



**C.F.O.**  
**Journal**

No. 29, Winter, 1977

King Rail, Pueblo, June 8, 1976

Photo, Steve Larson

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The C.F.O. Journal, formerly the Colorado Field Ornithologist, is a 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 Hugh Kingery, Editor, 869 Milwaukee Street, Denver, Colorado 80206.

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Send inquiries about membership to the Treasurer, and about subscriptions, address changes, and the like to the Executive Secretary.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT--C.F.O. ANNUAL MEETING

The 1977 Annual Meeting of the Colorado Field Ornithologists will be held at Grand Junction, May 21-22. Nyla Kladder is chairman of local arrangements. The Grand Junction area offers bird habitats from dry semi-desert brushland to the green cottonwood river bottoms; and from the pinon pine/juniper woodland in Colorado National Monument to the spruce/fir woodland on Grand Mesa.

FIELD TRIPS: The Saturday morning field trip will visit Devil's Kitchen, in Colorado National Monument, for Black-throated Sparrow, Gambel's Quail, Chukar, Gray Flycatcher, and Gray Vireo; then to Unaweep Canyon for Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-chinned Hummingbird, and Sage Thrasher.

The Sunday morning field trip will respond to the preference of the members. Tentative proposal is for Rifle Gap Reservoir for Sage Sparrows.

MAPS AND CHECKLISTS: The Audubon Society of Western Colorado published a Mesa County checklist in September, 1976. These, and local maps, will be available to registrants.

CALL FOR PAPERS: C.F.O. Members are invited to present papers at the Saturday afternoon meeting. Please send title, approximate times, and visual aids equipment needed, to Mrs. Kladder by May 1.

COSTS: Registration fees, field trip costs, accommodations, and a more detailed announcement of the meeting and programs, will be announced in a mailing to members on or about April 15.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL NOTES

Mike Moulton, of Longmont, has assumed the duties of President of the C.F.O. succeeding Ed Curry, who resigned. We regret our loss of Ed's services, while at the same time, looking forward to more of the dynamic leadership which we have seen from Mike in the first month of his tenure.

\* \* \* \*

Until this year, C.F.O. has never sent out dues notices, but they did go out in early March; with a good response, thank you. They had one small error--we published only three issues of the Journal in 1976; we expect to put out four this year.

The C.F.O. dues year is a calendar year, although dues are not regarded as delinquent until the annual meeting. Look, next year, for the announcement in the Journal that dues are payable. Dues constitute our organization's sole source of income, and you are important to us--both as a dues-paying member and as a participant in our meetings and field trips.

\* \* \* \*

The Journal welcomes papers for publication, and photographs, both with or without articles. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, typed if possible. We welcome, as well, short notes suitable for publication in our General Notes section. These notes may discuss interesting behavior observations, effects of habitat changes, rare occurrences, or other observations of interest.

PYGMY OWL OBSERVATIONS FROM GUNNISON COUNTY,  
COLORADO

by James R. Rees\*

From April 13 to 17, 1976, the author, accompanied by Robert Sanz, searched for nesting and territorial raptors on a coal lease property in Gunnison County, Colorado. This paper concerns Pygmy Owl (Glauclidium gnoma) observations recorded during that study. As with most of the other small Strigiforms in Colorado, relatively little is known of the distribution, abundance, and habitat affiliations of Pygmy Owls in the state. Concerning nesting, Bailey and Niedrach (1965) say only that their habits are similar to Saw-whet and Flamulated Owls (Aegolius acadicus and Otus flammeolus) but that they range to higher altitudes - up to 12,000 feet. These authors list the Pygmy Owl as an "uncommon resident in the mountains throughout the state." They state that it breeds locally throughout the mountains, but that there are few definite records. Beidleman (1949) lists Pygmy Owls as infrequent Colorado residents.

Historically there are many recorded observations of Pygmy Owls in Colorado; however, many of these are winter observations, few are recent, and most provide insufficient detail. Bailey and Niedrach (1965) list only seven nesting records. In addition, Collister (1970) lists a record by W.G. Smith, and Bent (1938) mentions a record by W. H. Bergtold. More recently, H.E. Kingery observed a pair near Dillon, Colorado during the summer of 1975 (pers. comm.). Other records doubtlessly exist, but more are needed before the status of Pygmy Owls in Colorado can be ascertained.

## STUDY AREA

The study encompasses approximately 18 mi<sup>2</sup>, and extends from the town of Somerset south to Beaver Reservoir and from West Flatiron Mountain west to the confluence of East Fork and Dry Fork Minnesota Creek. At least six distinct habitats are represented within the study area. North-facing slopes and the higher elevations often have stands of Douglas-fir (Psuedotsuga menziesii) or aspen (Populus tremuloides), lower elevation south-facing slopes are dominated by junipers (Juniperus utahensis), drainages have primarily cottonwood (Populus angustifolia) or willow (Salix spp.) growth, while the majority of the area is covered by dense oak (Quercus gambellii) brush cover in many different environmental situations. Elevation varies from 5900 ft along the North Fork Gunnison River to 8641 ft near the head of Dry Fork Minnesota Creek.

A diverse resident avifauna is present in the study area, common species include Cooper's Hawks (Accipiter cooperii), Red-tailed Hawks (Buteo jamaicensis), Broad-tailed Hummingbirds (Selasphorus platycercus), Dusky Flycatchers (Empidonax oberholseri), Black-capped Chickadees (Parus atricapillus), House Wrens (Troglodytes aedon), American Robins (Turdus migratorius), Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (Poliophtila caerulea), Orange-crowned Warblers (Vermivora celata), Yellow Warblers (Dendroica petechia), Green-tailed Towhees (Pipilo chlorura), and Rufous-sided Towhees (Pipilo erythrophthalmus).

