used field guides.

Arctic and Red-throated Loons from Common Loon (winter plumage)

Most of us see few loons in Colorado, and the Common Loon is undoubtedly by far the most common of our inland loons, yet both of the smaller species have been recorded in Colorado and both undoubtedly occur here more frequently than reported. The Red-throated Loon is easily distinguished from the Common Loon by its much lighter, grayer coloration: the back and head are very pale and distinctly paler than the brown upperparts of the Common Loon. This characteristic can be seen at great distances. At close range, the Red-throated's back will appear distinctly spotted with white, whereas the Common's back will appear a solid color, or if light areas can be seen, they are blurry mottlings, not well-defined spots. The bill of the Red-throated is very much smaller than that of the Common; whereas one is usually impressed with the length of a Common's bill, the Red-throated's is often conspicuously small. The division between the dark and light areas on the neck and head is less distinct in the Red-throated than Common. Whereas the Common Loon dwarfs ducks and grebes, the Red-throated Loon is basically the same size as a Western Grebe or Mallard. I have found the upturned bill character of the Red-throated Loon emphasized by the field guides not nearly as useful as the other characters noted above.

Separation of Arctic and Common Loons is much more difficult; after several years of Pacific coast experience, I still don't feel confident on every single bird. The Arctic and Common Loons are both very brown, yet the Arctic has a darker, more uniformly colored back and neck. The division between white and brown on the Arctic's neck is much sharper and more well-defined than on the Common's. The Arctic's bill is not nearly as large in proportion to the body as is the Common's; the Arctic's bill is darker, thinner, and shorter. Common Loons usually have an indentation of light color on the dark portion of the upper neck, almost a hint of a collar; the Arctic Loon has an even, crisp border down the neck between the light and dark areas. The dark color on the Arctic's head usually is solid to the eye, while the dark color of the Common's head usually begins to get lighter around the eye and the eye itself can be distinguished clearly. Most of the above characters can be seen in the loon illustrations in Peterson's A Field Guide to Western Birds (1961) but are not treated as field marks. One character which is not mentioned by any field guide, but which is probably the best clinching mark for an Arctic Loon is the presence of a thin chinstrap, a dark line which extends through the light area of the upper throat connecting the eye areas. Ninety percent of the Arctic Loons in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California at Berkeley possess this strap, and not one Common Loon specimen shows this mark. All in all, however, I would be skeptical of Arctic Loon sight identifications in Colorado unless the bird is seen at close range (within 100 yds.) or unless the chinstrap can be seen clearly.

Ross' Goose from Snow Goose

Most evidence indicates that the Ross' Goose is actually increasing on the Great Plains (Trauger, et. al., Auk, 88 (1971):856-875); flocks of over 100 have been discovered with Snow Geese in New Mexico and Texas. This may be due to recent eastward extensions of its breeding range in the Arctic. Thus every flock of Snow Geese in Colorado should be scrutinized closely. The field guides cover the identification features of the Ross' Goose adequately, and I can offer nothing new. Just be alert for them.

Greater Scaup from Lesser Scaup

Greater Scaups undoubtedly migrate through Colorado every year, and a few even winter, yet they are seldom reported. They have probably wintered in the Bow-Mar area of Littleton southwest of Denver every year, yet were only discovered a few years ago, and only because all the Lesser Scaups were examined closely. The difficulty in separation of these two species is in my opinion over-rated. However the only character that seems to work in every single case is the shape of the head. As mentioned by the field guides, Greaters have much more rounded heads than Lessers. The Greater's head is almost Mallard shaped: the outline is smooth and even. Lessers usually have a very slight crest and a flat portion on the back of the head, breaking up the outline of the head. In looking at a scaup flock, check carefully first those with pure white, clean sides: these are more likely

(but not always) Greaters. Seen from close range, the Greater Scaup has a definitely green head and the Lesser Scaup a purple head, and, contrary to common belief, this can often be seen at close range in poor light conditions. Not mentioned by the field guides is the fact that even when the color itself cannot be distinguished, the color of the breast of a Greater appears to be a different shade from that of the neck and head - there is a distinct contrast or break between neck and breast, whereas the Lesser shows no such break. This character seems only to work at close range, say within 100 feet. I have never been able to use successfully the different lengths of the wing stripes in flight for separation. In museum specimens, the much larger black nail on the tip of the bill of a Greater can be used to separate all scaup, including females; I have not yet had time to test this in the field.

