

# *C.F.O. Journal*

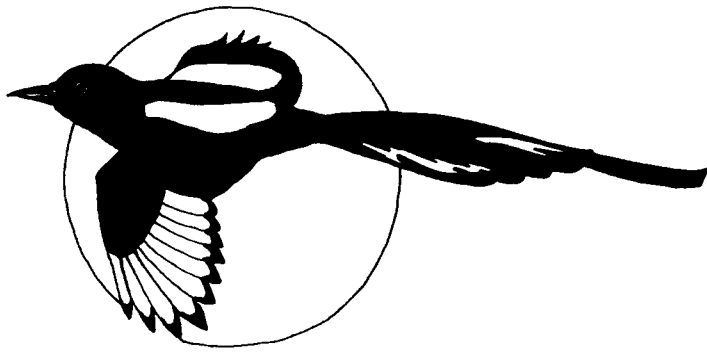
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Editor: Ann Hodgson, 6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216.

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Cover Illustration: Northern Pygmy Owl by Steve Bouricius

## SUMMER 1986 SEASONAL REPORT

Duane Nelson  
31428 Burke Road  
Golden, CO 80403

The amazing variety of breeding birds, late spring stragglers and early fall migrants was evident again this summer. Unfortunately, there were not the offshoots from tropical weather systems that there were last year.

This article focuses more on the unusual than on the ordinary, unless there were notable fluctuations in local or statewide populations in specific species. Special thanks go to those who took the time to report and to Hugh Kingery for supplying me with the data, but the responsibility for errors or omissions, however, lies solely with me.

GREBES THROUGH PELICANS:

Clark's Grebes are locally common in eastern Colorado, becoming more common farther south. Of interest are new reports from the west slope. One was seen near Eagle, changing status in Latilong 9 to b (JM). A documented breeding pair at Hart's Basin changes status in Latilong 16 to B (MJ).

Only 800 to 900 American White Pelicans were hatched at Riverside, where they are "doing poorly" (RR). Numbers of Double-crested Cormorants at Chatfield are skyrocketing, with 178 nests located by HK.

HERONS THROUGH IBIS:

American Bitterns were reported from many areas on both slopes. Immature Least Bitterns were seen flying over Lower Latham, and a nesting pair was observed with young at the Bobbie Christensen residence 3 miles southeast of Berthoud (AM). 171 nests of Great Blue Herons were counted at Chatfield by HK. Great Egrets nested again on the property of Boulder Valley Farms, east of Boulder. 3-4 pairs of Snowy Egrets nested at Barr, joined by 4-5 pairs of Cattle Egrets (CL). There were 25 pairs of Cattle Egrets at Riverside (RR). At Lower Latham, up to 30 White-faced Ibis, including immatures, were seen through the period (JC).

WATERFOWL:

The only unusual summer record was a female Bufflehead in South Park on 7/12 (DFO). Numbers of ducks produced at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge increased 20% to 31,812, mostly Mallard, Gadwall and teal (RAS).

HAWKS THROUGH GROUSE:

Up to 26 Osprey adults were counted in Grand County (DJa). Mississippi Kites continue to move up the Arkansas. Three adults and 2 immatures were seen at Mineral Palace park in Pueblo (DJo). The Denver area (Latilong 11) had its first recorded Kite when one flew over Dick Schottler's house in Lakewood on 7/13. An adult Merlin was seen stooping on swallows in Radium on 6/29 for a rare summer record (DJa). White-tailed Ptarmigan were in their usual places, such as Vail Pass, where Dave Jasper reported being surrounded by them on 7/24-25. Three Chukar were seen near Cameo on 6/14 (DN).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH TERNS:

One Snowy Plover lingered until 6/8 at Delta (MJ). One pair of Black-necked Stilts nested at Lower Latham (JC). Latilong 15 (Delta) recorded its first breeding of American Avocet, with 6 nests, 5 successful (MJ). A very early fall migrant Pectoral Sandpiper was at the Delta sewage ponds on 7/21 (MJ). A flock of breeding-plumaged Short-billed Dowitchers were at Red Lion on 7/19 (DM, DN). Birders are urged to thoroughly check early dowitchers, as the majority of adult Short-billed migrate between late June and mid-July in other regions of the country, while adult Long-billeds migrate about a month later on average (Don Roberson, American Birds, 1982, pp 951-952). The west slope reported many Red-necked Phalaropes well into June, with 3 lingering at the Delta sewage ponds until 6/11 (MJ). California Gulls had their best nesting year in 25 years of observation at Riverside Reservoir with several hundred young fledged (RR). Grand County had its first Black Tern, one bird seen at Shadow Mountain on 6/18 (DJa).

PIGEONS THROUGH CUCKOOS:

Few reports were received on Band-tailed Pigeons, but in traditional feeding stations in the front range, such as one in Coal Creek Canyon, up to 26 were seen daily between April and late September. It was another poor cuckoo year, with only scattered reports of Yellow-billed. However, at Prewitt Reservoir, a pair was observed feeding young, changing their status in Latilong

6 from b to B (JD). The only Blackbilled was one reported to JC as seen in Greeley.

Three Barn Owl nests were found at White Rocks, Boulder County (SJ). A pair in Ft. Collins fledged 6 young (RR). Eight Flammulated Owl territories were found in Boulder and northern Gilpin Counties, including one nest in Golden Gate State Park found by Alan Hay, which he graciously shared with 44 observers (DFO). Pygmy Owls were reported in several locales on the front range, and BR found a preening pair at Colorado National Monument. Janos heard Spotted Owls in two different places at Mesa Verde on 6/29, changing status in Latilong 22 to b. Surely they nest there.