## METHODS

The area was traversed by foot each day and camp was made each night. An attempt was made to cover as much area as possible and visit all habitat types. No attempt was made to solicit owl calls by taped recordings. All observations of territorial raptors and probable nests were marked on field maps.

Weather during the first half of the survey period was cold with intermittent rain, hail and snow. During the second half of the survey period, clear skies and cold temperatures prevailed.

\*Biologist, Ecology Consultants, Inc., Ft. Collins, Colorado.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Territory 1

On April 13, camp was set up on Lick Creek, near its confluence with East Fork Minnesota Creek (NE $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec 9, T14S, R90W). Elevation at this location is 7400 ft. Commencing at approximately 2200 hrs and continuing intermittently throughout the night, a Pygmy Owl called persistently from several locations along the creek. The activity of this owl centered around several large cottonwood trees along the creek and juniper trees along the adjacent hillside west of the creek. Except of the limited area of cottonwood and juniper trees, the surrounding habitat is primarily oak brush. Before sunrise the following morning, the owl had stopped calling and could not be located.

Territory 2

A Territorial Pygmy Owl was heard calling at 1000 hrs on April 14, approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile southeast of the confluence of Dry Fork Minnesota Creek and Poison Gulch (NE $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec 3, T14S, R90W). Calling was muffled and abbreviated, making it difficult to detect the owl's exact location. The owl was finally determined to be somewhere within a small dense stand of Douglas-fir trees. The trees were in a small draw surrounded on all sides by oak brush. Because of the muffled calls of this owl, it may have been calling from within a tree cavity. It stopped calling a few minutes later and was never located.

Territory 3

This owl was heard calling at approximately 1045 hrs, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile northwest of territory 2, at an elevation of 7800 ft. This location is at the confluence of Poison Gulch and Dry Fork Minnesota Creek (SW $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec 34, T13S, R90W). The Pygmy Owl called intermittently from a small aspen stand adjacent to a large beaver pond; oak brush covers the surrounding hillsides. A search of this aspen stand 15 minutes later, after the owl had stopped calling, revealed a well used hole 15 ft above ground level in a live aspen tree. A few thumps on the base of the tree with a stick prompted a Pygmy Owl to look out of the hole. No attempt was made to check the hole for eggs or young, therefore it is a probable, but not a confirmed, nest location.

## CONCLUSIONS

The number of Pygmy Owl observations made during the relatively short period of the survey suggests that Pygmy Owls are not uncommon in the study area. The locations of the territories indicate that Pygmy Owls can be relatively common at an elevation and in habitats considerably different from the high elevation coniferous forests normally considered typical of their natural history in Colorado.

These observations do not support the contention that individual owls are scattered widely throughout the mountains. Unfortunately, these observations provide little information to evaluate the contention that Pygmy Owls quickly deplete their food supply and, therefore, must frequently relocate their territory (Walker, 1974). Additional studies are needed to clarify the breeding habits, habitats and distribution of Pygmy Owls in Colorado. Long term studies are needed to determine the relationships of Pygmy Owls to their food supply.

## LITERATURE CITED

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- Beidleman, R.G. 1949. Guide to the Birds of Prey of Colorado. Univ. Colo. Museum, Leaflet 6, 24 p.
- Bent, A.C. 1938. Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey: Part 2. Smithsonian Institution National Museum Bulletin 170.
- Collister, A. 1970. Annotated Checklist of Birds of Rocky Mountain National Park and Shadow Mountain Recreation Area in Colorado. Museum Pictorial No. 18, Denver Museum of Natural History.
- Walker, L.W. 1974. The Book of Owls. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 255 p.

## SONG SPARROWS - AGGRESSIVE AND ADAPTABLE

by J.R. Guadagno

At first glance, the Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) appears to be the most innocuous of birds. It is small in size, drab in coloration, and without any prominent distinguishing marks. Only its melodious song sets it apart from other sparrows. But for those of us who have been able to get to know it intimately, the Song Sparrow is one of the most fascinating of all birds.

I must admit that I knew nothing about song sparrows before I moved to my present home near Ridgway, Colorado in 1974. It is a remarkable piece of property. Only ten acres in extent, it includes such a variety of habitat that I have been able to identify more than 150 species of birds in the two short years I have lived here. But of all the birds I have encountered, none has captivated my interest as much as the simple song sparrow.

In the first place, this bird would have to be included among the most successful of all creatures. Amazingly adaptable, it is equally at home along the shores of a swift mountain stream, burrowing deep beneath the tall grass of a marsh, wading in the shallows of a beaver pond, or at a bird feeder. It eats seeds, small aquatic animals, flying insects which it captures in a flycatcher-like manner, and other tidbits it finds under the shrubbery. It is a year-round resident, being able to withstand even the coldest of winter weather.

Song Sparrows are extremely territorial and very aggressive. Not only do they defend their homes against other Song Sparrows, thus dispersing the population, but they also keep other types of seed-eaters away, especially during the breeding season. Where there is strong competition for food, such as at a bird feeder, they are near the top of the pecking order, successfully challenging even the larger White-crowned and Fox Sparrows. They yield only to birds which are much larger than they are.