Female Red-breasted Merganser from female Common Merganser

In my experience, most Coloradoans let female large mergansers go by as Common Mergansers, although Red-breasted Mergansers migrate through regularly and some even winter. As emphasized by the field guides, the female Red-breasted has a blurred, indistinct border between the neck and breast color, whereas the Common has a very sharp border. The head of the Common is also very rusty, whereas that of the Red-breasted is a duskier shade of brown.

Pigeon Hawk from Sparrow Hawk

This is not a particularly difficult separation, one covered well by the field guides, yet most of us tend to be lazy and are seldom alert for Pigeon Hawks; most small falcons just go by as Sparrow Hawks.

American Golden Plover from Black-bellied Plover

While neither species is common in Colorado, most individuals of this size class of plovers are dismissed as Black-bellied Plovers without checking for Golden Plovers. The field guides cover the differences well; just flush them to make the identification certain. I have noticed that Goldens have a distinctly darker and more well defined cap than Black-bellieds in non-breeding plumage, a mark not emphasized by the field guides. Golden Plovers are more likely to be seen in fields than on mud flats.

Hudsonian Godwit from Marbled Godwit

While these two species are readily distinguished in flight (see any field guide), most observers do not look over all their godwits carefully, assuming them all to be Marbled. A few Hudsonians probably pass through Colorado every spring and fall. When standing, the fall Hudsonian Godwit is much grayer and more uniformly colored than the Marbled Godwit, in addition to being definitely smaller and having a smaller proportioned, darker, less upturned bill.

Short-billed Dowitcher from Long-billed Dowitcher

Although Colorado has only two records of Short-billed Dowitchers (both are specimens: 14 Aug. 1909 and 16 July 1938, both at Barr Lake, Adams Co., according to Bailey and Niedrach, 1965, Birds of Colorado, vol. I, p. 353), some probably migrate through Colorado every year. Yet who has checked all their dowitchers for Short-billeds? The surest and easiest character is the call: the Long-billeds have a high-pitched, loud "keek" or a series of "keeks" given in an irregular sequence; the Short-billed gives a soft, much lower, muffled three-noted whistle "tu-tu-tu". This is all mentioned in the field guides, yet most Coloradoans pay no attention to their dowitchers' calls. At least start flushing your dowitchers so as to become familiar with the Long-billeds' call, and then when you do hear a Short-billed, you'll know it for sure. They are really very different. In addition to the differences in the markings on the flanks (barred in Long-billed, spotted in Short-billed), David Easterla (Birding, 2 (1970):insert) gives the following plumage differences:

> "In breeding plumage the Long-billed is darker, with more intensely colored underparts. Short-billeds have a lighter, more buffy or pinkish-cinnamon wash across the underparts. The Long-billed also usually has more black spots or bars on the breast than Short-billed."

Easterla also notes that in Missouri, the Long-billeds are an earlier spring migrant, peaking in late April and mostly gone by May 1; the Short-billeds arrive in early May and are still present in late May. He has never seen the Long-billed Dowitcher in late May. Whether this might apply to Colorado is uncertain. We have Long-billed records in early June, but were they checked for Short-billeds?

California Gull from Herring and Ring-billed Gulls (in winter)

California Gulls have been discovered occasionally in Colorado in winter, yet few birders are on the alert for them. The field guides cover the identification characters. The only thing I would like to add is that the ground color of the California's bill is more yellow than that of a Herring Gull and (especially) that of the Ring-billed Gull. Also I would like to emphasize that the mantle color of the California Gull is a noticeably darker gray than that of either the Herring Gull or the Ring-billed Gull. Also remember that Herring Gulls' eyes are pale, whereas Californias' and Ring-billeds' are dark.