#### SWIFT THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS:

Two Black Swifts were reported at Slavonia in Latilong 2 (BR). They were also reported from historical sites in Ouray, Indian Peaks, Rocky Mountain National Park and Hanging Lake. The summering male Magnificent Hummingbird returned for the 5th summer to a feeder near Pine Jct., Park County (DM, DN). A very early male Calliope Hummingbird appeared in Coal Creek Canyon on 7/6 and left the next morning (DN). Rufous Hummingbirds seemed to arrive late, and in much lower than usual numbers in July. Typical of most observers is the comment in the July DFO newsletter..."only one report of a single bird...are they scarce this year?" Curiously, the earliest report came from the southern San Juans, at the extremely early date of 6/25 (EF).

#### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH PHAINOPEPLA:

Two Least Flycatchers were present at Chatfield on 6/13, singing and acting territorial, changing status in Latilong 11 to b (HK). A bird identified as a Dusky-capped Flycatcher was observed on 6/28 at Temple Canyon, details were submitted, pending verification by the CFO records committee (DS). Latilong 4 had its first breeding record of Ash-throated Flycatcher, on Mesa trail in Boulder (SJ). A pair of Purple Martins were already at their nest hole in an aspen on McClure pass on 6/1 (DN).

Every mountain area observer commented on how low Red-breasted numbers were this summer.

Veeries were reported from typical mountain habitats of low willow growth at relatively low elevations. Of special interest was Colorado's third plains nesting record, from the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Nelson first heard a Veery singing in midafternoon on 6/11 and passed it off as a late migrant, since Swainson's often

sing when still migrating in early June. When a song was heard from the same spot on 6/20, nesting was suspected. On 6/24, 2 birds were seen. On 6/25, Martin observed both birds carrying food in their beaks, repeatedly going to the same spot in a very dense hillside thicket. The nest was not located for fear of crushing young birds.

Mockingbirds appear to be increasing on the west slope (MJ). Several parties observed Bendire's Thrashers just northwest of Del Norte during June (JC, JR). A Curve-Billed Thrasher was seen on the Pawnee National Grassland in thick sage on 7/14 (DM).

A male Phainopepla was reported in Ignacio, and was present the week of 6/28 (EF). (Details are needed for a bird as rare as this, even though it should be unmistakable and the southern border is the most likely place for it to occur).

#### VIREOS THROUGH BUNTINGS:

Most observers along the front range reported a great decrease in the numbers of Solitary Vireos this summer (WWB et al.). However, on the west slope and in drier habitats such as pinyon-juniper, they seemed present in usual numbers. Gray Vireos were reported from Devils Kitchen and Bell's Vireos from Tamarack Ranch.

Warblers will be divided into two arbitrary groups, late spring stragglers and those nesting only in local situations. A male Northern Parula was present and singing territorially for a month, from mid-May to mid-June at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. This is the second year in the last four that this has happened there. Of interest, this is only 5 miles from where Schottler found a female building a nest in 1982. Under very propitious circumstances, a Colorado breeding record seems plausible. A male Black and White Warbler was singing in Wheat Ridge on 6/6. A Hooded Warbler male was present 6/4 to 6/5 at Cache la Poudre Jr. High School in Ft. Collins (DL).

Orange-crowned Warblers were widely reported from many locations and habitats in the mountains of the west slope, as well as at Lake San Isabel in the Sangre de Christos. Grace's Warblers appear to no longer breed at Rye, although one was seen there on 6/13 (DS). They were found in their more traditional sites in the San Juans, as at Chimney Rock and Durango. Ovenbirds were again present in Pike National Forest west of Sedalia, as well as 4-5 breeding pairs at Rye (DS). Also near Rye were nesting American Redstarts at Colorado City (DS). Hepatic Tanagers successfully nested again on Mesa de Maya in Latilong 27. The latest Rose-breasted Grosbeak reported was a male in Ft. Collins

on 6/15 (JM). Lazuli Buntings nesting near Greeley for a first Latilong 5 record (JC). Indigos were suspected of nesting both near Greeley (JC), and at Dinosaur National Monument (CD), but nests were not found, so Latilongs 5 and 1 change status to b.

#### SPARROWS THROUGH FINCHES:

Cassin's Sparrows were widely reported from desert scrub and sage habits on the eastern plains, but were absent from some traditional areas on the Pawnee National Grasslands (RR). Field Sparrows were found nesting near Holly (Latilong 21) by Dan Bridges. They arrived by April 5, and subsequent visits included territorial singing through June, and juvenile birds in July. The only Sage Sparrows reported was a family group seen west of Grand Junction, along Mesa Road 2 miles east of the Utah state line (DN). A pair of Grasshopper Sparrows were seen on 6/13 at Chatfield (HK). Twenty were seen within 1/2 mile along the road going east through Tamarack Ranch on 7/19 (DM). Fox Sparrows are being sought and found in many regions, from the front range (DH, DN), to McClure Pass (DN), to the Uncompahgre Plateau (MJ). Great-tailed Grackles are showing up more frequently in new places, from Penrose (RW), to a new Latilong 5 record, when a male was seen south of Latham on 7/13 (JC). Scott's Orioles continue to breed west of Grand Junction. Red Crossbills were almost absent during most of the period, but began to reappear as at Indian Peaks by late July (DH). The state had its first summer record of a "Gray-crowned" Rosy Finch, which was seen in Latilong 11 or 6/14 above timberline in the Indian Peaks area (DH).