One of the pleasant surprises I found in moving to this area was the absence of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). In all my two years' residence, I have seen only two of them (perhaps even the same one twice, since both appearances were just a few days apart). This seemed rather odd to me, since they are quite abundant in the town two miles away and at other farms nearby. But it didn't take me long to learn why these pests do not frequent my property. On both occasions the House Sparrow, like many other seed-eaters, began eating at my bird feeder. Each time he was attacked almost immediately by one of the resident Song Sparrows. But this was no ordinary sortie designed simply to drive a rival away from food. Both times the Song Sparrow persisted in the attack until the House Sparrow left for points unknown. They never returned again.

During the winter, my "bird feeder" consists of a scattering of seed on the ground at one particular point. Located beneath a small pinyon pine, sloping toward the south to pick up more sun, and close enough to the edge of a bluff to be swept by frequent winds, this spot remains free of snow through most of the winter, even though the ground is covered elsewhere.

Not many birds are willing to face the cold winters of Ridgway. Thus I noticed that two of the regulars during the winter of 1975-76 were a Song Sparrow and a female Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*). These two birds appeared together at my feeder far more often than chance would dictate. Trying to find the reason for this strange companionship, I watched the two very closely and finally discovered what was going on. The towhee, with its rather violent two-footed kicking motion, can easily uncover food lying beneath a thin layer of snow, which was the usual situation near my feeder. But the towhee is not very thorough in its eating habits. It eats only a fraction of the food it dislodges. The Song Sparrow, realizing this, was actually following the towhee around and feeding on the items she uncovered! The towhee, either unmindful or else very tolerant of this, made no attempt to put a halt to this bit of one-sided symbiosis. Sel-dom does one find a better example of animal intelligence than in this incident of spontaneous learning by the remarkable Song Sparrow.

## NESTING SEASON, JUNE-JULY, 1976

by P.R. Julian

A comprehensive discussion of nesting status is made difficult by the lack of verified nesting reports, particularly for passerines. Nest finding is difficult for many species, but observers are encouraged to report circumstantial evidence-territorial behavior, food carrying, etc.- which can be useful in assessing breeding status.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife, as well as Colorado State University and U.S. Fish and Wildlife (and allied) personnel make quantitative reports on waterfowl and game-birds in line with their duties, so that material for non-passerines is relatively plentiful.

As examples of tantalizing, but unverified nestings, were the numerous eastern slope reports of singing male Chestnut-sided Warblers in June and July. However, not one nest was discovered. Only two Colorado nesting records for this species exist. Andrews reported a female Orchard Oriole carrying food at Barr Lake, but could find no nests and only immature males.

Some suspected nestings, but again unverified, would represent real contributions to the state list. Black-necked Stilts at Lake Cheraw in mid-July certainly suggest nesting. Fourteen White-faced Ibis spent the summer at Totton Reservoir, and a Mountain Chickadee pair was reported to have nested on the CU campus. Bailey and Niedrach report this species nesting above 8000'.

Confirmed nestings of note command special comment. Collister reports a banded and nesting Black-chinned Hummingbird in Big Thompson Canyon on July 21. Bailey and Niedrach list no verified nesting of this species along the eastern slopes, although nesting in Pueblo and Las Animas counties has been suspected.

Wood Duck, long a suspected nester at Barr L. was confirmed as such by Andrews. A rare Flammulated Owl's nest was well documented by the Winns. The nest was 35' up in a dead aspen (with a Williamson's Sapsucker nest hole 18" below!) located northeast of Lake George at about 8800' elevation.

Bobolinks apparently nested at two locations near Longmont. This species is classified as a very irregular nester in both the western and eastern parts of the state. Snowy Plover young were observed in July at Lake Cheraw.

Finally, some notable occurrences of unusual numbers or out-of-place species were: Ash-throated Flycatchers turned up in some numbers along the Eastern Slope. American Redstarts were reported in two locations on the Western Slope. And Pine Siskin was classed as abundant by nearly all observers.

## Species Accounts:

Podicipediformes-Ciconiiformes.

Western Grebe. Numbers apparently good at Pueblo, Riverside, and Union Res., but no nesting reported at any location. Only a few summered at Barr L. One, 6/20, Lake Dillon (HK).

White Pelican. Riverside produced 325 young, about normal (WG,GM).

Double-crested Cormorant. Twelve nests at Riverside and about ½ normal number at Barr. At Barbour Ponds near Berthoud, 20-60 reported roosting, July-Aug, no nesting (AC).

Great Blue Heron. Chatfield heronry had 32 nests, up from previous years. See comment on Boulder Creek colony below.

Green Heron. Two each at Rocky Ford and Pueblo, no nesting (VT). Two, Boulder, 7/3 (BK).

Great Egret. Pair observed again this year in Boulder Valley Farm heronry, nesting not confirmed. This heronry suffered major damage in June windstorm (PJ).

Snowy Egret. Three nests each at Barr and Riverside. No young seen at former, 7 at latter (RA,GM). One, McClellan Res., 5/4 (MOS). No nesting attempted, Monte Vista (PB).

Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Single adult, 7/24-5 at Barr (RA).

American Bittern. Nesting down? Only one nest at Riverside (GM). Sawhill Ponds (BK). Nine at latter location last year.

White-faced Ibis. CDW reports four nesting colonies, San Luis Valley. Stransky reports

14 summering at Totton Res. No proof of nesting.

Anseriformes.

Waterfowl nesting at Monte Vista up 50% from 1975 (PB).

Wood Duck. Pair with ten young 6/27 at Barr for first confirmed nesting there (RA).

Redhead. Nesting, no numbers given, at Riverside (GM).

Common Merganser. Nesting Animas River, Williams Creed (RS).

Falconiformes.