Common and Arctic Terns from Forster's Tern

Although the Arctic Tern is definitely a long-shot in Colorado, I know that Common Terns are more regular than supposed; they have been found almost annually at Barr Lake in August for a number of years. Vande Weghe (California Birds, 1 (1970):33-36) gives an excellent summary of the distinguishing

characters between these species. Since this article may be unavailable to most Coloradoans, I shall recount a few of the major points here. First let me give a brief key given by the editors of California Birds in their introduction to Vande Weghe's article:

> "(1) A bird showing dark shoulder patches is a young Common/Arctic Tern.
>
> (2) A bird without shoulder patches, and showing no contrast between back and rump in flight (general whiteness) is an adult Forster's Tern.
>
> (3) Both adult Common/Arctic and young Forster's lack shoulder patches and display a contrast between white rump and darker back; young Forster's are best distinguished by the brownish edgings on the back as well as the black tips to the outer three or four tail feathers.
>
> (4) In every plumage except breeding adult, Forster's Tern has a diagnostic head pattern; a black ear patch, limited to the auriculars, and curving downwards toward the rear. The head patch of the Common Tern (when it has a white forehead) curves upwards to include the nape."

Vande Weghe offers the following characters for separating Common and Arctics: (1) in flight, the silhouettes are very different: only the head and bill of the Arctic are situated in front of the wings, and thus a much greater proportion of the body sticks out behind the wings. In the Common Tern, more of the body is in front of the wings, giving it a longer necked appearance. This really has to be seen in the excellent photos in California Birds to be appreciated. At close range, the Arctic's bill is definitely shorter, and thus the head looks more rounded; (2) from underneath in flight, the Arctic Tern's primaries are translucent, and those of the Forster's and Common Terns are not. Vande Weghe says that the Arctic Tern has an all red bill only in the spring; at other times of the year, bill color cannot be used as a separating character.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird from Broad-tailed Hummingbird (males only)

Colorado has no record for the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, yet it would seem that they must occur occasionally in Colorado, especially in the fall, and especially on the eastern plains at places like Bonny Dam. Although a sight identification would be tricky, noting of the following two characters would seem to indicate Ruby-throated: (1) the Ruby-throated's tail is definitely forked, whereas the Broad-tailed's is rounded; (2) the Ruby-throated Hummingbird does not make the characteristic trilling sound in flight of the male Broad-tailed Hummingbird, a sound with which we should all be familiar. Other aids might be the throat color, which has a decidedly rosy or lavender tinge in the Broad-tailed, but is a deep red, with maybe

an orange tinge, in the Ruby-throated; the iridescence is also not quite as bright in the Ruby-throated. From museum specimens, it can be seen that the throat color comes all the way to the lower mandible in the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, whereas there are always some white areas between the throat color and the lower mandible in the Broad-tailed Hummingbird. Whether this can be used in the field is unknown to me, but it should be noticeable at close range at a feeder. The back and head iridescence is much brighter in the Broad-tailed than in the Ruby-throated. All this may sound very tricky, but we should at least start paying more attention to this situation.

Yellow-shafted Flicker from Red-shafted Flicker

This is a case differing from those above in that I feel most Yellow-shafted Flickers reported are called Yellow-shafted only because of the yellow wings seen in flight. Considering the high frequency of hybridization on the Great Plains, most of our yellow-winged flickers are probably hybrids. No one should report a Yellow-shafted Flicker unless all of the head pattern characters are also seen clearly: red nape, gray crown, buffy face, and black whiskers in males. Introgressive hybridization (hybrids mating with pure parents, and their offspring mating with pure birds again, and so on) has produced birds with all combinations of Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted characters, and sometimes the traces of hybridization are very difficult to see in the field. Every report should indicate which of the characters the bird had and which it did not have.

Cassin's Kingbird from Western Kingbird

Cassin's Kingbirds are not particularly rare, and all our Western Kingbirds should be checked more carefully. The field guides cover the separation adequately. However, just because a bird lacks white outer tail feathers does not necessarily make it a Cassin's: molt and wear can sometimes produce dark-tailed Westerns. A very useful character is the light tail corners of the Cassin's Kingbird, which can be seen in flight.