Contributors: (WVB) Bill Brockner, (JC) Jerry Cairo, (JD) Jim Dennis, (DF0) Denver Field Ornithologists, (EF) Elva Fox, (DH) Dave Hallock, (MJ) Mark Janos, (DJa) Dave Jasper, (DJo) Dave Johnson, (SJ) Steve Jones, (HK) Hugh Kingery, (CL) Carol Leasure, (DL) Dave Leatherman, (DM) David Martin, (AM) Ann Means, (JM) Jack Merchant, (DN) Duane Nelson, (JR) Jack Reddall, (BR) Bob Righter, (RR) Ron Ryder, (RAS) Roberta A. Salazar, (DS) Dave Silverman, (RW) Rosie Watts.



PROSPECTIVE BIRDS  
FOR THE COLORADO STATE LIST

Jerry Cairo  
2621 23rd Ave., #36  
Greeley, CO 80631

Robert Righter  
2358 S. Fillmore  
Denver, CO 80210

We hope this paper will stimulate interest in the discovery and identification of species to Colorado, and provide some information and ideas which will be helpful to accomplish this. Currently there are 440 species on the Colorado state list.

Prospective species are divided into four groups, which are admittedly quite arbitrary. These groups are primarily fashioned after the North American categories of Basham (1983) and Bob-O-Link (n.d.). Group I birds are generally what Bob-O-Link classifies as "annual irregulars". These are birds which we think occur irregularly in Colorado every year. They should be the most likely to be found and added to the state list. Group II birds are called occasional visitors. These are birds which we think visit Colorado at least once within any five year period. Group III and Group IV birds are vagrants. Group III birds are called likely accidentals either because of closer proximity to Colorado, greater frequency of sightings in nearby states, or hypothetical sightings in Colorado. Group IV birds are called unlikely accidentals. They are the "long-shot" birds which we think might occur infrequently. Listing of birds within the groups is in A.O.U. (American Ornithological Union) order.

Certainly all of you would compile a slightly different list and place some birds in different groups. Similarly, there is no reason to expect that the next bird added to the Colorado state list will be from Group I of our list, although it might be. In fact, the next bird may be a Eurasian or tropical accidental that never occurred to any of us and is not on this list. In the following discussion we have provided citations for Colorado observations, but, to condense the article, have not included out-of-state citations. Those are available from the authors on request.

## Group I - Annual Irregulars

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (Archilochus colubris). This bird is annual but rare in western Kansas with records from St. Francis, Goodland, Syracuse, and Elkhart which are all within 20 miles of Colorado. Harold Holt reported seeing a male at 20 feet near Hale, Colorado on May 17, 1962 (pers. comm.). Jack Reddall reported seeing a female at Bonny Reservoir on May 6, 1976 (pers. comm.). There is a Wyoming record, one record from the Nebraska panhandle, several records from western Oklahoma and the Oklahoma panhandle, and numerous records from the Texas panhandle. We feel that this bird occurs regularly in eastern Colorado and would be most likely seen from May to mid-September. Identification is a problem especially among female and immature hummingbirds; probably this is the only reason this bird is not already on the state list.

ACADIAN FLYCATCHER (Empidonax virescens). There is 1 record of this bird from the Nebraska panhandle, 2 records from western Kansas, a few central-Western Oklahoma and 1 Oklahoma panhandle records, and 2 Texas panhandle records. This bird is most likely to be found on the eastern plains of Colorado during May or August-September migration, but summers cannot be ruled out. Identification of this small flycatcher is very tricky, especially in the fall.

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER (Empidonax flaviventris). Western Kansas, eastern New Mexico, and southern Oklahoma each have one record of this bird. It nests in Canada as far west as British Columbia, so during May and August-September migrations it could occur in eastern Colorado. Identification is very tricky.

SMITH'S LONGSPUR (Calcarius pictus). There is 1 record of this bird from the Nebraska panhandle, 1 record from the Oklahoma panhandle, and several records from northwestern Oklahoma. This bird is secretive and we think it is probably annual in small numbers in fall (late September-November) migration in eastern Colorado and less regularly during spring (mid-March early May) migration. Similarity to other longspurs and sparrows is a major problem in identification.

## Group II - Occasional Visitors

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK (Dendrocygna bicolor). There are 10 records of this bird from Kansas (2 eastern and 8 central), 1 southwestern and 1 central Oklahoma records, 1 Texas panhandle record, and a few Utah records. This Whistling Duck has strong vagrancy tendencies and escapism cannot be ruled out. It could occur anywhere in Colorado, but is more likely in the east from March through November.

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (Columbina passerina). 3 single observer sight records, 1 seen near Deckers, Douglas County, November 8, 1981 (Gent 1986); 1 December 17, 1981 at Tamarack Ranch, Logan County (Gent 1986); and Fountain Valley School, El Paso County, Colorado on April 25, 1937 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965) is noted. There are records from 10 counties in south-central Kansas, 9 records from Oklahoma (7 eastern and 2 western), and 1 record each from Wyoming, eastern Nebraska, and the Texas panhandle. Most of these are autumn records. This bird is most likely to be found in brushland fields in southeastern Colorado, but all of eastern Colorado is potential.

INCA DOVE (Columbina inca). 1 sight record (Bailey and Niedrach 1965) near The Republican River east of Hale, Colorado in Yuma County on May 13, 1961 is noted. There are 7 south-central Kansas records, 6 Oklahoma records (including 1 panhandle and 1 southwestern), and numerous Texas panhandle records. This bird is usually found near farms and other human habitations. It is most likely to be found in southeastern Colorado from spring through the fall.