Cooper's Hawk. Nest and young, 7/28, Mt. Evans (SB,ECT).

Bald Eagle. Four young from 2 eyries (CDW,WG).

Osprey. Eight (!) active eyries, number of young not yet known(WG).

Gruiformes.

Sandhill Crane. Routt Co. colony reported having nesting troubles owing to heavy mid-June snow(WG).

Sora. Nesting Ridgway (RG), one seen Summit Co. at 9200' (HK).

King Rail. June 12-July 3. See note, Fall 1976, p. 17.

Charadriiformes.

Snowy Plover. Five pair, 7/17, Lake Cheraw, 3 young (VT). Also five pair L. Meredith, 7/16.

Mountain Plover. Graul reports excellent production on Pawnee.

Upland Sandpiper. Two, 6/23, near Hudson, possible nesting (C,FH).

Greater Yellowlegs. Reported all summer, Totton Res. (RS).

Western Sandpiper. Ditto.

Black-necked Stilt. One pair L. Cheraw 7/17, no nest found (VT). Baily & Niedrach list no nest records for this species, but CDW indicates nesting recorded previously on Lake Cheraw and in the San Luis Valley.

Black Tern. Few reports. Barr L., July (DFO), 20 near Berthoud, 8/1 (VH).

California Gull. Only two fledged from 50 nests, Riverside (GM).

Cuculiformes.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo. 6/8-7/31, Fort Morgan, feeding on Mourning Cloak larva (JRi).

Black-billed Cuckoo. One, Red Rocks 6/13 (DFO); 1 Cuckoo possibly Black-billed, Gunnison River, 7/5 (AH).

Strigiformes.

Flammulated Owl. Nest in dead aspen on Beaver Creek, Lake George (Mrs VW).

Pygmy Owl. Few reports. One nest, three territorial males, Minnesota Creek, April (JRe).

Apodiformes.

Chimney Swift. Boulder population steady (BK), Longmont down some(AC),none(!) in Denver (RA).

Calliope Hummingbird. One Evergreen 7/9 (BP); various numbers, 4-6 Guanella Pass area, July (SL,BW).

Black-chinned Hummingbird. May to mid-June, adults and young, McCoy (Mrs KE). One male banded in Big Thompson Canyon, 7/21, nest with young (AC).

Rufous Hummingbird. In good numbers, Durango, in early July (RS). Numbers up, Evergreen (WB).

Piciformes.

Common Flicker. Numbers down? None seen by 2 or 3 parties on DFO Fall Count. Scarce Denver, Chatfield, mountains (RA) and 10 pairs Barr vs 12 last summer, but noted as more common in urban Denver (HK).

Red-headed Woodpecker. Only one pair, Barr L. (RA), but six pairs Pueblo Res. (VT).

Lewis' Woodpecker. Now uncommon to scarce in Boulder, Denver area. Two at Franktown (MS), 1 Barr L. (RA), 2 at Hygiene, June & July (VDi). However, flock of 30 seen at



Howard, 9/4 (T,RVZ).

Williamson's Sapsucker. Numbers up, Evergreen, nest 3 young (WB).

#### Tyrannidae.

Ash-throated Flycatcher. Andrews notes minor invasion in July-Aug., with 1 Longmont (AC), 1 Eldora (GS), 1 CPER (AC), and 1 Barr (RA).

Willow Flycatcher. Several singing, s.e. of Somerset, late May (JRe).

#### Hirundinidae.

Bank Swallow. Almost no reports, few in June, none in July-Aug.

Purple Martin. Female, 6/18, Ft. Morgan (JRI).

#### Corvidae to Mimidae.

Scrub Jay. Eating green acorns Franktown, 8/29 (MS). Two wanderers, Boulder 7/28-31 (HS,RE).

Mountain Chickadee. Nesting reported on University of Colorado campus, Boulder (EM).

House Wren. Four observers, widely spaced in the state, all remarked on the relative scarcity of this species. The exception was Barr L. where Andrews counted 36 territorial males compared with 28 last year.

Gray Catbird. Nesting reported at Rocky Ford, Pueblo Res. (VT), Big Thompson Canyon (AC), and near Somerset, Gunnison Co. (JRe).

#### Turdidae and Sylviidae.

Veery. Immature (?) banded in Lykins Gulch, 7/17 (AC). Reports from McCoy 7/26-7 (Mrs KE).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Highest population in four years, Evergreen (WB).

#### Parulidae.

Chestnut-sided Warbler. Many reports. Singing males Boulder, 6/20-7 (LH), 7/3-13 (BK, FH, MJ); Red Rocks, 6/22 (NH).

Bay-breasted Warbler. Male flew into Estes Park Public Library window, 6/4 (RD). One male, Barr L. 6/5-6 (RA).

Parula Warbler. Usual early June reports, no nesting evidence is ever associated with these reports, and the conclusion is that the birds are late or lost migrants. Two in Boulder, 6/6, 8( ), and one Barr L., 6/6 (RA).

#### Icteridae, Thraupidae.

Bobolink. Seven or eight pairs reported nesting west of Longmont, two locations (AC).

Orchard Oriole. None appeared at Fort Morgan (JRI), but 2 immature males and female carrying food seen at Barr L. No nests located (RA).

Western Tanager. Boulder observers noted early arrival on plains, 7/29-30 (LH,PC).

#### Fringillidae.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Four reports in early June, Estes Park (Migrants?) (RH, KD, LM, MP).

Blue Grosbeak. Four to six pairs (!) at Barr L., 2-3 at Chatfield (DFO). None, however, reported from the Boulder area.