Loggerhead Shrike from Northern Shrike (in winter)

Most shrikes in Colorado seem to be identified in winter by what the locals believe to be the wintering species. It is more likely that our winter population consists of both species, with Northern Shrikes predominating in the north and Loggerhead Shrikes in the south. In any case every winter shrike should be examined carefully before assigning an identification. The identification is really much easier than believed. The most obvious difference to me is the relative width of the masks: wide in the Loggerhead and narrow in the Northern. Also, Loggerheads have a more rapid, more fluttery wingbeat and more rounded wings than Northerns; Northerns have more pointed wings, and glide more in-between series of wingbeats. Zimmerman (Wilson Bulletin, 67 (1955):200-208) points out that the faint breast vermiculations supposedly characteristic of Northerns (and the character most frequently used by most birders for separation) is not reliable, since some

fall and winter female Loggerheads have remarkably distinct breast barring and some Northerns lack them. Zimmerman also states that the broken mask effect of the Northern Shrike (much white or gray in the lores, i.e. black mask doesn't reach bill) is very useful, but that one of the best marks is the much heavier, longer, more strongly hooked bill of the Northern, which he noted to be conspicuous at great distances. Another mark stated to be helpful at close range is the small white spot below the eye of many Northerns (especially females), but absent in Loggerheads.

Tennessee Warbler from Orange-crowned Warbler (in fall)

It seems that about the only sure way to tell these two species apart is by the undertail covert color: white in the Tennessee Warbler and yellowish in the Orange-crowned Warbler. Tennessees pass through Colorado every fall, and many are undoubtedly overlooked.

Louisiana Waterthrush from Northern Waterthrush

Although Northern Waterthrushes are rare enough, they should all be checked for Louisianas. An excellent paper on this separation by Dr. Laurence C. Binford appears in California Birds 2 (1971):1-10. I will relay his conclusions:

> "... no single character is one hundred percent diagnostic. A bird that has strongly ochraceous-buff flanks or a combination of pure white eyeline (posterior part) and pale buff flanks is definitely a Louisiana. Any bird with a yellowish tint on the posterior part of the superciliaries or strong yellow on any portion of the underparts is definitely a Northern. This leaves us with the few birds that have white superciliaries, throat, breast and belly combined with flanks that are so pale that the exact color cannot be determined in the field. For such individuals, a combination of all characters will probably enable identification by the more experienced birder and under the best conditions of observation. The beginning birder should not attempt identification of such a bird. In (Louisiana) the bill averages larger, the throat is usually unspotted, the streaks below are usually broader and paler, and the over-all size is usually very slightly larger.
>
> In practice, birds that are of doubtful identity usually prove to be Northerns. The situation is one in which a birder might be tempted to make Northerns into Louisianas, but when a Louisiana is finally seen, its identity is rather obvious."

Purple Finch from Cassin's Finch

I believe that Purple Finches are not as rare on the plains in winter and migration as the lack of records indicate. Any "Cassin's" Finches away from the mountains at least deserve to be examined carefully. The females are actually easier to distinguish than the males. The female Cassin's has relatively much narrower and more distinct breast stripes, whereas the female Purple has broader, more blurred breast streaks. This is not clear from any of the field guide pictures, but is really striking to observe in the field.

In demarcating the above challenges in field identification, I do not wish to encourage an outbreak of reports of these difficult-to-identify species, but rather affect a greater awareness on the part of Colorado birders of what they are probably overlooking. Reports of any of the rare species mentioned above should be accompanied by written substantiating details. Some of the scanty, superficial "details" that occasionally appear in ornithology periodicals are embarrassing to read and should never have been printed. To say that you observed a bird from thirty feet away for ten minutes through 7 X 35 binoculars and that the bird has all the right field marks is not enough. You must describe what those field marks were and also every other feature you noted about the bird (coloration of all body parts, voice, habitat, behavior, and your reasons for believing your identification to be correct and how you distinguished it from similar species). Otherwise do not bother to report it. Sight records of the above species will be regarded with skepticism by some anyway, even with good details. One should also be aware that the pictures one sees in his field guides are only idealized versions of large variations in combinations of individual characters; one must see a museum series to truly appreciate the tremendous range in individual variation.

With all this in mind, however, I would encourage Colorado birders to start taking closer looks at some of these birds if only for practice so that when that rarity does appear, you will be all the more confident and experienced.