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW (Caprimulgus carolinensis). In Kansas this bird is found as far west as the west-central part of the state. In Oklahoma it is a summer resident in all of the state except the panhandle where there are a few records including one in Cimarron County. There are many Texas panhandle records. Considering its promimity in Texas and Oklahoma, this bird could wander into southeastern Colorado.

VAUX'S SWIFT (Chaetura vauxi). This bird is a rare migrant in Utah and has been reported in southeastern and east-central Arizona with a sight record from Boulder, Colorado (Gent 1985). It nests in northern Idaho and western Montana with a probable wintering ground in Central American, so during migration as a vagrant it could fly over any part of Colorado, but western Colorado is more likely.

ACORN WOODPECKER (Melanerpes formicivorus). There are 2 records from the Texas panhandle, 2 records from central and western Oklahoma, and 1 unverified record from Wyoming, and 1 single observer sight record from Ouray, Ouray County, Co. on September 5, 1980 (Chase 1982) for this bird. Recently it was discovered nesting in southwestern Utah. It is a local breeder in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Northern New Mexico. We think this bird is most likely to be found in Colorado as a fall vagrant in the southern mountains.

CACTUS WREN (Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus). Although there is only 1 record in Cimarron County of the Oklahoma panhandle and 1 record in northwestern Oklahoma, this species is showing recent evidence of northern expansion in the Texas panhandle. Harold Holt reported seeing one at Carrizo Canyon in southeastern Colorado on June 3, 1982 (pers. comm.). There are also unverified reports from northeastern New Mexico. We think this bird could wander into southeastern Colorado in areas where there is cholla.

### Group III - Likely Accidentals

GLOSSY IBIS (Plegadis falcinellus). There is 1 central Oklahoma specimen (Shackford et al. 1981, Tyler 1979), but because of the similarity to and potential confusion with the White-faced Ibis (P. chihi), the exact status of this bird is unknown. The AOU (American Ornithologists' Union 1983) states that this bird is a wanderer, so it could wander into eastern Colorado. There are many unconfirmed sightings in Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach 1965) which could be juvenile White-faced Ibis. There is also a question as to whether these two birds may be conspecific (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Palmer 1978).

KING EIDER (Somateria spectabilis). This bird is casual to Iowa and Illinois with 1 record in Kansas. It is known to wander even more than the Common Eider (S. mollissima) and should be watched for in Colorado from October through December.

RUFFED GROUSE (Bonasa umbellus). There are several hypothetical records of Ruffed Grouse in Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach 1965) which may have been female Blue Grouse (Dendrogapus obscurus) or Sharp-tailed Grouse (Tympanuchus phasianellus). It is a resident in the mountains of Utah including the Flaming Gorge area of the Uintas which is 20 miles west of the northwestern corner of Colorado. It is also a resident in forests of south-central Wyoming. However, after extensive research, Hoffman and Braun (1978) concluded that: "Despite reported observations and conjecture there is no tangible evidence of the presence of Ruffed Grouse in Colorado presently or in recorded history." This bird could stray into northwestern Colorado in late summer or early fall and there is a remote possibility that it may be a local resident in some other mountain range in Colorado.

BLACK VULTURE (Coragyps atratus). 1 sight record near Pueblo, Colorado on May 27, 1953 is noted (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). Also, a single observer sight record on June 6, 1978 at Pawnee National Grasslands (Chase 1981, Gent 1986). This vulture breeds north to central Oklahoma. There are a few records in western

Oklahoma, and 2 Texas panhandle records. Although this bird does not wander much, it could occur in the eastern plains, particularly southeastern Colorado from April through October.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE (Elanus caeruleus). Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and North Texas each have one record of this bird. There is a single observer sight record at Alamosa Wildlife Refuge, Co. (Gent 1986). It wanders widely and is expanding its range. It could occur anywhere in Colorado from April through September.

HARRIS' HAWK (Parabuteo unicinctus). 1 sight record from Denver, Co. on January 14, 1963 is noted (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). There is 1 nesting record from Kansas, 1 record from Nebraska, 2 Texas panhandle records, and several late fall and early winter records from southwestern Oklahoma for this bird. However, it is a favorite of falconers and the escapee problem is always a concern. It might wander into Colorado between April and December, but is most likely in late fall to early winter.

HEERMANN'S GULL (Larus heermanni). Has occurred in Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Texas. Gulls are strong flyers, so it could occur anywhere in Colorado, most likely in late summer or fall.

ICELAND GULL (Larus glaucooides). This bird has been reported in many scattered states. The closest are Idaho and Nebraska. It would be most likely from late fall through early spring. Identification is the greatest problem.

GREAT GRAY OWL (Strix nebulosa). This bird is a resident in northwestern Wyoming. It is considered accidental in Utah; and there is 1 eastern Nebraska record. Dan Bridges saw a Great Gray Owl just north of the Colorado line near Tie Siding, Wyoming circa January, 1980 (pers. comm.). Northern Colorado in the winter during invasion years is the most likely time and place to find this bird in Colorado.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (Parus bicolor). The "Tufted" race is resident throughout Oklahoma except in the panhandle, and in Kansas westward to within 100 miles of the Colorado border. There is 1 Nebraska panhandle record; and Bill Brockner reported a North Platte, Nebraska sighting (70 miles from Colorado) circa April 1, 1983 (pers. comm.). This race would wander into east-central and northeastern Colorado via riparian habitat. The "Black-crested" race is resident in the eastern half of the Texas panhandle north to the Canadian River (80 miles from Colorado) and could wander into southeastern Colorado any time of the year.