Indigo Bunting. Very few reports and no nest sites noted. Observers should note territorial males and evidence of intergrades with Lazuli. (Ed. note-both Indigo and Lazuli territorial at Chatfield.)

Evening Grosbeak. Nested in Ft. Collins (2 broods reported week of 8/9-13 (RAR) and in Denver foothills (HK).

Pine Siskin. Unanimous agreement, Evergreen (WB), Estes Park (WR), Eldora (GS), Boulder (PJ), abundant.

Red Crossbill. Seemingly disappeared. Lowest in 7 years, Evergreen (WB); Boulder had a few flocks, 6/20-27, and few reported Summit Co. (HK).

White-winged Crossbill. Large flock at Guanella Pass (SL, BW) July date. Flock of 30,

RMNP, 7/18 (BK).

Cassin's Sparrow. Nesting reported, Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RA), for more evidence of the northward expansion of this species.

Brewer's Sparrow. Nesting common, Ft. Morgan (JRI).

Contributors: Boulder (Louise Hering, Barry Knapp, Bruce Bosley), 21 observers  
 Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDW) (Gerald Craig, Walt Graul)  
 CSU, Dept. of Fishery & Wildlife Biology (Gary Miller)  
 Denver (Bob Andrews) 9 observers  
 Durango (Kip Stransky)  
 Estes Park (Warner Reeser) 6 observers  
 Evergreen (Winston Brockner) 10 observers  
 Fort Morgan (Joseph Rigli)  
 Grand Junction (Dave Galinat)  
 Longmont (Allegra Collister) 16 observers  
 McCoy (Mrs. Kenneth Ewing)  
 Monte Vista NWR (Pete Bryant)  
 Pueblo (Van Truan)  
 Ridgway (Dick Guadagno)  
 Summit Co. (Hugh Kingery)

Initialed Observers: Pete Bryant, Robert Andrews, Winston Brockner, Sylvia Brockner, Pilk Carter, Allegra Collister, Kent Dannen, Ruth Deffenbaugh, Denver Field Ornithologists, Robbie Elliott, Mrs. Kenneth Ewing, Dave Galinat, Walt Graul, Richard Guadagno, Nicholas Halmi, Carol and Fern Hack, Ramona Harris, Louise Hering, Vera Haubold, A.S. Hyde, Paul Julian, Hugh Kingery, Barry Knapp, Steve Larson, Elizabeth Mekellsen, Gary Miller, Lou Murphy, Marion Patterson, Jack Reddall, James Rees, Warner Reeser, Joseph Rigli, Ronald A. Ryder, Gail Shickley, Helen Stiles, Richard Stransky, Mildred Snyder, E.C. Thomas, Van Truan, Tom & Ridi Van Zandt, Bruce Webb, Mr. & Mrs. Vincent Winn.

#### NOMENCLATURE CHANGES

The AOU has issued the 33rd Supplement to the AOU Checklist. The changes are mostly cosmetic--to scientific and common names.

The only species changes combine Brant with Black Brant and Black-crested and Tufted Titmice.

Tree Ducks changed their common names to "Whistling-Ducks."

Changes in scientific nomenclature include:

Tern genera Thalasseus and Hydroprogne merged into Sterna.

Owl Genus Speotyto merged into Athene.

Woodpecker genera Centurus and Asyndesmus merged into Melanerpes.

Cowbird genus Tangavius merged into Molothrus.

Pyrruloxia merged into Cardinalis.

Goldfinch genera Acanthis and Spinus merged into old world goldfinch genus Carduelis.

Towhee genus Chlorura merged into Pipilo.

A SUMMARY OF 1976 COLORADO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS  
by David Hutchinson

There were 22 Christmas Bird Counts held in Colorado during the 1976 count period, December 18, 1976 - January 2, 1977. A request was sent to each of last years compilers, asking for their compilation reports. Replies were received from 21 of the counts with 20 reports received. One report was unavailable. The summary which follows was taken from the compilation reports as submitted by each count compiler. These results are subject to CFO Records Committee action on rare and unusual records as well as the scrutiny of American Birds editor and regional editor.

There were 163 species, 8 additional races, 1 form and 1 hybrid with about 236,313 individuals reported for the 20 Colorado Christmas Bird Count compilations received by February 1, 1977.

A CALENDAR OF COLORADO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

December 18, 1976	Denver, Hotchkiss, Longmont, Pueblo Reservoir, Rocky Mountain National Park
December 19, 1976	Boulder, Evergreen-Idaho Springs, Grand Junction, Greeley, Pueblo
December 20, 1976	Weldona-Fort Morgan
December 22, 1976	Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, Nunn
December 26, 1976	Ft. Collins, Gunnison
December 28, 1976	Black Forest
December 29, 1976	North Park
December 31, 1976	Lake Isabel, Pikes Peak
January 1, 1977	Bonny, Durango
January 2, 1977	Colorado Springs

NUMBER OF SPECIES FOR EACH COUNT

Denver 106, 4 races, 1 form	Durango 58, 1 race
Boulder 100, 4 races, 1 hybrid	Greeley 52, 3 races
Longmont 87, 2 races	Pikes Peak 47, 2 races
Ft. Collins 86, 3 races	Evergreen-Idaho Springs 46, 2 races
Colorado Springs 83, 2 races	Gunnison 46, 2 races
Grand Junction 82, 1 race	Black Forest 40, 2 races
Pueblo Reservoir 73, 2 races	Weldona-Ft. Morgan 36, 2 races, 1 form
Pueblo 71, 2 races	Rocky Mountain National Park 40, 2 races
Hotchkiss 67, 2 races	Nunn 22
Bonny 59, 2 races	North Park 20