I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Stephen Bailey.

Editor's Note:

Undoubtedly readers are aware of other "look alike" species which do or may occur in Colorado, e.g. the "peep" sandpipers, Empidonax flycatchers, Chimney Swift vs. Vaux's Swift (see Pierre Devillers "Chimney Swifts in Coastal Southern California", California Birds 1 (1970):147-152 for excellent comparison; Vaux's Swift has not yet been recorded from Colorado), and Eastern Meadowlark vs. Western Meadowlark. Regarding the latter, the author writes "I left out the meadowlarks because the only record I would accept would be a specimen. They (Eastern Meadowlarks) have been heard numerous times in Colorado--see Bailey and Niedrach--but no specimen yet. I don't trust field marks on these two, and they can learn each other's song."

OPPIE REAMES: IN MEMORIUM

Richard Stransky
175 West 29th Street
Durango, Colorado 81301

OPPIE REAMES, long time birder of Durango and the southwest part of Colorado, died Saturday, June 10, 1972.

She was born October 9, 1906 in Indian Territory, Oklahoma, and taught in the school system in Blanchard, Oklahoma for several years before coming to Ignacio, Colorado to teach. Upon leaving Ignacio in 1943, she came to Durango, Colorado and taught until her retirement in 1967.

Miss Reames was a member of the Colorado Education Association, Colorado Field Ornithologists, National Audubon Society, and the Denver Bird Club from 1955 to 1968.

Through her keen interest in nature and birds she introduced many other people into the world of bird watching. Oppie started the Durango Bird Club in 1968, becoming its first president. Because of her thorough and accurate observations of all field marks on the birds she identified, she established a firm foundation for many of the bird records of the Durango and San Juan Basin areas.

Oppie Reames will be greatly missed by many in Durango and the state, and to her, a salute of respect and of gratitude for what she has done for us all.

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David W. Lupton
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Ewing, William R., R.R. 2, Genoa, Colorado 80818.
Hagood, Janet, 7332 Island Circle, Boulder, Colorado 80301.
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Library Exchanges

New Jersey -- Dr. Donald S. Heintzelman, Curator of Ornithology, Bureau of Research, New Jersey State Museum, Cultural Center, 205 W. State St., Trenton, New Jersey 08625. Publications--New Jersey State Museum. Bulletin .... Investigations .... Report.

Ohio -- Mrs. Helen Yenkevich, Publications Department, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Wade Oval, University Circle, Cleveland, Ohio 44106. Publication--Cleveland Bird Calendar.

Canada -- Club des Ornithologues de Quebec Inc., 8191 Avenue du Zoo, Orsainville 7, Quebec, Canada. Publication--Bulletin Ornithologique.

Russia -- Director, Fundamental Library, Academy of Sciences, 4 Komunala Street, Riga, Latvian S.S.R. Publication--Ornitologicheskie Issledovania.

Russia -- Exchange Librarian, Central Library of the Estonian SSR, Lenin Boulevard 10, Tallin, U.S.S.R. Publication--Ornitholoogiline Kogumik.

Uganda -- Uganda Society Library, P. O. Box 4980, Kampala, Uganda. Publication--Uganda Society. Bird Newsletter.

CORRECTIONS

General Membership

Calder, Dr. William A., Jr. - change of address to: Department of Biological Sciences (E), University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721.
Ryder, Dr. Ronald A. - temporary change of address to July 15, 1973: 6 Grenfell Ave., St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

The Colorado Field Ornithologist is a quarterly journal devoted to the field study of birds in Colorado. Articles and notes of scientific or general interest, and reports of unusual observations are solicited. Send manuscripts, with photos and drawings, to David W. Lupton, Editor; Serials Section, Colorado State University Libraries; Fort Collins, Colorado 80521. Membership and subscription fees: Full member $5.00; Library subscription fees $5.00. Submit payments to Sadie Morrison, Treasurer; 1283 Elizabeth Street, Denver, Colorado 80206. Request for exchange or for back numbers should be addressed to the Editor. Numbers 1-10 are $1.50 per issue; 11 and continuing are $1.25 per issue. All exchange publications should likewise be sent to the Editor's address.

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