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (Parus carolinensis). This chickadee is resident within three counties in southwestern Kansas (70 miles from Colorado). It is resident in Oklahoma except for the panhandle which has 1 record; and it is resident in the eastern half of the Texas panhandle northward to the Canadian River, with a few western panhandle records. Although parids seldom wander, we think this bird could occasionally wander into southeastern Colorado any time of the year.

PYRRHULOXIA (Cardinalis sinuatus). Cimarron County in the Oklahoma panhandle has 1 record of this bird, and there have been more frequent sightings in the Texas panhandle in recent years. It tends to wander northward in springs, fall, and winter and could wander into southeastern Colorado.

#### Group IV - Unlikely Accidentals

COMMON EIDER (Somateria mollissima). There are 2 old hypothetical records in Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). However it should be noted that female/immature plumage Common Eiders and King Eiders (S. spectabilis) can easily be confused. This bird is casual in Iowa, and there is 1 record each from Kansas and Nebraska. It could occur in Colorado in fall and/or early winter.

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (Buteo albonotatus). This hawk nests north to Dixon, New Mexico (just north of Santa Fe) and is casual in northern Arizona. It could wander into southern Colorado from spring through the fall.

COMMON CRANE (Grus grus). There is 1 record west of North Platte, Nebraska and 1 record in New Mexico of this bird. It is also casual to Alberta and Texas. This Eurasian species is rare in North America and usually joins flocks of Sandhill Cranes (G. canadensis).

CURLEW SANDPAPER (Calidris ferruginea). This Eurasian species is casual on the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coast and has a number of inland records including one record each from Utah and Kansas. It is most likely in Colorado in the spring or fall.

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL (Larus ridibundis). This Eurasian gull is uncommon on the Atlantic coast in winter. Some vagrants on the Pacific coast are thought to be gulls that have traveled westerly from the east (Ryser 1985). It is found inland and there is 1 sight report in Kansas (American Ornithologists' Union 1983).

GULL-BILLED TERN (Sterna nilotica). This tern is rare inland from the Gulf Coast but does wander some. It could visit Colorado from spring through fall.

BLACK SKIMMER (Rynchops niger). This bird has 1 Kansas record, 1 New Mexico record, 2 central Oklahoma records, and several records from Arizona. It could wander into southern Colorado during the summer or fall.

NORTHERN HAWK-OWL (Surnia ulula). This bird is a rare winter migrant in North Dakota and Wyoming. There is 1 record each from South Dakota and Nebraska. It would wander south to northern Colorado.

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (Melanerpes aurifrons). This bird is a resident in southwestern Oklahoma with records in northwestern Oklahoma up to the panhandle. It is a resident in the Texas panhandle north to the Canadian River. Wandering is not common but it is possible that this woodpecker could move along riparian habitat into southeastern Colorado.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (Picoides arcticus). This woodpecker breeds in northwestern and northeastern Wyoming. Occasionally it wanders irregularly south during winter and is possible in northernmost Colorado in winter.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (Dryocopus pileatus). There are several reports of Pileated Woodpeckers from the Aspen and Snowmass, Colorado area around 1960 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965) and some recent southwestern Oklahoma records. However, the possibility of this bird occurring in Colorado seems to be on the decline.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (Myiarchus tyrannulus). This bird is found in northwestern Arizona and southwestern Utah in summer. It does not wander as much as the other North American myiarchus flycatchers except coastally in the west, but it could wander into southwestern Colorado.

GREATER PEWEE (Contopus pertinax). The Greater Pewee is a local summer resident northward to central Arizona. There is 1 record from northern New Mexico. It would wander into southern Colorado, based on its proximity.

VERDIN (Auriparus flaviceps). This bird is a resident of the Texas panhandle north to Amarillo, a resident in southwestern Oklahoma, and a resident of southwestern Utah. There is one Albuquerque, New Mexico record. It is tied to its desert, mesquite, arid-scrub habitat and is not known to wander much.

However, there is a limited possibility this bird might wander into southern Colorado, most likely southeastern.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe). From its Arctic breeding grounds, most wheatears winter in Europe and Asia, but a few wander south in North America mainly along the coasts. This bird could be a late fall migrant anywhere in Colorado.

RED-FACED WARBLER (Cardellina rubrifrons). In New Mexico, this warbler is casual north to Sante Fe (Jemez Mountains), and it nested west of Albuquerque (Sandia Mountains) in 1982. It occurs in northwestern Arizona in the summer, and could occur in the southern mountains of Colorado as an occasional summer visitor or early fall vagrant.

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (Spizella atrogularis). This sparrow is local in northwestern Arizona during the summer. It breeds north to the Sandia Mountains (Albuquerque) in New Mexico. There is one Texas panhandle record. It might wander into southern Colorado during the summer.

HOODED ORIOLE (Icterus cucullatus). A pair of these orioles was reported from Hotchkiss, Colorado (Delta County) in May 1959 and 1960 (Bailey and Niedrach 1965). Another pair of these birds has been recorded carrying nesting material in the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona (Monson and Phillips 1981). There is one record in northwestern New Mexico and one record at Albuquerque. It could wander into southwestern Colorado from spring to fall.

HOARY REDPOLL (Carduelis hornemanni). This bird is a very rare winter migrant to Wyoming. There are also a few Nebraska records. It is usually found in mixed flocks with Common Redpolls (C. flammea) and could occur in northern Colorado during the winter in Redpoll invasion years. Identification is tricky and some authorities consider this bird to be conspecific with Common Redpoll.