TEN MOST NUMEROUS SPECIES

Mallard	61,178	House Sparrow	9185
Canada Goose	38,890	Dark-eyed Junco	7885
Starling	23,767	Tree Sparrow	5680
Red-winged Blackbird	22,739	Rock Dove	5632
Horned Lark	10,182	Black-billed Magpie	4832

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL BIRDS FOR EACH COUNT

Bonny 42,205	Grand Junction 13,497	Evergreen-Idaho Springs 2699
Ft. Collins 32,830	Colorado Springs 11,918	Pikes Peak 2396
Denver 24,747	Weldona-Ft. Morgan 8410	Gunnison 2290
Boulder 19,626	Nunn 5563	Black Forest 1286
Longmont 19,153	Durango 4456	RMNP 1283
Greeley 18,895	Pueblo Reservoir 3761	North Park 1191
Pueblo 16,866	Hotchkiss 3241	

NUMBER OF OBSERVERS FOR EACH COUNT

Denver 149	Greeley 29	Gunnison 10
Boulder 144	Grand Junction 25	Pueblo 10
Colorado Springs 72	Pueblo Reservoir 19	Black Forest 7
Ft. Collins 54	Pikes Peak 17	North Park 7
Longmont 43	Bonny 15	Hotchkiss 3
RMNP 37	Nunn 12	Weldona-Ft. Morgan 2
Evergreen-Idaho Springs 33	Durango 11	

SUMMARY OF SPECIES REPORTED

Key to Columns: A--Number of counts reporting each species  
 B--High number for each species, with count which had the high count  
 C--Total individuals for each species

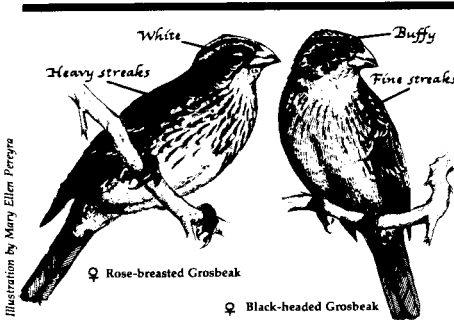
	A	B	C		A	B	C
Com. Loon	1	1 Boul	1	Rgh-legged Hawk	15	30 Boul	146
Horned Grebe	1	2 Boul	2	Ferruginous Hawk	6	13 Boul	22
W. Grebe	3	5 Boul	7	Golden Eagle	17	7 Den	59
Pied-billed Grebe	6	5 Den, Pub	19	(27a,22i,10u)			
Double-cr. Corm.	2	2 Den	3	Bald Eagle	12	18 Bonny	41
Great Blue Heron	10	37 Den	10z,102	(15a, 7i, 19u)			
Canada Goose (Lsr)	1	10 Den	10	Marsh Hawk	12	35 Lmt	117
Canada Goose (Cackling)	1	4 Boul	4,890	Prairie Falcon	11	7 FC	34
Canada Goose	11	15,400 FC	38,490	Peregrine Falcon	1	1 CS	1
Wh-fr. Goose	3	1 D,FC,L	3	Merlin	7	3 GJ	11
Snow Goose	5	8 Boul	18	Am. Kestrel	14	42 Lmt	257
Mallard	16	35,000 Bonny	61,178	Blue Grouse	1	1 Boul	1
Gadwall	8	43 Den	128	White-tl Ptarmigan	1	12 RMNP	12
Pintail	11	75 Pub	243	Bobwhite	1	10 Bonny	10
Gr-wg Teal	11	66 FC	308	Sage Grouse	1	6 "	6
Bl-wg Teal	1	2 Gunn	2	Scaled Quail	2	44 Pub	76
Bl-wg/Cin Teal	1	1 Den	1	Gambel's Quail	1	208 GJ	208
Am. Wigeon	13	512 Den	1292	Ring-necked Pheas.	11	39 GJ	112
N. Shoveler	3	9 Dur	15	Chukar	2	10 GJ	19
Wood Duck	3	6 Den	9	Virginia Rail	5	5 Den	12
Redhead	8	157 Lmt	251	Am. Coot	8	148 Lmt	335
Ring-necked Duck	8	173 Boul	410	Killdeer	13	41 FC	181
Canvasback	4	7 Boul	12	Com. Snipe	13	36 FC	172
Lsr. Scaup	5	28 CS	75	Semi-palm. Sanpr.	1	2 Grly	2
Com. Goldeneye	14	170 Lmt	545	Glaucous Gull	1	1 Pb Res	1
Barrow's Goldeneye	2	2 Lmt RMNP	4	Herring Gull	8	37 Boul	79
Bufflehead	6	8 GJ	23	Ring-billed Gull	7	106 Den	162
Ruddy Duck	5	4 CS,D,L,PR	17	Rock Dove	18	1248 Den	5632
Hooded Merganser	4	4 Den	8	Mourning Dove	9	210 GJ	241
Com. Merganser	14	180 Bonny	806	Roadrunner	1	1 Pb Res	1
Red-br. Merganser	1	18 Boul	18	Screech Owl	3	4 Bonny	9
Turkey Vulture	1	1 CS	1	Great Horned Owl	12	22 Bonny	108
Goshawk	6	2 Den	7	Snowy Owl	1	3 Bonny	3
Sh-sh Hawk	9	7 Den	29	Pygmy Owl	2	4 Den	5
Cooper's Hawk	10	3 GJ	13	Long-eared Owl	7	9 Den	26
Red-tailed Hawk	14	30 Lmt	155	Short-eared Owl	3	3 Boul	6
Red-tl (Harlan's)	4	4 Boul,Grly	10	Saw-whet Owl	1	3 Boul	3
				Belted Kingfisher	16	42 Den	131
				Com. (Y-s)Flicker	3	4 Pb Res	7
				Com. (R-s)Flicker	13	203 Den	769