For acceptance to the Colorado state list, appropriate documentation of the following birds may be required: Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus), Vaux's Swift (Chaetura vauxi), Acadian Flycatcher (Empidonax virescens), Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (Empidonax flaviventris), Smith's Longspur (Calcarius pictus), and Hoary Redpoll (Carduelis hornemanni).

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and Mike Tove in Logan, Utah for all their correspondence and local information, which has been invaluable in the preparation of this paper. Particularly, we want to thank Dan Bridges, whose many ideas and thoughts contributed greatly to this paper.

We also gratefully acknowledge the reviews, suggestions, and criticisms made by Bob Andrews, Bill Brockner, Charlie Chase, Harold Holt, and Jack Reddall here in Colorado. However, the inclusion or exclusion of species and their order in this paper is based on the author's judgment, not on the reviewers.

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AN OBSERVATION OF NORTHERN PYGMY OWL  
PREDATION UPON HARRIS' SPARROW

Steven M. Bouricius  
50152 Highway 72  
Peaceful Valley  
Lyons, Colorado 80540

Located at 8500 ft. on the Middle St. Vrain creek, Peaceful Valley, Colorado is in northwest Boulder County just seven miles east of the St. Vrain glaciers and the Continental Divide. Here, the dining room and living room windows of my mountain home are like a big screen tv from which I monitor the comings and goings of my avian neighbors and visitors. My bird feeding stations are located in a riparian forest of willow-alder thickets, aspen and the predominant alpine fir and Engelmann spruce. Feeders on the stream are in an open area, whereas, window and hanging feeders on the east side are in a dense fir stand. I scatter seed on the ground below where I believe the thick covering of fir branches has encouraged shy ground feeding species like the Hermit Thrush and the White-crowned Sparrow to feed.

On Tuesday, 12 November 1985, an adult Harris Sparrow was seen feeding on the ground with the Dark-eyed Juncos. The sparrow's plumage was that of a winter adult showing buff cheeks with a lighter buff eye line, its crown black at the front then mottling grayishbrown to the nape. The all black throat and bib cleaved the chest to the white belly. The bill and legs were pink. This was my first observation of a Harris' Sparrow and I felt its occurrence in the mountains might be uncommon. The Harris' Sparrow is known as an unusual migrant and winter visitor, being more common in the shrublands and riparian habitat of the eastern plains. It was a welcome and seemingly hardy visitor feeding both earlier and later in the day than the other birds. Its habit was to hop and scratch with both feet simultaneously. It appeared to prefer feeding within the protection of the fir branches and would readily fly whenever the window was approached incautiously.

On 22 November at about 2:00 p.m., I watched as the Harris' Sparrow stopped to drink and bathe in a small opening of running water in the ice and snow covered river. At 3:40 p.m. I noted the bird again feeding under the fir branches when, as swiftly and silently as a snowball hitting a drift, the sparrow was taken down by a ball of gray feathers. The kill, made by a Northern Pygmy Owl, was instantaneous. For a long moment there was silence. Then gradually, the scattered gathering of feeding

birds reassembled, surrounding the owl and its kill in a cacophony of scolding jeers, screaming about the impropriety of the intrusion. There seemed to be a layering by species in distancing from the owl with the Mountain Chickadees most bold, nervously flittering to within 16 inches. The Blackcapped Chickadees stayed at a more respectable six to ten feet and the dozen or so Stellar's Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers protested actively from thirty or more feet. A Downy Woodpecker bounced around wildly six feet over the owl, but the juncos were gone from the area. With fast beating wings the owl struggled to carry the sparrow to a nearby spruce branch where I photographed the bird at 6 feet. The Northern Pygmy Owl was clearly smaller than its kill, perhaps six inches in length. Its round graybrown body was no larger than my fist. The round head was finely white-spotted, and black nape spots lightly fringed in white resembled eyes. The owl's underparts were white bodily streaked with dark gray-brown feathers. Its yellow eyes, beak, and legs, and the long barred tail all identify the Northern Pygmy Owl.

The owl struggled from branch to branch with its kill, eventually dropping the sparrow and then following it to the ground. Later I watched at fifteen feet with 7X35 binoculars as the owl deftly plucked the wing feathers then the tail feathers in sequence, leaving one tail feather. Flesh from the back was taken first, then turning the kill with one claw, the belly cavity was opened without removing the feathering. As darkness fell, the owl took its kill to a large dead fir by the stream and gradually made its way to a perch about 40 feet up, which is where I last saw it.

The Northern Pygmy Owl is an uncommon resident of the mountains of Colorado, though it has been known to occur on the plains in winter. It is rarely seen. Most common in the literature characterizing the Northern Pygmy Owl is its unassuming and fearless manner, often attacking animals larger than itself. Reports of its predation include Stellar's Jay, Robin, Starling, Gambel's Quail, squirrel and weasel. Of particular surprise to me was the efficiency of the kill of a cautious bird in dense foliage. This was my first observation of a Northern Pygmy Owl and questions remain as to its origin and whereabouts.





## BIRDING THE WHEAT RIDGE GREENBELT

Duane Nelson  
31428 Burke Road  
Golden, CO 80403

The Wheat Ridge Greenbelt has long been recognized as one of Denver's best birding sites. Its potential was seen almost immediately after the Adolph Coors Company turned it over to the city of Wheat Ridge in the mid 1970's. What makes the Greenbelt unique is its native riparian habitat, found in four major ponds, Clear Creek, numerous springs, and old beaver ponds. The birding is good in all seasons, with great migrant potential in both spring and fall.