	A	B	C		A	B	C
Com. Flicker	8	235 FC	625	Yel-Rmp (Myrtle)W.	1	2 Pub	2
Red-bellied Wp	1	2 Bonny	2	Yel-Rmp (Audubons W.	4	2 De,GJ,PR	7
Red-headed Wp	1	1 Pub	1	Com. Yellowthroat	1	1 Boul	1
Lewis's Wp	9	11 Lmt	31	House Sparrow	19	1607 GJ	9185
Yellow-bel. Sap.	2	1 Gunn	2	W. Meadowlark	14	396 Lmt	1645
Hairy Wp	16	89 Boul	234	Red-wg Blackbird	14	5753 Pub	22,739
Downy Wp	18	71 Boul	292	Rusty Blackbird	1	7 CS	7
Ladder-backed Wp	1	1 Pb Res	1	Brewer's Blackbird	9	147 Lmt	451
N. Three-toed Wp	3	5 Boul	8	Com. Grackle	2	11 Den	12
Say's Phoebe	2	1 GJ,H	2	Brown-headed Cowbird	2	40 Htch	41
Horned Lark	17	4823 Nunn	19,182	Cardinal	1	1 Bonny	1
Gray Jay	4	53 Ev	115	Evening Grosbeak	11	390 Den	814
Blue Jay	10	31 Grly	140	Purple Finch	2	4 FC	5
Blue-Steller's Jay	1	1 Boul	1	Cassin's Finch	10	211 CS	450
Steller's Jay	14	425 Den	1674	House Finch	15	1064 CS	4100
Scrub Jay	11	183 Dur	413	Pine Grosbeak	2	17 Ev	20
Bl-bil Magpie	20	1202 Den	4834	Gray-cr Rosy Finch	8	1025 NP	1432
Com. Raven	16	53 Ev	325	Black Rosy Finch	4	25 Den	66
White-necked Raven	1	2 Pub	2	Br-cap Rosy Finch	3	936 Gunn	1137
Com. Crow	14	1756 FC	3139	Com. Redpoll	3	40 Den	44
Pinon Jay	4	40 Htch	96	Pine Siskin	14	241 Den	907
Clark's Nutcracker	3	30 Ev	56	Am. Goldfinch	16	473 Dur	1501
Black-capped Ch.	19	492 Den	1746	Lesser Goldfinch	3	16 CS	20
Mtn. Chickadee	18	595 Boul	2690	Red Crossbill	3	8 BF,RM	23
Plain Titmouse	3	12 GJ	19	White-wg Crossbill	1	19 Pikes	19
Com. Bushtit	7	38 Den	153	Rufous-sided Towhee	10	71 CS	111
Wh-br Nuthatch	14	91 Den	336	Brown Towhee	2	17 Pb Res	24
Red-br Nuthatch	11	54 CS	118	Svannah Sparrow	1	1 Gunn	1
Pygmy Nuthatch	9	419 Den	1308	Dark-eyed Junco	4	400 FC	732
Brown Creeper	16	59 Boul	216	DE Junco-White Wg	11	85 Ev	399
Dipper	12	35 Gunn	148	DE Junco-Slate col	17	359 Boul	1889
Winter Wren	5	1 BBDeGG	5	DE Junco-Oregon	18	1032 Ev	4831
Bewick's Wren	3	24 GJ	28	DE Junco-Pink sd	2	26 Den	34
Long-bl Marsh Wren	3	3 GJ,We1	7	Gray-headed Junco	14	650 CS	1664
Canon Wren	9	15 Den	39	Junco sp.	4	699 CS	803
Rock Wren	2	1 BF,FC	2	Tree Sparrow	19	1528 Den	5680
Mockingbird	2	2 CS	3	Chipping Sparrow	1	7 GJ	7
Brown Thrasher	2	1 Den, L	2	Field Sparrow	1	1 FC	1
Curve-billed Thrasher	1	1 Pub	1	Harris's Sparrow	9	195 Bonny	242
Sage Thrasher	1	1 GJ	1	White-cr Sparrow	14	524 GJ	1338
Am. Robin	18	538 Den	2613	White-thr Sparrow	5	4 Den	12
Varied Thrush	1	1 Pikes	1	Fox Sparrow	2	2 Den	3
W. Bluebird	1	8 Dur	8	Swamp Sparrow	3	1 Bo,De,L	3
Mtn. Bluebird	4	40 Pb Res	45	Song Sparrow	18	223 Pb Res	995
Townsend's Sol.	16	238 Den	708	Lapland Longspur	4	155 Bonny	176
Blue-gray Gnat.	1	1 GJ	1	Snow Bunting	1	24 Gunn	24
Golden-cr Kinglet	7	40 Boul	71				
Ruby-cr Kinglet	4	7 Den,Jur	18				
Water Pipit	6	13 GJ	23				
Bohemian Waxwing	12	838 CS	2046				
Cedar Waxwing	7	93 CS	271				
N. Shrike	17	11 Den	60				
Loggerhead Shrike	6	4 Htch	8				
Starling	18	3345 Pub	23,767				
Solitary Vireo	1	1 Boul	1				

(Ed. Note-As the author stated, the above compilation is taken directly from the reports submitted by the compilers. Any unusual reports should have been documented to Am. Birds, and all such rarities are subject to verification by documentation provided to the Am. Birds Christmas Count editor.)