The four ponds are all remnants from a time when gravel was mined from pits. The character and size of each are different. 22 species of ducks have been seen on at least one of the ponds. West Lake is typified by rafts of Redheads and Ring-necked Ducks in migration, but freezes solid most winters. Bass Lake is partially ringed by cattails, and have been nicknamed "Gadwall Lake" by birders. One glance at the lake in spring, fall and when ice-free in winter will explain. Also on Bass Lake, all three teal can be found in season. Tabor Lake is the deepest of the lakes, and the one most likely frequented by all of the mergansers, other divers, and rarely an Oldsquaw. Prospect Pond, at the main entrance to the park, has had the most rare ducks, because it has an underwater pump that keeps part of it ice free, even when all other water in the area is frozen. For the last five years, Greater Scaup have spent the coldest part of winter here, with one male for four consecutive Januaries, and up to five present in the winter of 1986-87. Also around the lakes in season are gulls (mostly Ring-billed), four grebes, an occasional Common Loon, cormorants in late summer, and Black-crowned Night-Herons and Green-backed Herons (summer but rare). Because of the constant depth of water and steep banks, shorebirds other than Spotted Sandpipers are usually absent.

Clear Creek is the lifeblood of the Greenbelt: Without it there would be no ponds, trees, and few birds. There is always open water in winter, and in that season, its cobbly banks are visited by Killdeer, Mallards, Green-winged Teal and Dippers. Dippers are seen and heard almost anywhere along the river from October through March, especially in areas near or under the bridges at Youngfield Avenue or the Prospect Park footbridge. Some winters Water Pipits and Rusty Blackbirds are seen feeding near the water. The most out of place wintering bird, for the



past five winters, has been a lone Greater Yellowlegs. The nearest wintering Greater Yellowlegs are in Southern New Mexico.

There is an extensive cattail marsh below the hillside between Youngfield and south of Bass Lake, and a catwalk takes the birder through the best part of it. Sora and Virginia Rails nest in the marsh, but less commonly than in the past. Song Sparrows are common year 'round, and Snipes in winter. In spring, there is a deafening chorus from abundant Red-winged Blackbirds and uncommon, but louder Yellow-headed Blackbirds. In winter, Marsh Wrens are annual but uncommon while Swamp Sparrows are almost annual, but very rare. To find a Swamp Sparrow, if present, go to the west end of the catwalk, especially in cold weather following a snowstorm, and look for it feeding in the spring-fed stream, green with watercress even in subzero weather, between the old gray house on the hillside and an old concrete foundation near the end of the catwalk. Many a diligent Colorado birder has seen their first (and only) Swamp Sparrow here. In migration, American Bitterns have been seen and heard, and there is one June record of a Least Bittern.

There are large areas of weedy growth, mixed with shrubs. Where they are next to water, as at West Lake, Savannah Sparrows are present in spring. Other sparrows are common in migration in areas like south of West Lake and east of Bass Lake, including Lark, Vesper, Chipping, Clay-colored, Brewers, Tree, Whitecrowned and Lark Bunting.

The best part of the Greenbelt, especially in migration, is the vast area covered by woodlands. There are many types of woodland exhibited here which provide ideal niches for a great many landbirds. The hillsides, cottonwoods, streamside thickets and thickets of choke-cherry and wild plum should be checked at all levels to see the birds present. Birds with eastern affinities are always exciting to find and some are usually here somewhere. Broad-winged Hawks can usually be found in late April, often in the trees just south of the catwalk near Bass Lake. In 1984, a rare melanistic Broad-winged was seen. In some years, Yellow-billed Cuckoos nest, especially near the Tree Bridge. Eastern Screech-Owls are fairly common permanent residents, most often seen sunning themselves in late winter in knotholes on the south-facing sides of large Cottonwoods. The birds here are of the very pale Maxwelliae race. A current hotspot is atop the first cottonwood tree on the left as you walk west from the east parking lot. Five species of Empidonax have been seen, certainly enough to challenge the imagination. Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes can be found in spring, and there is even one record of a Wood Thrush. In the summer of 1986, a pair of Veeries nested

on the north-facing hillside behind the Tree Bridge trail, for only the third plains nesting record.

Red-eyed Vireos probably nest in the tall cottonwoods, especially in the east end of the park. For some reason, their numbers seem to pick up in August. Solitary Vireos pass through in spring and fall, most of which are of the "Plumbeous" race, but with several good sightings of the eastern "Blue-headed" race. The Greenbelt is a great place to look for warblers. At least 27 species have been seen since 1980. Spring is good, and fall is usually better. The most exciting warblers, by Colorado standards, have included Tennessee, Nashville (some falls fairly common), Northern Parula (spring and fall), Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Townsend's (more common in fall), Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Palm (spring), Bay-breasted (fall), Black-poll (spring and fall), Black-and-White (annual), American Redstart, Ovenbird and Northern Waterthrush (fairly common in both spring and fall, along the brook crossed by the Tree Bridge). Probably the rarest warblers seen here so far have been a Prothonotary, seen by many observers in August 1985 in the swampy woods on the north side of Clear Creek just east of Youngfield, a Hooded found in September 1985 near the corral on the east end of the park, and a Canada seen from the Tree Bridge in early October, 1982. Yellow Warblers, Common Yellow-throats and Yellow-breasted Chats nest.

Western Tanagers are common migrants. In late May, 1982, a male Scarlet Tanager put in a brief but beautiful appearance. Most springs, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks can be seen and heard, especially in tall cottonwoods. It is an unforgettable sight to watch one as it clings and dangles from the outermost twig above the ground in order to browse on emerging new growth.