IDENTIFICATION NOTES

Female Grosbeaks



Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have become regular visitors to Colorado, and probably will be found nesting in several locations on the eastern plains and piedmont cities within the next five years. We see more of them during migration, spring and fall.

Differentiating the mature males from the Black-headed Grosbeak offers no very serious identification challenge, but the females and immatures do present a problem. The young male Rose-breasted basically resembles the female, but it normally has a trace of rosy color in the breast--and in flight the bright pink underwings will immediately separate it from any plumage of the Black-headed.

Hybrids also occur in Colorado, and their characteristics can vary widely.

Gail Schickley had one last fall in Eldora which had slate-colored back, wings, and tail, a spot on the breast shaped exactly like the rose on the Rose-breasted, but a very bright orange instead of rose, with a yellowish tinge on each side of the bright spot. With our location at the coincidence of the range of the two species, other hybrids likely may appear.

Telling the females apart is another matter. Not only are the birds very similar, but the problem of identification is compounded by the fact that the plumage is somewhat variable, and the key characters emphasized in the field guides are not entirely reliable. Apart from the call note, no single character is, in itself, diagnostic, so the birder must rely on a combination of characters to identify the bird in question. This is especially the case if the bird shows ambiguous characteristics--although such a bird may be a hybrid.

Probably the best field mark on the female Rose-breasted is the heavy dark streaking running vertically across the whitish breast. The Black-headed tends to have a more buffy breast, with very fine streaks--restricted only to the whiter than the buffy stripes of the Black-headed. In addition, the Rose-breasted has slightly more prominent back streaks, and the wing linings are a slightly brighter saffron hue--as opposed to the duller buff wing linings of the Black-headed.

Unfortunately, though these marks are not always definitive. The female Rose-breasted can sometimes have very thin streaks across a breast that has a slightly buffy cast. And conversely, the breast of a Black-headed can become quite worn (in late spring and summer), so that the buffy cast disappears. Logically, then, some birds must remain unidentified... unless they are heard...

Although both species give a whistle wheet flight-note, the regular call notes of the two birds are diagnostic. The call note of the Rose-breasted, a sharp eek, is much more high-pitched and squeaky than that of the Black-headed. If one learns the call of the common Black-headed Grosbeak, then the call of the Rose-breasted should sound quite distinctive, and provide confirmation of identification.

\*\*\*\*

Like many flickers, orioles, and buntings, the ranges of the two grosbeaks meet close to Colorado. Observers should look, not only at the male of the pair, but also at the female; and at the females with nesting male Black-headed Grosbeaks.

## PLIGHT OF THE BLACK RAIL

(Adapted from article by Charles Repking, in *The Roadrunner*, published by the Phoenix Audubon Society).

Throughout its known history, the Black Rail has been the subject of controversy. After its discovery on the West Coast in 1859 by T.C. Martin, disputes arose concerning the bird's authenticity as a distinct species from a similar rail found on the East Coast. After its discovery on Jamaica in 1788 and in the eastern U.S. in 1836, a specimen was collected on the Farallon Islands off San Francisco in 1859. Disputes arose concerning its status as one or two species, but finally the western and eastern species were decreed subspecies. These disputes resulted in the renaming of this bird five times.

Until recently, its only known nesting sites in the West were in salt marshes around San Diego Bay. Its disappearance from this area has occurred with the elimination of its habitat. More recently the bird has been found nesting along the Colorado River in Arizona, 106 counted in 10 months of extensive field work.

Shy and secretive, Black Rails are rarely seen on the ground, even more rarely observed on the wing; in fact, Repking observed only two of the 106 Colorado River birds. They prefer running to flying. Unlike other rails, however, they carry their heads held high, and display none of the jerky movements so characteristic of their relatives.

If you do happen to see one, you will see a relatively small bird, about the size of a baby chicken. It is 4-5 inches in length, has red eyes, a short, black bill, black plumage with white speckling on the back and sides, and a maroon nape patch.

The bird's repertoire consists of four distinct calls:

(1) The most characteristic is the mating call, which is heard most extensively in the spring. Best described as "kic-kic-kerr," it is repeated several times in succession. This call is also heard at other times of the year, but not as often nor as robust as in the spring.

(2) A low, growling "grr-grr-grr." This call again is repeated several times in succession, and is heard throughout the year, though not as frequently during the breeding season. It is believed to be a territorial rather than a mating call.

(3) A "yelp" given when the bird is startled, or as a prelude to the "kic-kic-kerr" or "grr" calls.

(4) "Croo-croo-croo," not often heard. I have encountered this response on only three occasions, in early summer. Its function is not as yet known.

Along the Lower Colorado River, Black Rails tend to associate with three-square bulrush, which is a triangularly stemmed plant ranging in height from one to five feet. This plant, characteristic of shallow water areas, occurs in pure stands or in association with salt cedar, salt grass, arrow weed, and common reed.

Man's modifications of the river area around Yuma, Arizona, has created much of the marsh habitat for Black Rails. Seepage areas along canals, built in association with the dams, have provided some good habitat.

In Colorado, Herman Griese, studying at Colorado State University, has heard possible Black Rails near Fort Lyon on the Arkansas River. Others, like Thompson Marsh and Dick Guadagno, have caught tantalizing glimpses of possible Black Rails. Will someone succeed in locating this most elusive rail in Colorado?

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