The total list for this birdy area now exceeds 200, with more birds added almost every season. This number is especially impressive considering the relative absence of shore and mountain birds. To get to the Greenbelt, take I-70 from either east or west, exit at Ward Road, go south on Ward Road to 44th Ave. Go east on 44th about ten blocks, to just past Robb St., and enter Prospect Park, which is on the right side of the road here. Park near the footbridge and walk from here. There is a map to direct you from here. Whether you have an hour or a day, you should see something exciting.

## BIRDS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

PAUL A. JOHNSGARD  
COLORADO ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1986

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Peter R. Gent  
55 S. 35th Street  
Boulder, CO 80303

This book covers just over 350 species that have occurred in the northern Rocky Mountain region from north Colorado to Alberta. Particular reference is given to national parks in the region covered. In fact, the birds of the parks are listed twice, once by species and once by park. There is also a brief description of the National Parks, along with maps, and of the habitats, climate and vegetation of the region. There is also a description of the latilong information and the abundance codes used. The book covers only a small part of Colorado; latilongs 1-4; and the following parks: Rocky Mountain National Park, Dinosaur National Monument and Brown's Park and Arapahoe National Wildlife Refuges. The bulk of the book gives one page to each of the species and briefly covers Identification, Status, Seasonality, Comments and Suggested Reading. There is an extensive bibliography of both regional and species references.

I was somewhat disappointed by this book by the well known University of Nebraska author. It is not as good or as informative as his book on the breeding birds of the great plains. I was puzzled as to the aim of the book - it certainly cannot be used as a field guide, and cannot be used as a site guide to the various national parks because the information for each is too sparse. In fact, many of the species covered are vagrants for the region with only a few records, so that they cannot in any sense be expected to be seen on a visit to the parks. In my opinion, it would have been more helpful to birders to cover many fewer species, those that might reasonably be expected to be seen, and to give more details about where and how to find them. This would have been very helpful to birders for the rarer species. For this reason, I do not really recommend this book to CFO members. Finally, the book could have been more carefully proofread. The captions to plates 22 and 23 of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Black-backed Woodpecker are interchanged. In fact, it should be a Red-naped Sapsucker - the 1985 AOU changes are only included as footnotes. The description of Black-backed Woodpecker on page 239 mentions Colorado active nests when the

range map clearly shows it must be a more northerly state. On page 7 the Idaho latilong is named Bear Lake, but on page 6 the map labels it Gray's Lake.

## ATLAS PROGRESS REPORT

Hugh Kingery  
869 Milwaukee Street  
Denver, CO 80206

The Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas will start field work this summer. About 50 field workers have officially signed on, and we welcome anyone interested.

Atlas workers will census one block in each 7 1/2 minute topographic map; by random selection, that block is the south-eastern block. (You can identify it on your favorite map by dividing the map in half vertically and in thirds horizontally.) Field workers obtain their block assignments by contacting the Atlas office or Regional Coordinators. Regional Coordinators will meet after the Journal deadline, to draw regional boundaries and to set up distribution of field packets to field workers.

The Atlas has organized under the aegis of a new organization, the Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership. Cooperating organizations include the Colorado Field Ornithologists, Colorado Division of Wildlife, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Denver Museum of Natural History, and several Audubon societies and bird clubs. (So far, endorsing organizations include Colorado Audubon Council, Audubon Society of Western Colorado, Denver Audubon Society, and Denver Field Ornithologists. Sponsors making donations include Aiken Audubon Society, Boulder Audubon Society, Boulder Bird Club, and Foothills Audubon Club.)

President of the Partnership and chairman of the Atlas Steering Committee is Dr. Alex Cringan of Fort Collins. Other officers and members are Vic Zerbi (C.F.O.), Ron Lambeth (BLM and Aud. Soc. of W. Colorado), David Blue (C.F.O.), Dr. Carl Bock (U. of Colorado), Pete Stacey (professional ornithologist), Dale Wills (Forest Service), Steve Bissell (Division of Wildlife), Bob Righter (D.F.O.), Judy Ward (D.F.O.), and Hugh Kingery (Project Director).

The Atlas Partnership has set up a tier of membership categories. They range from Field Workers (who join by committing to census a block) to paying members (with memberships from \$20, \$50, and up).

The Atlas invites you to participate--contact it c/o Zoology Dept., Denver Museum of Natural History, 2001 Colorado Blvd., Denver 80205.

ANNOUNCING: CFO FIELD TRIP  
MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND  
MAY 23, 24, & 25, 1987

The Bonny Reservoir area of eastern Colorado has a number of very interesting areas for birdwatching. The purpose of this trip is to explore the Arickaree River riparian woodland, an exciting area that has had little attention, and bird the Republican River woodland, a well known hotspot for eastern Colorado specialities. In 1986, a brief trip to the Arickaree discovered a possible colony of Eastern Meadowlarks as well as Bobwhite, Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds. Landowners of the area have reported hearing Whip-Poor-Wills. An afternoon and evening walk of the area is planned to hunt for all these mentioned species and also owls. The Republican River woodland has been a good place for Wild Turkeys, Great-crested Flycatchers and Cardinals. In addition, we should have an excellent chance for some good migrants.

A group campground will be reserved at Bonny Reservoir State Park. Motels are available in Idalia and Burlington.

For more information please contact:  
Bill Prather  
13810 Weld County Road  
Longmont, CO 80501  
776-2191 (Longmont)  
427-9295 (Denver Metro Area work number).

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